



## 'The Beginning of Outward Bound'

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*Starting from November 24, 1956, Outward Bound Australia held its first course at Narrabeen Lakes for 50 young men from 16 to 18 years old. One of the participants was Doug Arnott (1956), who got into contact with the OCA and answered several interview questions about his experiences. Two other participants, Malcolm Murdoch and David Brigden — although not Cranbrook students — also responded to the questions for illustrative purposes.*

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### **What memories do you have of Outward Bound? What activities did you participate in?**

**Doug Arnott:** We had a daily tough morning routine involving a long obstacle course which we had to complete in a certain time; we swam, rowed, sailed, water skied, had a day on the harbor in some yachts, did PT [personal training] and self-defence, learned rappelling, and did the jog route marches over long distances, learning to splint and carry 'injuries' along the way.

**Malcolm Murdoch:** Still being a callow school youth in 1956 (that was my dad's assessment), I have memories of quickly having to assimilate with many of the group who had been working, for a few years, in commerce or as apprentices, some of the latter being pretty rough around the edges.

A number of them already had their own car and in many respects were young men of the world. However, I found that I had some background that many of them didn't possess, and that helped in the quick adjustment that was needed. With the course being run on military lines, I also recall the high level of personal cleanliness and hygiene required, the bans on smoking, alcohol and bad language, and always moving on the double during duty hours (which was most of the time).

### **What had been your expectations heading into Outward Bound?**

**Doug Arnott:** Since I had already attended several Singleton school cadet camps and been punished for various crimes against authority by our sadistic 'officers', like standing in the cold at attention with one's rifle held overhead for a long time – or crawling around at night in wet grass as the southerly buster hit and having to continue although freezing – Outward Bound held no fears whatever for me. I was also already a boxer and sailor thanks to school programs.

**Malcolm Murdoch:** I really didn't know what to expect. Apart from receiving a list of clothing etc. to take, I had only a vague idea of the likely activities. As I recall, being able to swim, competently, was the prime requirement.

**David Brigden:** I do not remember having many expectations – my sponsor had organised my entrance as he thought (correctly) that it would improve my self-confidence. I believe that I knew the camp was designed to ‘build character’ and to improve confidence and self-reliance.

### **What lessons learned from your Outward Bound experience have assisted you in later life?**

**Malcolm Murdoch:** When I was 20, I tossed in my job as an articled surveyor to drive an open-top Mk1 Land Rover to the wilds of the NT’s South Alligator River and help establish a buffalo property, from scratch.

Completely isolated, I spent many months working most of the time with the men of a tribe of Aborigines. We built huts for the boss (I only rated a tent with no floorboards), an airfield suitable for planes up to DC3 size, fenced, cleared and even started work on a wharf.

Many of the lessons I learned from Outward Bound came in handy on that venture, as they have all through my life. The NT hot weather eventually drove me back south, but I carried the Outward Bound ‘can-do’ and lateral thinking attitude through a long public service career.

### **How do you think the Outward Bound experience changed you as a person, if at all?**

**Doug Arnott:** The course lasted almost a month and was pretty much non-stop and also it was pretty tough with none of the safety equipment that kids are forced to wear today. In addition, our instructors were ex-military people who were not going to put up with any cheek from adolescent boys!

That said, we were living in huts with running water, which is one difference to the way that Outward Bound is run today. Nevertheless, the experience gave me enormous confidence in drawing on deep reserves to get seemingly impossible physical tasks completed without whining.

**David Brigden:** I believe it gave me a lot of inner self-confidence and the knowledge that I could succeed (and improve, with practice) at relatively hard physical and mental challenges. It helped me develop personal courage and that was to be very important to me for at least the next 10 or 15 years.

In terms of the instructors, I thought they were very good. I quite liked the routine and the semi-military style of operating (I was in the Army Cadets at my school). I had not been expecting freedom!

**Malcolm Murdoch:** I believe that the course enhanced my ability to tackle problems logically and with a determination that if I tried hard enough I’d succeed. I don’t have enough knowledge to comment on the contemporary experience of young lads attending Outward Bound courses, but my experience with raising my own lads firmly suggests that Outward Bound is of lasting benefit.

