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SUZANNE Consedine was killed instantly on August 3 1993 after falling down a 61 metre bluff at Outward Bound in Queen Charlotte Sound. She was 22 and the fourth to die at the outdoor activities school in 13 years.

SHE had been there just four days, a day of that lost in bush without an instructor. She died cold, tired and utterly disorientated.

SOME say this is acceptable and inevitable in high impact outdoor education; risk is part of the learning process.

OTHERS say Outward Bound's deep end learning is stuck in a World War II time warp where fear and pain are still seen as the surest way of building character.

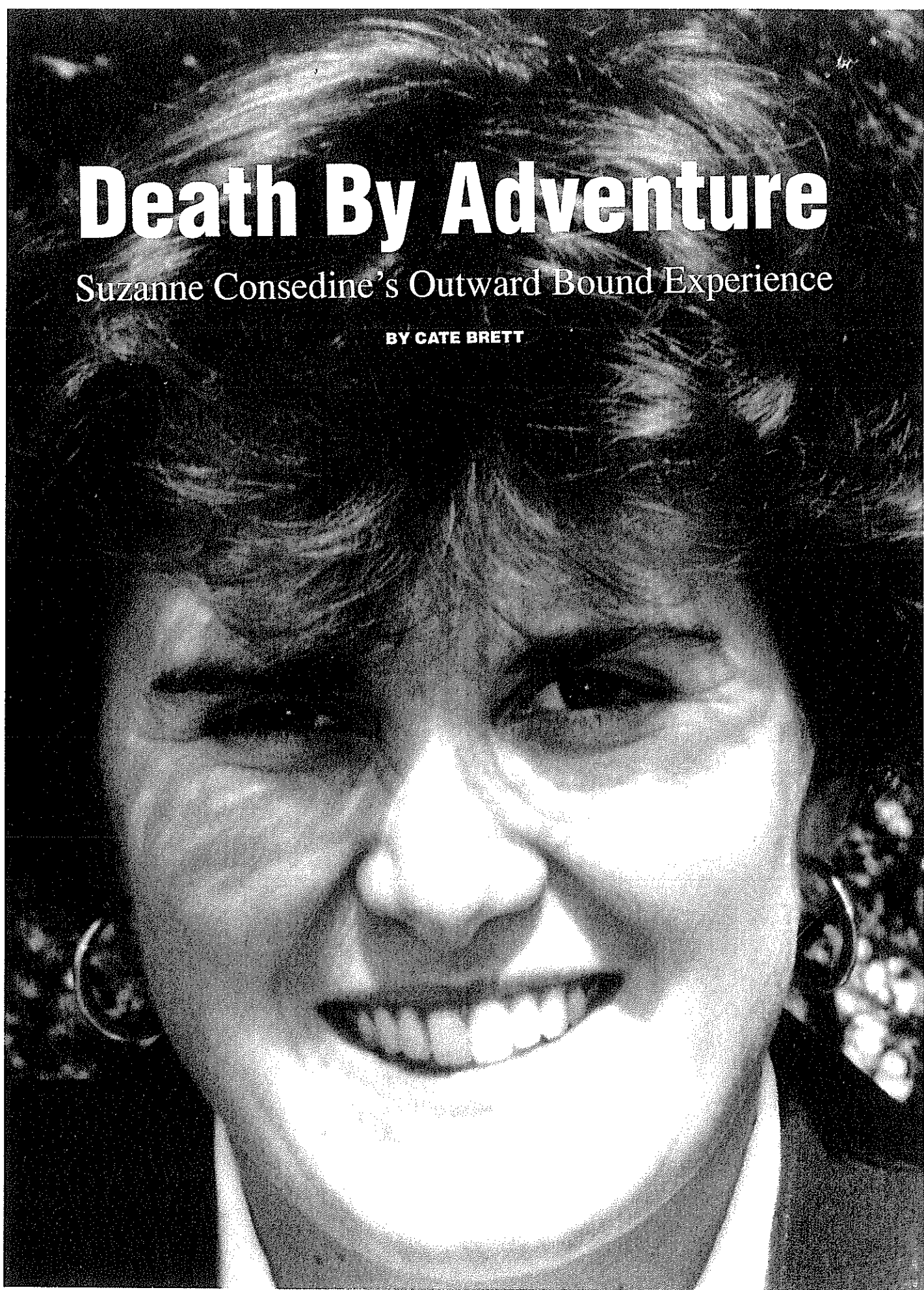


Death By Adventure

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Suzanne Consedine's Outward Bound Experience

BY CATE BRETT



It was an accident — or so it seemed. Suzanne Consedine, a 22-year-old Radio New Zealand journalist, was killed instantly on August 3 last year after falling down a 61-metre bluff during an exercise at Outward Bound. Outward Bound was quick to point out that Suzanne was only the fifth person to die in the 31 years that young New Zealanders have been putting themselves through their paces at the Cobham Outward Bound School in Queen Charlotte Sound. That makes a ratio of about five deaths per 30,000 students. Except that the last four deaths have all happened since 1980. January 1980: Lee McNabb, a 23-year-old Wellington draughtsman, drowned in a canoe accident. August 1983: Richard Ropiha, an 18-year-old Auckland, died after falling from a rock face. August 1990: Aaron Henwood, a 23-year-old Auckland, drowned during a river crossing. August 1993: Suzanne Consedine, a 22-year-old Christchurch journalist, killed in a fall. Which makes a ratio of fatalities closer to 1:4000. And leading up to every death, experts say there were hundreds of near misses. Some say this is both acceptable and inevitable when you're involved in high-impact outdoor education; risk is part of the learning process. Others say no. They say Outward Bound is out of step. A dinosaur stuck in a World War II time warp where fear and pain are still seen as the surest way of making men out of boys. A macho culture which for decades has attracted the highest praises from governors general and chief justices to lowly office workers. But a culture which may finally have met its end in Suzanne Consedine's death.

Cate Brett is a *North & South* senior writer

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARETH EYRES

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IT HAD BEEN A dreadful night. The temperature hovered around freezing point and the rain had been falling steadily since the previous afternoon. Suzanne Consedine and her 13 companions in the so-called Shackleton Watch had spent a wet and miserable night camped on a narrow sloping site above a bluff.

