

## ADVENTURE IN A BUN

by Chris Loynes

Outdoor adventure, wherever it is to be found within recreation, education and training, is becoming another form of what Jarvie (1996) calls recreational capitalism. There is a growing body of evidence that what has been a social movement for our times (Crowther 1984) is now entering the market place and adopting market place values (Sessoms 1991). There is also evidence that, in the process, providers of outdoor adventure are leaving behind the values of the social movement that gave rise to the field. In so doing they are in danger of allowing the market to do to outdoor adventure what it has done elsewhere, that is to disassociate people from their experience of community and place. I want to examine the evidence for this trend and to see whether there is any hope for the survival of the values of the founding social movement of outdoor adventure.

The loss of identity amongst some of our best known 'brand names' is one indicator of the trend to McDonaldisation of adventure. The term 'brand name' is used advisedly as one manifestation of this trend is the emergence of market place language in the description of the work of outdoor adventure providers. It is no longer possible to recognise the philosophies of the leading providers in a milieu of 'products', 'services', 'customers', 'consumers', 'niche markets', 'logos', 'standards' and 'quality initiatives'. Adventure providers now package a programme designed anyway the customer wants to achieve predetermined outcomes of almost any kind. Once upon a time one of the greatest impacts on a participant arriving for an adventure programme was reportedly the vitality of the community of staff living fully to a set of values otherwise submerged or vanished in the wider world (South 1986). Now, facility managers express concern about the decor and the menu and whether they can get everyone a single room.

The same issues are reflected more widely in the professionalisation of outdoor adventure leaders and providers. The talk is about being an 'industry' and having a 'market' to which 'products' are 'supplied'. This language is symptomatic of attitudes that are shifting in the wind of wider change. It makes many feel uncomfortable. Noble (1995) encapsulates this discomfort, felt by many in Britain, in the title of his paper 'the ramblings of a disillusioned outdoor pursuitist.' Noble, a person with many years experience in the field and currently the director of a residential adventure education centre, goes on to describe with feeling the recent changes to the field as he has experienced them and how these have led him to lose his long standing commitment to outdoor adventure education.

This growing schism between market place and community values felt by outdoor adventure providers is a mirror for many aspects of change in our wider society. The title of this paper 'Adventure in a Bun' was inspired by a book called 'The McDonaldisation of Society' by Ritzer (1993). Here Ritzer proposes that much of life's experience is increasingly provided as a standard, dependable and safe product just like the McDonald's hamburger. He argues that, as life becomes increasingly commodified,

putting more and more of life in the market place, then the human values that bind society together suffer or are lost altogether.

### **Adventure in a Bun**

The ropes course can be seen as an excellent example of the McDonaldisation phenomenon. It distils some of the essences of less certain adventures into a guaranteed adrenaline rush as a predictable outcome. In the English Lake District another example would be the company called 'Grippers' committed to offering participants the four biggest buzzes you can get in the area - guaranteed! Reliable products supposedly satisfy customers and are also amenable to audits to ensure 'quality'. The recent commercial success of bungee jumping is a testimony to the viability in the market of the commodification of certain outdoor adventure experiences. The 'sacred place' of Hogan (1992) has not just become a 'playing field' but a 'commodity'.

In order to reflect on these trends this paper explores what Adventure Education has been in order to review what it is becoming. It attempts to identify whether it is outdoor adventure that is being commodified and considers whether there are ways to sustain the values of the original movement. The ideas are presented here to provoke thought in the reader rather than to define a path. They are not intended to identify an inclusive list of central issues. They are simply the ones that were useful in helping to guide my thought process.

### **What is Climbing?**

In the United Kingdom change is afoot in the climbing world. It is no longer sufficient to describe yourself as a climber. Instead of asking what crag you climbed on or what routes or grades you have done the first question now will try to work out what sort of climber you are. You might mean 'sport climbing' (in which bolts are placed and routes rehearsed: the emphasis is on the athleticism or the dance with the risk removed); competition climbing (undertaken on artificial climbing walls inside); or that strange, old fashioned approach where you struggle up to a mountain crag and place your own protection where you can, probably in the rain.

