

History of the Howard Bell Award

Never heard of him? Who is he? What did he ever do? These are common questions of members of AEOE. Howard never wrote the "Great Book" on outdoor education, but he could have.

Howard Bell was born October 24, 1907. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Southern California in 1930 and in September joined the Los Angeles Unified School District as a physical education teacher. He became Supervisor of Youth Services at the Junior High level and in doing so inherited the administration of the Clear Creek Forestry Center, the oldest, continuously operated school camp program in this country.

The Clear Creek Forestry Center was first opened in 1924. A disastrous fire that year led the L.A. Board of Education to lease 240 acres of forest land for use as a reforestation center. Mostly boys from the school district would hike into the area on weekends and spend time potting seeds and planting trees. When Howard received responsibility for this site, building had been added including a lodge, pool, kitchen, dining room, and caretaker's house. The lodge doubled as sleeping area. Howard watched with great interest the development of San Diego's pilot project in Outdoor Education in 1946 and with an even keener interest the development of the Long Beach Unified Schools program at Hi Hill in 1948. He tried to interest the L.A. Education people in Outdoor Education, but failing this, decided to do it himself.

In 1949, Howard was responsible for forming the L.A. County Committee on Outdoor Education. This committee acted as a professional outlet for people in the field and school districts interested in initiating outdoor education programs.

Recognizing that this committee was limited and had served its purpose by 1952, Howard became a driving force for the creation of the Association for Outdoor Education, which became a reality in 1954. Howard served the Association in various roles until his death in 1961. The Howard Bell Award was created by action of the Board of Directors of AOE (now AEOE) in 1961, with Howard as the first recipient.