They were lost somewhere in the ranges between Linkwater and Woodbourne, about 15 kilometres from the point where they had been dropped off two days earlier by Outward Bound.

Dinner that Monday night had consisted of cold baked beans eaten from cans while everyone struggled to get warm in their sleeping bags. Suzanne had made a desultory attempt to light a fire but the rain was too heavy and the camp site so steep every stick rolled uselessly away.

The group was equipped with emergency burners but everyone was too cold and miserable to be bothered lighting them.

During the night, Myles Taylor, one of five in the group with

Outward Bound offered to cut the \$1600 course fee by 50 per cent if she agreed to join the August course.

Suzanne led an active life, playing a lot of sport, including netball and volleyball. She swam and had been running in preparation for Outward Bound. The pamphlet she received from Outward Bound was reassuring, requiring only that a person be capable of running nonstop for 20 minutes.

Specifically, the leaflet stated: "Although it [the course] is physically strenuous and mentally demanding, it is within the capabilities of all reasonably fit people. It is not competitive and all activities undertaken during the course are conducted with constant regard to safety. "It is not expected that participants will have had any previous experience in outdoor activities."

When Suzanne tried to find out a bit more about the course she met a curious wall of silence. The brother of her partner, Mike Russell, had just completed a course at Outward Bound and Suzanne knew several others in Wanganui who were

Suzanne's mother, Trish, worried about her daughter, contacted a former Outward Bound instructor. He told her that Outward Bound in the winter was a kamikaze exercise, that Suzanne's lowest point would fall on her fourth day when she would be so low things could only get better.



Suzanne and her 13 companions were lost somewhere in the ranges between Linkwater and Woodbourne, about 15 kms from the point where they had been dropped off two days earlier by Outward Bound.

some tramping and bush experience, suffered mild hypothermia. Suzanne was one of the three women who spent much of the night monitoring his condition and bringing him barley sugars.

The next morning, Tuesday August 3, was Suzanne's fourth full day at Outward Bound but already the news room at River City Radio, Wanganui, where she worked as sole-charge journalist, seemed a world away. Here she was, lost, cold, tired beyond belief and utterly disorientated.

It was probably for the best that the Outward Bound graduates she had tracked down in Wanganui before embarking on the course had coyly refused to divulge any details of the Cobham experience.

Suzanne had been determined to go to Outward Bound since she was 18, but had always intended enlisting for a summer course. Last year she asked her employer for time off later in the year but was refused because of the upcoming elections. Then

graduates. But they all seemed tied to some unwritten code of silence forbidding "graduates" from revealing the secrets of their experience to "initiates" like Suzanne.

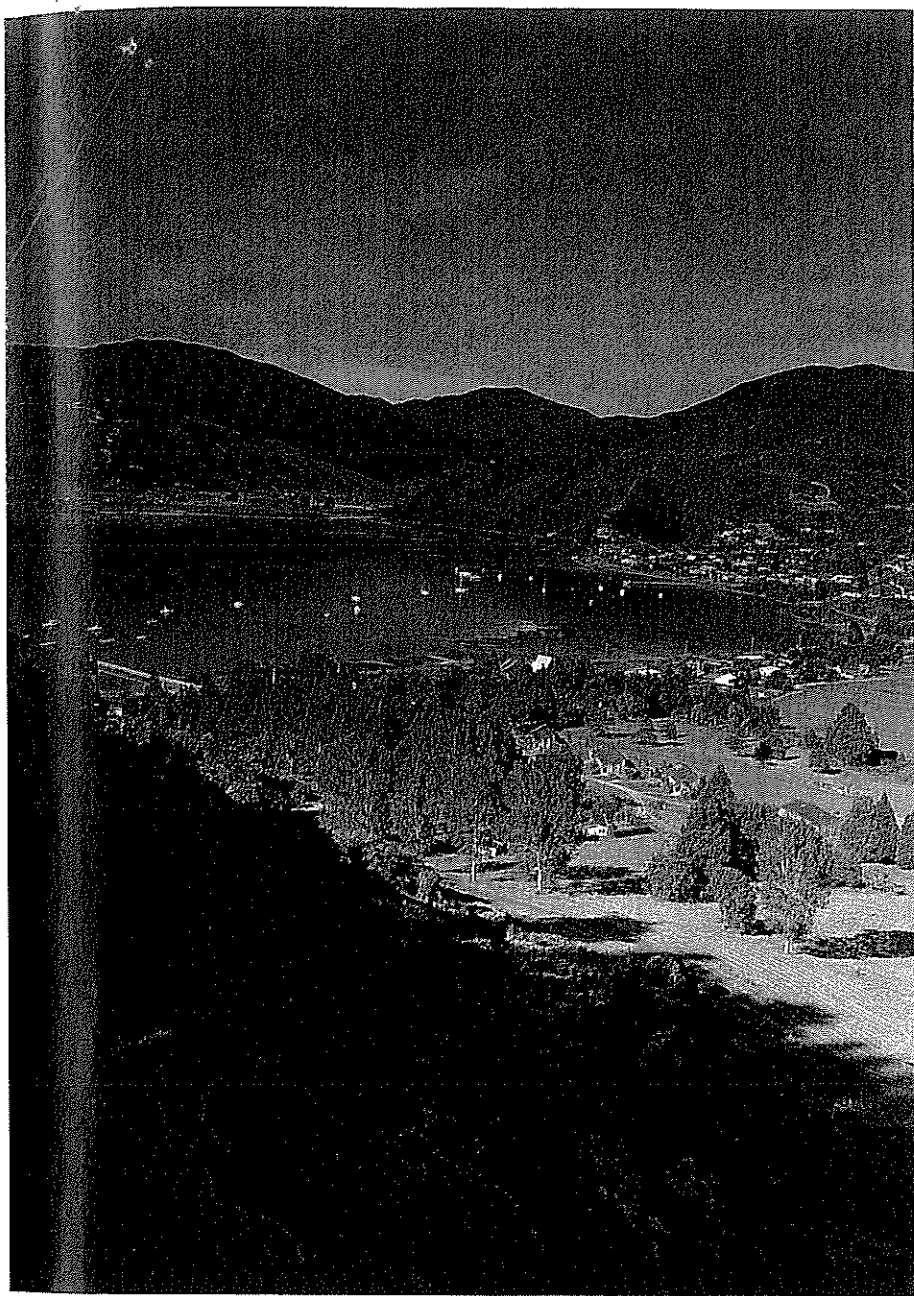
Suzanne's mother, Christchurch counsellor, Trish Consedine, worried about her daughter, contacted a former Outward Bound instructor to see if he would be more forthcoming. He was.