The results of these developments in climbing have been legion including a massive rise in the grade at which most climbers operate, greater levels of participation reflecting a wider band of society, family parties climbing together and more women climbers involved than men, all reversals of earlier trends. Whereas these can all be seen as good things in themselves it raises the question of whether 'climbing' and 'outside' are inextricably linked to each other or not.

In turn this disassociation of 'climbing' from 'outside' forces the outdoor adventure field to review its notion that climbing (and by association any outdoor sport) is central to the outdoor experience (see also Collister 1984, Yaffey 1991). Climbing is simply something that can take place outdoors and provides one excellent means of engagement with the outdoors. It also takes place indoors. You can now canoe on artificial rapids, ski on

artificial slopes and even sailboard in indoor wind tunnels. So called outdoor sports, then, can be seen as treating the sites they use as facilities; playing fields, not sacred spaces (Hogan 1992). However, these 'playing fields' need not be outdoor anymore than the sport need be. This leaves the sport open to commodification but in the process the sport has left behind the outdoor and perhaps the adventure values of its source.

### **A Risky Business**

When the first Outward Bound School was started at Aberdovey it was already steeped in a naval tradition and many of the first staff were previously naval officers. The discipline and order within an Outward Bound programme can be traced back to this influence. When the second school was founded at Eskdale it was chosen for its mountain location and was staffed by mountaineers bringing with them all their anarchic traditions of informality and risk taking. The two traditions blended to become formative influences on the programme of today.

At that time only a few people climbed. Equipment was rudimentary and the 'safety chain' was not much more than a token gesture. To be a climber in this era you needed to be enthusiastic about real risk taking. That kind of experience would be central to your sense of adventure. Whenever I debate the place of risk in the concept of adventure it is inevitably mountaineers steeped in this tradition that summon up risk as the central concept.

My own early adventures were had exploring the Somerset Levels on an old rickety bike and with a passion for bird watching. I preferred wild, wet and windy days. My feelings were of exhilaration not risk. I explored Cheddar Gorge by freewheeling its length on my bike and scrambling its sides to search for rare flowers. Later other 'bikes' helped me explore caves, hills and crags, but the approach I took to these experiences remained that of the explorer developed through my early activities.

My climbing for example was designed to stretch me physically and mentally, to fully engage me, but only if I was adequately protected. The occasions when I got out of my depth were not intended and redeemed as quickly as possible. Risk then was not my motive for climbing. It was a secondary consequence to be minimised not celebrated. Despite the stories to the contrary this I suspect is true for most climbers today.

Karl Rohnke (1995) also reflects on the nature of adventure within education in his book *Quicksilver*. He places something else entirely at its centre: fun. At one point he dismisses risk as a nuisance factor best left out as it requires too much management and gets in the way.

From these alternative views of the accepted dogma it can be argued that risk need not be central to the notion of adventure or adventure education. This I find heartening. The success of the emphasis on risk, often attached to an outdoor sport (see Bunyan 1990 and Dickinson 1992), has perhaps occurred because of our increasing pre-occupation with the self. This egocentric point of view leads us to use such measures of success as self esteem

criticised by Royce (1987a). Esteem is a factor highly visible in risk taking situations but in which our relationship with place is entirely absent and our relationships with others merely contributory (Royce 1987b and Yaffey 1990).

Risk can therefore be viewed as a marketing strategy. Much like overt sexuality sells icecream, cosmetics, cars and just about anything so risk sells outdoor adventure. Indeed there are a growing number of advertisements on British television that have supplanted sexual innuendo with outdoor adventure. The recent 'Pepsi Max' advertisement illustrates this trend. No longer does drinking Pepsi get you the girl it gives you status with your grandma! As a marketing ploy to attract young people to participate risk lends itself to the commercialisation of outdoor adventure. However, if it is not central to the concept, the hijacking of risk by the market place does not necessarily mean that all is lost.