As for the instructors, the average age of attendees meant that most were mature enough to adapt to the conditions without many hassles. I didn’t have any problems living at Narrabeen, as I’d already attended numerous Army cadet camps, as well as spending much of my spare time in outback NSW.

### **Do you think that Outward Bound should continue to be compulsory for the first four years of Cranbrook schooling? Should it be made voluntary?**

**Doug Arnott:** It definitely toughens people up, teaches them co-operation for common goals and takes them out of their comfort zone for a while. We did a similar sort of course here [in Hawaii] two years ago for a bunch of Navy SEALs kids and Astronaut kids — a three-day hike from the

sea to the 4,200 metre summit of Mauna Kea. It was a tough hike but peer pressure kept everyone going, even though it was difficult for some. After three days, however, all the kids had changed into sharing an impossible dream.

**Malcolm Murdoch:** Making things compulsory is not a generally popular move these days, but as long as parents understand the mandatory school requirements (in the same vein as uniforms etc.) when they enrol their lads, I can see no objection to making Outward Bound compulsory. No doubt some lads may need special attention/care at camps, but I believe that this can be accommodated.

**Do you lament the fact that the duration of Outward Bound is no longer a whole month? Do you also lament the fact that the present-day approach to safety (compared to 1956) may have compromised the spontaneity and freedom of some of the activities that you participated in?**

**Doug Arnott:** I think the important thing is the element of at least one part of the adventure that pushes the participants far out of their comfort zones and makes them have to go deep inside to not let the others in the team down. If they are just wandering around in the bush, whether it's a month or a week is not relevant.

I am constantly amazed when I see kids today all dressed up in crash helmets, life jackets and other protective gear — how can you learn not to bang your head if it's in a crash helmet? We did pretty severe stuff and I don't recall anyone getting injured!

**Malcolm Murdoch:** With kids as young as 11 or 12, I strongly doubt that month-long camps would be appropriate for most of them. On the safety question, I know that it's a cliché to note that we live in quite different times these days, but it's very true. Like most others in that first course, I had been brought up enjoying a high degree of freedom, in my case being free to wander or cycle the Eastern Suburbs (day and night) without thought of any danger.

I spent my weekends and holidays either sailing big yachts on Sydney Harbour, surfing/swimming, clambering around the South Head cliffs and tunnels, at cadet camps or on hunting trips to western NSW. Some of the fun we had is no longer possible, or allowed (bonfire/cracker nights are an example), and the modern safety measures are quite heavily driven by the threat of a highly litigious society.

Having said that, many of the current safety measures are common sense and we probably would have been required to use them, on that initial course, had they been available.

**David Brigden:** Often you need an extended time for learning to take effect. An important emphasis in that 1956 camp was personal improvement ('competing against yourself'). You need time for this to show that it is working. With enough time, even lads who are physically less able will see personal improvement in their skills and performances.

More preoccupation with safety means that the challenges now may not be as adventurous as they once were. As just one example, we were given the task to individually find our way to three check points – one was at Barrenjoey Lighthouse, one in Liverpool, and the third was in Penrith, I think. The only money we were allowed to take was a sixpenny coin (for an emergency phone call, if needed). I hitchhiked the whole way – I imagine that each of the boys did the same. Can't imagine that exercise being allowed today – but it was a great experience and we came back believing that we could do almost anything we set our minds to.

**How important do you believe Outward Bound will continue to be as a part of every Cranbrook boy's education (particularly, whose costs are incorporated in the school fees)?**

**Doug Arnott:** I think it's a great idea that Cranbrook has fully embraced Outward Bound and has it as a part of its schooling. Since it is a bush experience and the boys live in the wilderness and hike each day, I am sure that it has the same positive effect in a shorter period as our longer time at a fixed base had.

**Malcolm Murdoch:** From experiences that I had raising my own three boys, I'd thoroughly recommend that all youngsters experience Outward Bound. My lads participated in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, which has many similarities to Outward Bound, and that has been of immense value to them.

**David Brigden:** I think it is a great idea that it is included in the fees, because then it becomes an accepted part of schooling, rather than being thought of as an 'extra'. I wish we had the same arrangement at Sydney Boys High!