He told her that Outward Bound in the winter was a kamikaze exercise, that Suzanne's lowest point would fall on her fourth day when she would be so low things could only get better.

Trish opted not to pass these little gems on to her daughter the last time they spoke.

And the instructor was absolutely right. By that Tuesday morning, on the third of August, everybody wanted out.

When they had left the Cobham School base at Anakiwa on Sunday to begin an exercise known as Bush One, their instructions had been to head for various grid sites on their maps before



In September 1962, governor general, Viscount Cobham, opened the Outward Bound school at Anakiwa with these words: "Outward Bound sets out not to cure delinquency but to prevent it."

completing a loop and walking out back at the drop-off site some time on the Tuesday afternoon.

Susan Lamont, their 31-year-old instructor, had accompanied the group for the first day and camped nearby on the Sunday night, checking on their progress. By midday on the Monday she was satisfied that they were capable of being left and she headed back to Cobham.

Before leaving the group she went through a couple of role plays on how to deal with emergencies, including hypothermia, and double checked to see whether one group member, Martha Nati, was really happy to proceed, given the obvious problems she was having with her knee.

Confident in the group's ability, she left.

But within a couple of hours the weather had closed in and visibility reduced to five metres. Map and compass work became extremely difficult without visual bearings and soon the

group had wandered off the ridges and the open beech forests, into steep and inhospitable country. To the south and east of the ridge route were treacherous bluffs dropping away into the valley floors.

The watch had been instructed to remain on the ridges, always to retrace their steps if they became lost and not to split up. Within hours of losing their instructor, all these cautions had gone out the window.

Nobody wanted to wait around for cooked breakfast or a hot drink that Tuesday morning. The cloud had lifted a little and everyone decided to move on — and out — as quickly as possible. Without knowing exactly where they were, a unanimous decision was made to abandon their original route and head for farmland visible in the valley.

The best and quickest route to the farm seemed to lie below them, by descending the steep slopes to a river leading out of the valley. The going was so hard and the terrain so steep that retracing their steps as instructed seemed an impossibility. Small rivers flowed underfoot with every step they took.

The going was slow and treacherous and the party, which had shown a tendency to fragment from day one, again split into two groups. The slowest members, including Suzanne Consedine and the woman she had befriended, Martha Nati, were at the front of the rear group. Two of the most experienced watch members, Miles Taylor and Rodney Smith, had adopted the role of tail-end-charlies and were helping the slower group.

But even they were having problems. This area was never intended for inexperienced bush walkers. It was rocky with ferny cover and few footholds.

By 11.30 that morning the first party had got so far ahead they were out of sight — still within ear shot, but about 20 minutes ahead.

Suzanne was distressed. She was yelling out to the advance party to slow down and wait. She and Martha kept losing their footing and going into barely controlled slides on their bottoms.

The party had reached the top of Myres Stream and were heading down to the river over a steep face when Suzanne called to the leading group for directions, right or left, for the best route down. Rodney Smith was behind Suzanne and says she was getting angry with the front group, yelling out for them to stop and regroup: "She was starting to use the F word. Then she took a couple of steps, slipped over on her bum and shot straight into the gut of a bluff. It was totally hidden by ferns."

She was perched precariously on the edge of a 61-metre drop, her legs hanging over the void. She grabbed at ferns to stop herself from slipping over as Martha slid in behind her and reached for her hand.

Rodney was a metre behind the pair and quickly dropped to the ground to get rid of his pack and help Suzanne. Her legs were dangling, her bottom slipping off the ledge with the weight of her pack.

Martha says she gave Suzanne her right hand while Suzanne held on to a small tree with her left: "She was panicking, she was yelling 'I'm falling'... I tried to get her pack off. I tried to wait until Rodney was in a position to help, he was right behind me. Suzanne was falling forward. She told me she wanted to grab the tree to get her balance. She let go of my hand and fell forward. She turned round onto her stomach and grabbed the tree which snapped and she went over the edge."

Members of the advance party saw her somersault through the air above them, smashing her head on the first ledge 30 metres below before falling past them.

The scream silenced after the first bluff. Then there was just the sound of crashing branches.

When the first students got to Suzanne it was obvious she was dead. She was lying face down, her brains visible through her smashed skull. They covered the body and decided to send

— not surprising given the fact they were lost.

But by six o'clock that night the Shackleton Watch had been taken by helicopter back to Cobham and Suzanne Consedine lay in the Blenheim Hospital morgue.

By Thursday morning the police team, headed by Picton's Sergeant Ken Rigby, had launched its investigation by interviewing each watch member, the Outward Bound Trust safety committee had begun its own internal investigation and the school's psychologist had begun working with the watch members.

And within 30 hours of Suzanne's death, her fellow watch members were into the next stage of their course.

FROM OUTWARD BOUND'S point of view, Suzanne Consedine was the worst possible person to die on a course.

Des Lyons, the Outward Bound Trust's Wellington-based executive director, must have quaked in his boots when he heard

The Consedines are a stropky lot. Suzanne's family is one branch of a large Catholic family that includes radical Christchurch priest Father Jim Consedine. Suzanne's father, Robert, works for Project Waitangi, her mother Trish is a counsellor. Both are well known in Christchurch for their social and political activism.



Robert and Trish Consedine with daughters Joanna (left), aged 21, and Bernadette, 19.

a party of four out for help, the rest remaining with Suzanne.

It was nearly 24 hours before that party reached the farmhouse and help. They had been forced to spend another night in the bush before finally walking out to the farm at 10am on the Wednesday.

In hindsight it was fortunate that Suzanne Consedine died during her fall: had she broken her back or suffered critical head injuries she could have waited 24 hours before help arrived.

The group had no means of raising the alarm: no radio contact with their instructor and no emergency flares. And, despite the fact that the Shackleton Watch was a day late coming out, no rescue party had been sent out to find them.

Outward Bound's director, Bruce Cardwell, with 15 years' experience in the New Zealand Police, would later tell the coroner that getting lost on Bush One is "part of the learning process" and it is not at all unusual for groups to emerge one or two days later than expected.

