

The Stump Story

Janice A. Smith, AEOE State Historian (1999)

It was a beautiful spring day in May of 1954, when a large group of outdoor educators had come together at Camp Hi-Hill to exchange ideas, share techniques and discuss the challenges they were facing running their school camps.

Sitting around a stump were Howard Bell, who had started Outdoor Education for L.A. Schools at Clear Creek O.E. Center, J. Holley Ashcraft, the founder of Outdoor Education in Long Beach, Jack Davidson, Director of O.E. programs for Los Angeles and Kenneth Pike, the Principal at Camp Hi-Hill, and Barney Davis. There may have been some others present, but these men I am sure of. As they shared their concerns about the future of Outdoor Education in California and, for that matter, the nation, one of them said, "Hey, what we need is an organization!" They all clamored with agreement, but remarked how starting an organization takes a lot of money. So, without hesitation, Barney Davis stood up and opened his wallet. He took out a dollar and placed it on the stump and said, "Well, there's my dollar! "

A momentary hush fell over the group, then everyone else instantly went for their wallets and added their dollars to the small pile on the stump. And so it had begun, The Association for Outdoor Education (A.O.E.) was born.

Much like the small flowering tree that grows next to the old stump in the picture, the organization has also grown and changed over the years. Now called the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (AEOE) we are still growing, still reaching, still giving our best to help one another find the most effective ways to teach the children that will someday be the caretakers of this earth. Supported by an organization that is built on a shared vision, we are like the branches that reach out to help the children to flower into thoughtful and environmentally responsible adults.

Many AEOE members have asked why the Howard Bell Award has that ugly piece of wood stuck on it. Well, my friends....It's the stump. Yes, it's all about "the stump."