### **Putting People First**

Development training is a term applied in the United Kingdom to a widely practised approach to facilitating outdoor adventure akin to experiential education (Nichols 1989). It has provided an antidote to the sport based, risk taking philosophy of outdoor adventure education and training. It takes a sociocentric view placing the group and its processes at the centre of the experience which is also seen as a basis for learning. Methods of work are gleaned from the training, social work and therapy professions. The sequence of activities is carefully chosen to provide a particular range of events that foster interpersonal growth.

As a result of this treatment the outdoor adventure experience is amenable to added value. No longer simply a recreational experience it has become educational (Stansfield 1987), developmental (Symons 1994) and therapeutic (Kimball 1988). This allows providers to charge premium prices to the corporate, public and private sector markets. In turn this enables employers to pay premium rates to an elite of facilitators. It is they, according to Bowles (1995) who are driving the trend towards the formation of a profession.

However, in this approach to outdoor adventure, the location and the activity and not of themselves important. The range of settings and activities that can support interpersonal growth are many and not in any way confined to the outdoors or requiring an adventurous experience. So, as with sport and risk, this approach can be dismissed as central to outdoor adventure.

### **Is there such a thing as Adventure Education?**

So is Adventure Education a real concept? I have argued that it is not the activity per se that is central to the experience. I have also argued that it is not essentially risky. Does it actually exist or is it simply a form of physical or personal and social education; a convenient and eye catching packaging for products that are hard to present of themselves? Providers often bewail the fact that the experiences that they facilitate are lost in the description of the events. The abseil is remembered and is describable. The

supposed moving experience that is the consequence of the abseil and its alluded powerful effects are not.

When presented with these questions in workshops participants faced with the seemingly emptied cupboard all come up with the same discoveries. They described it as connection. This isn't new. Simon Priest (1985) defined it as the fourth 'R' for relationships. Colin Mortlock (1984) named the relationships as being threefold with oneself, with others and with the environment and gave the relationships the qualities of love and respect.

### **Outdoor Adventure and the Third Sector**

The commodification and commercialisation of aspects of the outdoor adventure experience seems inevitable. Sport, risk and developmental outcomes can readily be interpreted as resources ripe for exploitation. Such a trend will become an industry with a market place. It will inevitably develop a profession and trade associations to protect its interests (Orgill 1989).

I have also argued that there is a core value within the outdoor adventure movement that is not amenable to exploitation. The notion of relationship, of re-association, with place and with community, does not lend itself to the market. However, this core value could be lost as the McDonaldisation process continues.

Rifkin (\*\*\*\*) identifies much work that is done in society but outside of the market place. This work, he argues, maintains the community and its values. It ranges from parenting through other social and environmental work. He claims this work is undervalued and disorganised yet provides, in many cases, more satisfaction than paid employment. He calls this the third sector. He predicts that in the information age few people will be employed in manufacturing industries. In order to provide a quality of life and an income to all people Rifkin believes this third sector will need to be recognised and politicised. He is aware of the problems, such as how to redistribute wealth in a global market place, but maintains it is the best hope of engaging everyone in meaningful work and leisure.

The concept of the third sector embraces many social movements which are already familiar. This includes outdoor adventure as it is found in the youth service for example. It is not new to this sector and indeed it can be argued had its origins there with Baden Powell and the Scout Movement (Loynes 1990).

Higgins (1996) and Cooper (1994) recognise a role for the outdoor adventure field in the development of an ethic most recently articulated by Fox (1995) in his book *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology*. Fox discusses how sociological and ecological perspectives must be brought into play alongside the dominant psychological perspectives of self. He believes this is essential if we are to get away from the egocentric view of western capitalist people and become healthy people living a sustainable lifestyle in a quality environment.