The rescue was impeded by the fact that the watch members who walked out gave the search party incorrect grid references

the news. Of course any fatality was bad: bad for the family, bad for the school. But this particular death was worse.

Lyons, formerly from Christchurch, knew the Consedine family personally and shared close associations with many of their extended network of friends in Christchurch.

The Consedines are a stropky lot. Suzanne's family is one branch of a large Catholic family that includes radical Christchurch priest Father Jim Consedine, renowned for his work in the anti-apartheid movement and prison reform.

Suzanne's father, Robert, works for Project Waitangi, running workshops on treaty issues for government departments and health and education institutes, while her mother, Trish, works as a counsellor. Both are well known in Christchurch — particularly among Catholic circles — for their social and political activism.

Knowing all this, Lyons' empathy with the family must inevitably have been tinged with a germ of anxiety about the possible repercussions of this death; the Consedines would be asking hard questions.

IT THE CONSEDINES' fighting spirit was no defence against the devastating news delivered by the two police officers who presented themselves at the Consedines' humble back door New Brighton on Wednesday August 4, to tell them their daughter was dead.

Trish Consedine's most urgent need when she heard the shattering news of her daughter's death was to bring her child home. Outward Bound made no offer to facilitate this, so the Consedines faced the nightmarish task of driving from Christchurch Blenheim to bring Suzanne's body back.

Robert's brother, Noel, and two close women friends, sister Pauline O'Reagan and Veronica Cummings, volunteered for the task.

Noel and Pauline O'Reagan would later become part of a team, including Robert, Trish, their two surviving daughters, Anna, 21, and Bernadette, 19, lawyer Peter Doody and friend Mike Gillooly, that would launch a rigorous personal inquiry into Outward Bound.

But for the moment there was only disbelief, grief and the endless task of hosting the hundreds of friends who poured through the Consedine household in the days before and after Suzanne's funeral.

The family buried their daughter at the end of this long wake still not knowing how she had died.

The first, reassuring version of the incident had Suzanne falling to her death as she turned to help her friend, Martha Nati, who was having problems with a knee injury.

With scant information, the Consedines fielded the stream of media inquiries with a generosity which must have been coming to Des Lyons. The Consedines apparently accepted that their daughter had died accidentally and laid no blame at Outward Bound's door.

But within weeks all that had changed.

It was a month after Suzanne's death before the family received a copy of the damning police report on the accident and official account of the events leading up to her death.

But within that time the Consedines had already begun to have second thoughts about the nature of the incident.

Robert says as lay people with no expertise in the outdoors a question that kept nagging in their minds was how their daughter could have come to be lost in such a hostile environment so early on in the course: "How come Suzanne can walk off the city streets on a Friday and be on the top of a mountain on a Monday night, lost, alone and probably hypothermic? We don't need any police report to start asking that question."

Then, two weeks after the accident, at their own instigation and expense, the Consedines went to Anakiwa to meet with the young people from Suzanne's watch. The group had just completed their course and was preparing to leave.

There, listening to the accounts of the distressed watch members, the Consedines learned exactly what had happened and exactly how alone the group had been.

On the Saturday, the watch's first full day at Cobham, the group received theoretical and practical training in map and compass reading, first aid and CPR instruction and basic bush skills including fire lighting, river crossing and what to do if lost or hypothermic.

The next day, by 8.30am, they had begun their first bush exercise, accompanied, until Monday morning, by their watch instructor. From then on they were alone.

Trish says she was dumbfounded when she realised that the instructor had left the group and returned to Cobham: "I felt — till I felt — pure rage. How dare they, in today's world where everywhere you turn the emphasis in the outdoors is on safety, have such an inexperienced group in such a situation."

She says before Suzanne went to Outward Bound, she and her daughter both imagined it was all about outdoor education: a

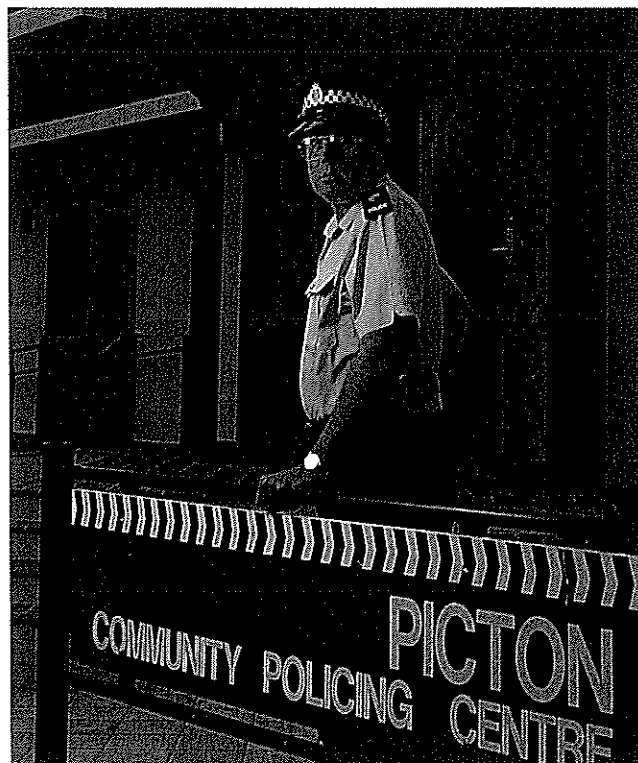
place where young people learned real skills and respect for the outdoors and where they would be introduced to the joys of outdoor activities.

"I was wrong. Of course you would expect that outdoor education would probably involve periods of being wet, cold and miserable — Suzanne expected that too. But I never imagined it would also involve mortal danger."

The Consedines' concerns were backed to the hilt in a surprisingly frank police report on the incident.

The report, compiled by Sergeant Ken Rigby of the Picton station, was prepared in consultation with two other outdoor education experts, Gerald Rawson and Ray Waters, an ex-assistant director of Outward Bound.

Their comments were based not only on the Consedine death but also on the preceding death of Aaron Henwood in 1990. The report concluded;



Picton sergeant Ken Rigby investigated two Outward Bound deaths and prepared a surprisingly frank report:

"I have to say in investigating the Consedine death I felt I was walking in my own footsteps again."

