Editorial

Almut Beringer

This issue of the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* sees a change in editorship. The newly formed Outdoor Council of Australia (OCA), a merger between the Australian Outdoor Education Council (AOEC) and the Outdoor Recreation Council of Australia (ORCA) [see James Neill's editorial in *AJOE* Volume 7 No 2], appointed Glyn Thomas and myself, Almut Beringer, as interim editors for 2004. We have taken responsibility for publishing Volume 8 of the Journal while OCA goes through a formal recruitment process to appoint a new permanent editor or editors for *AJOE* [see the call for expressions of interest in this issue]. Gratitude is extended to James Neill for his work as *AJOE* editor 2001 – 2003, and for the substantial commitment such work requires. James Neill's efforts for maintaining the professional standards of this Journal are acknowledged and appreciated. Our task now is to build on those standards, and to continue the contribution the Journal is making to outdoor education both nationally and internationally.

The refereed section of this issue documents that *AJOE* remains a primary outlet for Australian outdoor educators, as well as attracting overseas authors. Alison Lugg's, Lou Preston's and Peter Martin's submissions speak to the relationship between critical outdoor education, one focused on environmental objectives, and adventure-based outdoor education. Alison Lugg challenges some ingrained practices in Australian outdoor education, and asks to what extent unexamined British values, norms and attitudes continue to shape Australian culture and thought structures – to the detriment of developing a cultural context that is nurtured by and sensitive to the Australian landscape and environmental conditions.

In her article, Lou Preston takes up the theme of the Australian environment and reflects on what kind of environmental interpretation is appropriate and valuable to promote increased environmental understanding and students' pro-environmental values and ethics. Action research on her teaching of environmental interpretation in a Grad Dip (Outdoor and Environmental Education) course sees Lou Preston radically change her practices away from generalist, universalist interpretation to one that celebrates the local environment and

integrates natural features with cultural sensitivity and environmental history.

Peter Martin's article on the role of adventure experiences in building positive human-nature relationships challenges some preconceived notions from critical outdoor education: that adventure, excitement, and consumptive outdoor experiences which use the bush as a gymnasium or a backdrop tend to damage rather than enhance pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. This submission can be regarded as a direct response to Alison Lugg and Lou Preston: in a re-interpretation of his PhD thesis data, Martin suggests that teaching technical skills and focusing on outdoor pursuits can have equal if not more value to naturalist studies in environmental outdoor education. Outdoor educators committed to critical outdoor education and using outdoor education as a means to teach about ecological sustainability need to remind themselves that many students come to outdoor education for the adventurous activities, and that educators have a mandate to serve such interests as well.

As a trilogy, Lugg's, Preston's and Martin's articles carry on and enrich the debate on critical outdoor education. These articles can be read as an invitation to non-Australian/non-Victorian academics, researchers, and practitioners to investigate and discuss the potential of adventure-based outdoor education for building a connectedness and intimate relationship with nature and the local environment.

The theme of personal development objectives in outdoor education is taken up by Simon Beames and Paul Lan and colleagues. Beames adds to the 'rites of passage' discussion in outdoor and experiential education by researching an extended overseas experience for British adolescents regarding its potential as a rite of passage for participants. In his article, Beames shares his PhD research, which suggests that such an overseas experience can, indeed, assist young people in making the transition into the adult world. However, today's western cultural context gives those starting on the 'adult path' few if any community responsibilities – an integral part of a traditional rite of passage amongst indigenous peoples. Beames' article indirectly asks the questions how and what kind of outdoor adventure experiences can serve as relevant and

meaningful life transitions, and whether outdoor education can affect broader societal circumstances to the extent of providing significant and fulfilling roles for its young members.

Paul Lan et al.'s article contributes to the body of knowledge in wilderness/adventure therapy by sharing data on the cognitive and affective outcomes of a wilderness therapy program with youth-at-risk in Tasmania, Australia. Lan et al. report gains in self-actualisation and decreases in feelings of hopelessness, as well as positive effects regarding recidivism among young offenders. Their replication study confirms the value of a wilderness therapy program for youth-at-risk and young offenders.

In part 3 of his four-part series on fatalities in outdoor education in Australia within the past 40 years, all published in consecutive issues of this Journal, Andrew Brookes studies the environmental circumstances of these tragedies. In the present article, Brookes coins the term 'a geography of fatality risk,' concluding from his research that knowledge of particular and local environments is critical to preventing fatal accidents during outdoor experiences. This article, as well as the entire series, to me is an important contribution to safety and risk management in outdoor education, wherever it

may occur in the world. Brookes' research sets a benchmark to investigate tragedies in other parts of the world, and to trace the implications for outdoor education practice.

The non-refereed section of this issue reprints the keynote address from the 6th International Camping Congress, held at La Trobe University in January 2003. This conference saw over 200 international delegates come together to discuss professional issues and research, and to explore regional Victoria under the guidance of students and staff of the Dept. of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism. Stuart Hill set the tone for this international gathering by reminding the audience of some of the timeless values in residential/organised camping, and by giving his very personal perspective of camping as a young boy in the U.K. and its lifelong consequences.

The next issue of *AJOE* will publish papers from the forthcoming international outdoor education research conference, to be held at La Trobe University, Bendigo 6 - 9 July 2004. We look forward to receiving many submissions, and to sharing these with the *AJOE* readership in Volume 8 Number 2.

Call for Reviewers

AJOE is seeking additional reviewers to assist in the peer-reviewing of manuscript submissions. If you are interested in sharing your professional expertise with your colleagues and in gaining experience of the publishing process, please e-mail the editors at ajoe@latrobe.edu.au. Please include in your e-mail a

c.v. and a list of topics or themes you would like to review, and/or professional areas of expertise.

We look forward to hearing from you. Our aim with expanding the pool of reviewers is to spread the workload to 2 to 3 reviews per reviewer per year.

New Editor/s sought for 2005 and beyond

The Outdoor Council of Australia Inc. invites expressions of interest for the position of editor of the Australian Journal of Outdoor Education.

If you have experience in academic reviewing, editing and writing, and would like to help steer

AJOE for the next 2 years, contact Peter Martin for a position description.

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