Yet others see a role for outdoor adventure as a rite of passage for young people in transition from youth to adult (Maddern 1990). Increasing attention is being paid to the process by youth social workers world wide. In addressing this role outdoor adventure would have to reconsider its rebellious past and adopt an approach that is normative within society (Albrecht 1986).

It can be argued then that the core value of outdoor adventure could find a home in the emerging third sector economy as not for profit and voluntary work. In order to achieve this it will first of all need to disassociate itself from the commercial development of sport and risk so that it can be seen as something else. The core value will need to become more visible than it has been whilst it was screened by notions of risk and the norms of sports.

### **Challenge and Provision**

Throughout this paper language has been used deliberately to present a particular perspective on outdoor adventure. One frequently used word that has not yet been commented on is 'provider'. Although 'provider' may not be used commonly to describe outdoor organisations in North America it is the dominant term in the UK. With this word come various associations which highlight certain attitudes that are worth considering.

Thomas Moore wrote in Utopia about the responsibility of society to the individual being to provide challenge and judgement. 'Challenge' requires a challenger: society. Society requires an agent, a 'provider' of challenges. Providers require a methodology to deliver the challenge.

Collaborative problem solving has become a popular teaching method based upon challenge and is often wheeled out as the methodology for adventure experiences (see Payne 1986 and Wurdinger 1994). However, the problem solving approach is reactive. The participant responds to a challenge with appropriate skills and knowledge. A society that provides so many value choices to make and lifestyles to follow requires more of its citizens than reaction. A human spirit demands more of life's opportunities if it is to flourish.

Provision is associated with the delivery of a good or a product to a consumer. It implies a trading of that good from one to another rather than a sharing in its production. The parallel in education is didactic teaching.

As a child I had dreams and a bike with which to realise them. Later, an inspired leader showed me other places to dream about and showed me other 'bikes' with which to explore them. In my eagerness to share my dreams with others I took them to these places only too often to see the drudgery in their step. I put 'adventure in a bun'. Sometimes I would see the light in their eye only to watch it fade lacking a means of expression once I was gone.

The notions of provision and challenge therefore lend themselves, despite the best of intentions, to market place interpretation. In order to find another way than provision outdoor adventure would be advised to find another way of working and another word than challenge to describe its process.

### **The Explorer Within**

'Exploration' is a motive that is driven from within and can be seen as a counterpoint to the externally motivated challenge. Exploration fits well with the notions of student centred learning and of connection with the human spirit. The word 'explore,' then, comes to mind as an alternative to challenge as a way to describe the process for outdoor adventure in the third sector. Can such a concept be facilitated? Can adventure leaders provide situations that encourage proactivity, allow the students to dream and find the 'bikes' with which to explore them?

Anita Roddick, founder and director of the Bodyshop, found this on a London tombstone:

" A vision without a task is just a dream;  
a task without a dream is pure drudgery".

I remember one leader's way. On the evening of arrival he pointed to the top of a nearby hill and told his participants he would see them up there. They arrived after many small adventures in twos and threes just as the sun set. Around them was a panorama of mountains. As the group gazed in awe at the view, he told them they could climb any one of those mountains if they would like to. The rest of the programme involved tackling the task of making that dream come true. As always the best solutions are simple ones.

My personal view is that it can, of course be done. Whether it will be done is another matter. It will require the differentiation of market place outdoor adventure from third sector outdoor adventure. The third sector will, in turn, have to politicise in order to fight for recognition and resources. That will involve leadership able to buck the trend, invent new structures, resist being hijacked by the expectations of their colleagues and not be blinkered by their history, traditions or rhetoric. It will involve not giving in to the attractions of the packaged multi-activity deal, the instant fix demands of the 'market' or the status and security of a profession.

But outdoor leaders always did rise to a challenge. And in that alone perhaps lies the main problem such a movement will face. Can it discard challenge in favour of exploration as a basis for living?

"You live and learn" says the hero in Terry Pratchett's book 'Small Gods'.

"That's funny," says the philosopher character, "I always thought it was the other way round!"

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