- It is important to note that both the last two fatalities occurred at exactly the same part of the course, on the last day of Bush One and within 24 hours of the instructor leaving a group on their first scheme.
- A further common factor was that both these fatalities occurred when groups experienced situations beyond their training and capabilities.
- We feel the group structure was not operating, rather that they acted more as individuals. There had not been time for adequate group bonding or for a leadership structure to develop.
- The group had followed the standard instruction and training programme and all the usual prior checks and procedures were correctly completed. These "passed" the group to go it alone in the bush; however, events showed this assessment to be inaccurate.
- Events showed the group was not competent to undertake the Bush One task unsupervised.

- The importance of continual improvement in the school's systems, along with their internal and external audit procedures, cannot be overemphasised.

Rigby concluded that there needed to be a clear definition between training and expedition phases of the programme, and that as Bush One is a definite training phase all future groups should at least be shadowed throughout by an instructor.

Finally he recommended a complete external audit of all the school's systems and own safety audit procedures.

THE CONSEDINES got to work. They obtained a copy of the coroner's report into the previous fatality and began talking to outside experts.

What they discovered horrified them; it had all happened before. Aaron Henwood, a 23-year-old Auckland, had died in August three years earlier while attempting to cross a river on the unaccompanied section of Bush One.

Trish Consedine says she was dumbfounded when she realised the instructor had left the group and returned to Cobham: "I felt — still feel — pure rage. How dare they, in today's world where everywhere you turn the emphasis in the outdoors is on safety, leave such an inexperienced group in such a situation."

The Blenheim coroner, Colin McNabb, had again received a detailed report from the same Sergeant Rigby, and Outward Bound had been asked to explain what this inexperienced group of students was doing by itself trying to cross a raging river.

Outward Bound emerged from the inquest largely unscathed. Aaron Henwood was portrayed by Outward Bound staff as a weak male specimen — even slightly physically handicapped. In fact, then director Jon St Clare Delmeida went so far as to suggest Aaron had "a degree of cerebral palsy".

This guess, based on staff observations of Aaron's slightly jerky walking motion, was completely false but passed unchallenged by the coroner — despite the fact he had before him an autopsy report which found

no physical abnormality in the boy and in fact described the body as that of a "well-nourished, well-built young adult European male".

If Outward Bound's intention was somehow to blame Aaron for his own death, the facts before the court went a long way to contradict that explanation. If Aaron was not strong enough to be on the course, why was he given a clean bill of health by his own doctor and the Cobham nurse? Why too, if he was perceived as a weaker member of his group, did his instructor select one of the more demanding routes for their Bush One experience? And if the group was to be blamed for trying to cross a flooded river in their determination to get back to Cobham, was no one to be blamed for the fact that Aaron's group had been sent out without any instruction on practical river crossing?

And finally, if Aaron was to be portrayed as the weak link in the chain of seven boys attempting to cross the river, how did they explain the fact that it was not Aaron but another boy who first slipped and dragged Aaron down into the water. Or the fact that further up stream another boy from a different watch had also been swept away by the river before being rescued?

Heather Henwood, a solo parent from Papakura, had no lawyer to put these questions to Outward Bound.

When she arrived at the inquest, the coroner, Colin McNabb — the same man who would conduct the Consedine inquest — greeted her with these words: "Mrs Henwood, this could take an hour or all day. It's up to you."

Heather Henwood had never been to an inquest before, she had not been given copies of either the police report or Outward Bound's own internal investigation into the death. She was both distressed and overwhelmed: "I was devastated when I walked out of the inquest an hour and a half later."

Outward Bound seemed interested in only one thing: undermining Aaron and removing all suggestion of blame from themselves. "I couldn't believe it when I heard them say he was handicapped."

Heather Henwood says her son had been selected from a group of 200 who had applied for sponsorship from McDonald's. The fast-food chain was offering to give three young people a job provided they first successfully completed an Outward Bound course.

"Aaron was underweight at that stage but when he was accepted he started going to the gym every day and working out until he reached his goal weight. He felt that if this is what he had to do to prove himself and get a job, then he would do it."

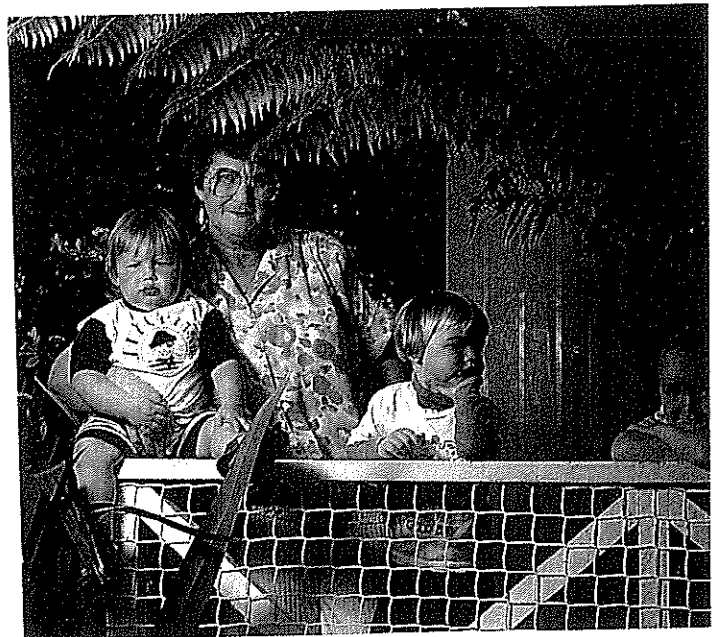
She says her son had an IQ well above average and although he was of slight build he was physically strong. He did have a pathological fear of water as a result of a childhood accident (something Outward Bound was told) and a slight co-ordination problem which produced a jerky walking motion when he was tired.

The day after Heather and her two surviving daughters buried Aaron, Outward Bound asked them please to fly down to Anakiwa to talk with the other boys in his watch. All expenses would be paid if they could come immediately.

"They said it would be therapeutic for us and for Aaron's group if we could come down and talk. My daughters were even asked to participate in the group's programme to help the boys come to terms with Aaron's death. It was a beneficial thing for us to do, but when I think back on what we did, it was unreal. I feel they were using us to motivate these boys to carry on despite Aaron's death."

