

The History of Outdoor Education

The roots of Residential Outdoor Education as we know it today, date back to the early days of school camping. In 1925, the first program of this type in California was experimental in nature and was jointly established by the Los Angeles City Public Schools and the U.S. Forestry Service. This beginning was at Clear Creek on the Angeles Crest, headed up by Howard M. Bell.

In 1940 the W.K. Kellogg Foundation inaugurated a community school camp near Battle Creek, Michigan called Clear Lake Camp. Its success led to a National conference hosted by the State Department of Education in 1942 to spread the word about putting children back in touch with nature in a school?out?of?school environment. Representatives from San Diego City and County attended this conference. As a result, they gained knowledge and inspiration in planning an outdoor education program for San Diego County. The California Pilot Project organized in 1946 marked the first organized, outdoor school effort in California.

On March 17, 1946 the first group of San Diego sixth graders journeyed with their classroom teachers to Camp Cuyamaca. The experience of spending five days and four nights in the mountains as part of a sixth grader's science and social studies lessons was unusual at the time, only being done in a few other places throughout the United States. (S.D.C.O.E. Outdoor School Brochure)

The concept was a good one: Provide first hand experiences with nature and environmental sciences while, at the same time, exposing children to social situations requiring the application of democratic principals and individual responsibility. The idea caught on.

Following close behind were:

Long Beach School Camping Program at Camp Hi?Hill, April 19, 1948.

Los Angeles School Camping Program at Clear Creek, 1949.

Culver City School Camping Program at Camp Josepho.

Garvey School District Camping Program at Camp Paivika.

Along with Coalinga, Huron, El Segundo, Carmel, Santa Clara Co., San Mateo Co.

By 1950 a rapid succession of outdoor school programs were being launched throughout the state as a result of the stimulus provided by the San Diego program. The first conference of Southern California School Camping Staffs and Teacher Training Schools' Personnel was held at Camp Hi-Hill, October 14-15, 1950.

As outdoor programs multiplied, interested people began to hold periodic informal meetings at various outdoor sites. The Los Angeles County Camping and Outdoor Education Advisory Committee, from 1949 to 1954, provided leadership and acted as a professional catalyst for early workers in Outdoor Education. It was this committee which took the initiative, in 1951, in preparing legislation authorizing city school districts to conduct classes in Outdoor Education. This early law, effective September 22, 1951, labeled the program "Outdoor Science Education and Conservation Education".

The Association for Outdoor Education actually began in May of 1954, when several administrators of outdoor schools held a meeting to discuss the challenges of managing their programs. A volunteer steering committee of 19 members was formed and a tentative calendar was established for a series of three Outdoor Education Conferences to be conducted during the school year 1954-1955 as follows:

Camp Paivika, Crestline, October 30-31, 1954.

Camp Colby, January 15-16, 1955.

Camp Cuyamaca, San Diego, May 15, 1955.

The corporation was actually formed in March of 1955, and the Bylaws were presented to the association members at the May meeting. It has continued to function as a charitable/educational organization since that time. The majority of the members have

traditionally been educators serving in residential outdoor science schools, although membership has been open to anyone interested in this area.

In 1957, with the success of Sputnik, a perceived educational crisis arose across the nation. In the name of "national defense", the U.S. government increased funding to public education in support of more programs that emphasized science, mathematics and foreign language. The nations schools responded by moving more to the conservative end of the philosophical spectrum and, in doing so, also changed many of the school camps to more school-like programs. In general, less recreation, more focused learning. With this came the name "Outdoor School", or "School in the Woods" or "Environmental Outdoor Education Center". The term Resident Outdoor Education eventually predominated with the realization that outdoor experiences can be both fun and educational. The focus of the 50's and 60's pushed for new outdoor school programs, improved teaching skills, greater curriculum definition and increased training to benefit the preparation for outdoor educators.

From a small nucleus, the Association grew to include sections in northern and southern California, Washington state, Alaska and individual members scattered throughout the country. The growth of the outdoor education movement extended into the 1970's with 45 counties statewide participating.

Four regional sections operated during the 1970's under the umbrella of the corporation:

Association For Outdoor Education, National

Southern California Section, 1955 to present

Northern California Section, 1957 to present

Washington State Section, 1968-1981

Alaska Section. 1972-1975

On April 22, 1970, an estimated 20 million people participated in a national environmental teach-in, more commonly known today as Earth Day. This event sparked new interest in the

environment and ignited a sense of urgency to deal with environmental problems. In the 1970's, words like "ecology", "energy resource conservation" and "quality of life" became familiar terms. Education focused on the extended classroom approach. The idea was to break down the "four walls" of the traditional classroom and extend learning out into the community to encompass the "total environment". To keep up with these changes and the new emphasis on "Environmental Education", A.O.E informally became A.E.O.E in January 1971, The Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education. In 1980, the name of the corporation was officially changed to Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education.

The 1980's brought economic pains to both public education and private programs. Some outdoor education programs were the first to go and last to be restored. Others developed new alternatives to resident programs with explorations into day experiences and adventure programs.

In 1981, the concept of the Association as being "National" in scope, was dropped, and the Association (A.E.O.E.) was thereafter known as being the "California" arm of the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education with sections in Northern and Southern California. The main reason to change from a national to a state emphasis was due to the inability of the Washington Section to exist as they had in the past. It was also believed that a state organization would be more effective in improving environmental and outdoor education in California where the organization resides.

Today the organization consists of sections in Northern and Southern California and continues to provide opportunities for professional growth, annual conferences, a forum for the exchange of ideas through section meetings, organizational strength in solving problems, training workshops, field trips, special projects, and many opportunities for individual contributions.