Although Outward Bound escaped the Henwood inquest

Heather Henwood's 23-year-old son Aaron went to Outward Bound in August 1990 on a McDonald's sponsorship. He drowned while attempting to cross a river on the unaccompanied section of Bush One.



with little criticism, it did undertake to do a number of things to try to avert any future fatalities on Bush One.

These included: assessing whether it was possible to equip groups in Bush One with hand-held radios for use in emergencies, and to introduce instructor shadowing of all groups during the entire Bush One expedition.

That shadowing was introduced in November 1990 but had been dropped six months later.

During the Consedine inquest, Outward Bound's new director, Bruce Cardwell, conceded that Suzanne Consedine's death might well have been preventable had an instructor remained with the group throughout the whole of Bush One.

In other words, if Outward Bound had done as it said it would after the last fatality, Suzanne Consedine could be alive today.

In industry, if two workers were killed in almost identical situations within three years and the employer was found to have disregarded the safety measures he had agreed to put in place after the first fatality, heads would surely roll.

Not so at Outward Bound.

THE CONSEDINES' LAWYER, Peter Doody, entered the Blenheim District Court on October 7 1993 armed with ammunition to throw at Outward Bound.

The family's objectives were clear: they wanted an unequivocal admission from Outward Bound that the school was responsible for their daughter's death and they wanted the school closed while a complete external review of the entire programme was undertaken.

They got neither.

Under intense questioning by Doody, they managed to bring out some interesting facts about the accident and the school's operations. These included:

- There was a strong incentive for instructors to leave their groups during Bush One. Those who opt to stay with their watch lose their day off.
- Suzanne Consedine's watch had already demonstrated that they were having navigational difficulties before they were left by Lamont and became lost. They had been lost twice while Lamont shadowed them on the Sunday and Monday.
- Lamont, while probably one of the most personally experienced bush instructors at Outward Bound, had little or no formal training in group work and had only completed her own training at the school in March. Suzanne's was only the third watch for which Lamont had sole responsibility.
- In 1992 the standard Outward Bound course was shortened from 24 to 22 days, one of the days being trimmed from the introductory/group-building period before Bush One.
- Bruce Cardwell, Outward Bound's current director, was personally responsible for the policy change which led to the abandonment of instructor shadowing on Bush One and replacing this with other safety measures including an early warning system for extreme weather and a minimum training package for Bush One.
- Outward Bound has a policy of rapid instructor turnover. The school's 17 outdoor instructors are employed on two-and-a-half-year contracts and six to eight new instructors are taken on each year. These instructors undertake a six-month-on-the-job training programme before coming off probation.

The closest Doody and the Consedines came to an admission of responsibility for the death was when Cardwell conceded that if Lamont had stayed with the group the death would have been preventable.

But, just as with the Henwood death, Outward Bound went to some lengths to portray Suzanne Consedine as physically unprepared: slow in the early morning runs, slow in the bush and generally struggling. Outward Bound also blamed the group for disregarding the careful instructions given during their training

period: for going down when they should have stuck to the ridges and not retracing their steps once lost.

In the end the coroner seemed to accept this line of argument. In his decision he described Suzanne Consedine, to her parents' outrage, as "tending to be bumble footed". He also placed some importance on the fact the group had become split at the time of the accident.

Again the medical evidence before the court tended to contradict Outward Bound's portrayal of Suzanne as physically weak: a report from her own doctor in Wanganui described her as "above average fitness".

The closest McNabb came to criticising Outward Bound was in his decision where he said that "circumstances as existed at the date of Suzanne's death did leave what I would consider an unacceptable risk."

He did not, however, feel it was necessary to make any specific recommendations but could rely on Outward Bound, as a reputable organisation, to follow through with the recommendations made by the police in their report.

North & South asked McNabb why he felt such confidence in Outward Bound, given the fact that it had failed to pursue either of the safety measures agreed to during the Henwood inquest. And why he had not seen fit to criticise Outward Bound for this failure in the face of Suzanne Consedine's death.

McNabb says an independent committee — including Sergeant Rigby — had been set up to monitor the changes recommended after the Henwood death. It was this committee that approved the additional safety measures which later replaced compulsory shadowing of Bush One.

So he was not bothered that the decision to drop shadowing had ultimately led to another fatality on Bush One?

"It's a problem because you've got Outward Bound that has been going a great number of years with 30,000 people through there and up until the Consedine death they'd had one fatality on the bush exercise.

"The theory of the thing is to provide a challenge but to do that you've got a very delicate balance between what provides a challenge and something that's so safe it provides no challenge at all.

"In my opinion the real cause of the accident was that the party split up and instead of looking after this poor girl, they hurried on and left her at the rear, hurrying and struggling to catch up.

"OK, you can blame that to some extent on Outward Bound in that the party hadn't been together long enough to function as a group and some of them quite clearly didn't know what they were doing."

Sergeant Rigby agreed that he had been one of the three outside experts to approve Outward Bound's alternative safety measures after the Henwood death.

But he says this did not state as a matter of policy that groups would not be shadowed in Bush One but rather set out very stringent requirements that must be met before an instructor can contemplate leaving a group at this stage of the exercise. Outward Bound estimates that about 10 per cent of the groups undertaking Bush One since this policy revision would have been accompanied by an instructor throughout the entire expedition.

But Rigby says he is aware that things he understood were going to be done at Outward Bound as a result of the Henwood death probably weren't done or weren't done properly.

"I have to say in investigating the Consedine death I felt I was walking in my own footsteps again I'm afraid — it was ironic, there were so many similarities."

Rigby says this time he is certain Outward Bound will be rigorous in following up the recommendations. His confidence in part seems based on Outward Bound's agreement to an external audit by the independent Outdoor Safety Institute.

oes Outward Bound accept responsibility for Suzanne Consedine's death?

An emphatic "no" is the answer from trust executive director Des Lyons, who refused to be photographed for this article. Consedine's death was an accident, he says, a personal tragedy, but not something for which Outward Bound can be called to account.

"During the inquest the Consedines tried to get Outward Bound to accept responsibility for their daughter's death and Outward Bound said no. The coroner agreed. He said it was an accident. Now nobody accepts responsibility for accidents."

So the organisation accepts no blame, even though, by its own admission, this death would most probably have been preventable if the group had been accompanied by an instructor — a policy agreed to after Aaron Henwood's death.

Lyons says he accepts that the death may have been preventable but wholly rejects the suggestion that Outward Bound had somehow reneged on an assurance to shadow all Bush One expeditions.

"Shadowing was clearly an interim measure instituted immediately after the Henwood death. It was not a recommendation from the coroner's court and there was no assurance given — or sought — that it would be continued indefinitely."

Lyons says Coroner McNabb had accepted that a safety review team would oversee any changes required following the Henwood death and it was this same team which later approved the lifting of shadowing and the implementation of alternative safety measures to mitigate against any future death in similar circumstances — ie during a river crossing.

Lyons is no doubt correct, in a literal sense. But any lay person reading transcripts of the Henwood inquest is left with the clear impression that instructor shadowing had been adopted as a long-term policy as a result of that death. Then director, Jon St Clare Delmeida, stated in response to a question during the final stages of that inquest: "A number of safety procedures have been put in place, all of those items have been evaluated. The students now have their instructors shadowing them the entirety of their bush walk."

Lyons argues Outward Bound's commitment following the Henwood death was to guard against any future river death. This they did — Consedine's death occurred in quite different circumstances.

Yes — and no. Look more closely and even the coroner recognised the similarities in the circumstances of the deaths. In both instances the groups made bad decisions: in Henwood's case, to cross a swollen river, in Consedine's case to abandon their route and head into dangerous territory, because their parties were desperate to escape situations which had got out of control.

In both situations Outward Bound's response was to blame the party for making foolish decisions.

Lyons argues the parallel between the two deaths lies in the fact that in both instances the groups were within sight of completion: "The Henwood death occurred within 100 yards from the farmhouse where they could ring up and get a truck. They chose to cross a flooded river and short-cut what would otherwise have been another two-hour tramp. And in the Consedine case the group had seen a farmhouse through the bush."

"Comfort was in sight... it seems to me it was a question of comfort rather than anything else."

Institutional arrogance or commercial sensitivity seem to prohibit this organisation from accepting any criticism of its operations — or even from sharing the blame with the students.

This, despite the fact that results of the interim safety audit (agreed to during the coroner's inquiry) into Outward Bound's Bush One scheme make it clear that changes are needed if safety standards are to be improved.

The Outdoor Safety Institute (OSI) is a private company run by Grant Davidson, currently director of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre, and Chris Knol, a former outdoor programme manager with the Hillary Commission and the only civilian involved in the military board of inquiry into the August 1990 deaths of soldiers on Mt Ruapehu.

Outward Bound's decision to appoint OSI as external auditor was a brave move, given Davidson's position as director of OPC, Outward Bound's closest commercial rival. However, OSI has an impressive track record in providing audits and training in risk management, including a recent contract with the police Search and Rescue squads.

The OSI's initial terms of reference drawn up in the wake of the Consedine death were to assess:

- the preparation, operation and debriefing phases of the bush training scheme (in the area known as Bush One), with the aim of minimising risk to students while retaining a high degree of challenge
- the precourse publicity material as to how accurately and appropriately it communicated to applicants and their families the risks involved in attending an Outward Bound course.

The interim report released on December 22 by Outward Bound covers these areas but OSI has been contracted to carry out a full audit later in the year which will comment on Anakiwa's systems of staff placement, training, appraisals and the school's overall safety management.

OSI's interim report examines the effectiveness of the Bush One training scheme as a preparation for the more advanced, unaccompanied three-day bush expedition which takes place later in the 22-day course.

In making its recommendations, OSI noted that "the fundamental question that Outward Bound needs to resolve for itself is how much risk it is willing to accept to maintain the element of challenge."

The question OSI posed for itself was: "Under what circumstances can someone be asked to assume responsibility for their own safety during a tramp with a group in New Zealand bush while under the duty of care of an organisation?"

OSI answered this by saying: "Certainly no one can be asked to do this with little or no knowledge of the bush terrain, the risks involved and how to manage those risks. Many Outward Bound participants are straight from urban settings and have little or none of this knowledge."

This was the very point highlighted by Sergeant Rigby in the police report on the Consedine death when he noted that both the Henwood and Consedine fatalities had occurred when "groups experienced situations beyond their training and capabilities".

OSI goes on to set out a list of requirements it believes should be met before the circumstances are right for a person to assume responsibility for their own safety in a bush expedition and these include:

- adequate training to handle the difficulties and risks is given
- suitably skilled training and supervision is given by the organisation to the group to ensure the skills and knowledge required to undertake the tramp exists.
- It concludes that "much of" the set of requirements is already a prerequisite for involvement in bush expeditions at Outward Bound but recommends that: "If the current structure of an Outward Bound course is continued, then the Bush One scheme [must] provide participants with a more comprehensive bush training programme

and ensures instructor supervision is maintained throughout. The training components that would have to be covered would include: navigation/travel in the bush; travel on steep ground; river crossing; fire lighting; camp craft; map and compass work.

Having acquired these skills and a good understanding of the risks involved, it is then reasonable to ask students to accept more responsibility for their own actions when they go on the longer unaccompanied bush expedition at the end of the course.

OSI is clearly indicating that the Bush One scheme should be a supervised training exercise, not the half training/half unaccompanied expedition scheme it was at the time of Consedine's death. But even with this more comprehensive bush training, it points out there is no way of eliminating the possibility of future fatalities and accidents.

Particularly, as the auditors noted, that while the given routes for Bush One and Two are in the first instance suitable as "an entry level for outdoor experience" and in the second instance consistent with a "moderately difficult tramp", in both cases navigational errors could easily lead the groups into "quite serious terrain".

On the question of publicity, OSI concluded that "the statements of risk disclosure were minimal to nonexistent in most Outward Bound publications..."

And went on to recommend "that all precourse information includes a clear acknowledgement of risk in the outdoor pursuits activities and a statement that safety is a shared responsibility between Outward Bound and the student: students sign a statement verifying that they understand the risks and the precautions Outward Bound takes, but that it is impossible to guarantee absolute safety."

Outward Bound is in the process of redrafting its publicity material in line with these recommendations.

In a press release announcing the audit recommendations, the trust's president, Lloyd East, said the findings were a "useful indication that the school's risk-management processes matched up to optimum standards".

With all due respect it is very difficult to see how East reached such a self-congratulatory stance from this slim interim report. You would almost think that Outward Bound had re-introduced Bush One shadowing off its own bat. You would never guess that it had taken the death of Suzanne Consedine to nudge them back to this position.

Finally I asked Des Lyons whether, when all the acrimony is put aside, he sees any justice in the Consedines' bellicose stance.

"They are obviously grieving most deeply and we have genuinely tried to respond to their concerns. The coroner's hearing was open and in depth, and we subsequently had this audit report. The auditors have said there are no residual matters. I think it is time they let the issues rest."

The family's concerns have most definitely caused us to look and re-examine everything — there's no doubt about that. Certainly we have no resentment about them raising the issues, on the contrary, they have contributed to the improvement of Outward Bound and its safety."

Outward Bound though has an odd way of showing its gratitude: the Consedines were not sent a copy of the audit report prompted by their daughter's death — and only provided a copy to *North & South* on the proviso that it was not made available to the Consedines. Lyons said to do so would simply provide more fuel for their fire. ■

SO WHAT MORE could the Consedines possibly want?

Nothing less than a complete overhaul of Outward Bound, from the top of the governing trust board down to the school's promotional and advertising material.

But aren't we now dangerously close to a personal vendetta? Surely Outward Bound has shown itself willing to make changes this time and, in exposing itself to the inspection of outside auditors, to make itself accountable?

Robert Consedine says no: "You see, I call these things cosmetic. The reason they stopped shadowing Bush One groups after Aaron's death was because it went against the organisation's whole philosophy. It was seen as cossetting students, watering down the impact of the experience. These steps they are taking might go further than they have gone before in addressing safety issues but they don't go to the heart of the organisation."

"They believe the best, the purest way to educate people in the outdoors is to drop them in the deep end and hope like hell they survive. In my opinion it is a highly macho and quasi-militaristic mentality — a mentality in which near misses, accidents, and indeed deaths, are seen as part of the learning process."

Trish agrees: "I think Outward Bound is a violent culture and I think their response to Suzanne's death underpins this. So we are not satisfied with cosmetic changes, minor reforms of bits and pieces of the programme. We think the whole organisation should be closed and have a radical rethink of what it's on about."

"And we also want Outward Bound to acknowledge responsibility for Suzanne's death. If they continue to dishonestly dump the responsibility for her death on the group we will still be here pushing for a response next year."

RODNEY SMITH, a 25-year-old Auckland auto mechanic, and Martha Nati, a 24-year-old Auckland bank clerk, take strong exception to the Consedines' stance.

These two Outward Bound graduates were at Suzanne's side when she died and were the two key witnesses called by the police during the inquest.

Today, both are converts to the Outward Bound movement and neither will hear a word of criticism of the Cobham School. Smith would not even agree to talk with *North & South* until he had obtained clearance from Des Lyons.

This, despite the fact that both admit to continuing trauma as a result of the accident: Martha has needed psychiatric help to get over Suzanne's death and Rodney told *North & South* although he had not sought counselling yet, he felt it was something he should probably still do. Outward Bound had made it clear to the group it would meet the costs of any future counselling they might need.

Martha did not want to be interviewed about Suzanne's death but did say that Suzanne had been a key member of the Shackleton Watch: "She was very strong. She was always pushing me along in the morning runs and helped me a lot on that first bush experience."

Martha says she is not at all critical of Outward Bound and has been recommending the course to family and friends since she returned.

Talking to Rodney you begin to gain some insights into the powerful quasi-religious conversion which graduates of Outward Bound undergo. He says although a number wanted to pull out of the course after Suzanne's death, they decided, as a group, to press on. Less than 24 hours after returning to the school after the accident, the Shackleton Watch was back at the coal face. "It was the best possible decision. I would have been a real mess if I had come out after the accident."

Rodney says when the watch first met and spoke with the Consedines at Anakiwa they were all impressed by how caring they were and by the fact they went out of the way to assure both the group and the school that they did not hold them to blame for Suzanne's death.

"But then at the coroner's inquest we found Robert Consedine on his high horse calling for the place to be closed down. The whole watch was devastated by their approach."

While, by contrast, Outward Bound was reasoned and measured: "They paid for Martha and I to go down for the inquest, put us up with the staff at Anakiwa, bought us lunches, did everything for us. Couldn't have been more helpful."

While it might seem a little irregular — if not improper — for Outward Bound to chaperone the police witnesses, I don't imagine for a minute that Rodney and Martha needed much persuasion to come down on the side of Outward Bound. Neither lay any blame for the death at the school's door.

As far as Rodney is concerned, the accident could have happened anywhere and nothing could have prevented it: "I don't think Outward Bound is blameworthy at all; you can step out on the road and get run over."

But what if Outward Bound had adopted the recommendations of three years earlier and kept the instructor on their tail?

"They believe the best, the purest way to educate people in the outdoors is to drop them in the deep end and hope like hell they survive. In my opinion it is a highly macho and quasi-militaristic mentality — a mentality in which near misses, accidents, and indeed deaths, are seen as part of the learning process."
— Robert Consedine

"We had our instructor with us for a day and a half and that was long enough. A number of us had bush and navigational skills and we were quite competent to handle the situation."

"In the future if groups are shadowed they will feel a sense of security that will undermine the experience to some extent. They won't be fully self-reliant and so the Bush One expedition won't bring out the best in them — that's what Outward Bound's all about."

Since graduating from Outward Bound, Rodney has become a member of the trust and is helping to co-ordinate corporate sponsors with recruits for the school.

RODNEY could not have provided a better insight into the philosophy of Outward Bound if he had been schooled word perfect.

What is clear, both from him and from the thousands of

students who graduate from the course each year, is that it does indeed offer a life-changing experience. In other words, it works.

Every year about 1200 New Zealanders aged between 18 and 26 complete the standard 22-day, \$1600 course. About 40 per cent of these are self-funded, another 40 per cent are sent by their employers and the remainder are sponsored by charitable trusts and educational institutes.

Employers and parents who send their workers and children to the school expect them to come back changed: more confident, more mature, with greater leadership and social skills. And for the most part they do.

An independent study on the effects of an Outward Bound course on 950 graduates between 1986 and 1987 found significant changes in the students' perceptions of their own confidence, abilities, motivation and self-esteem.

All of which seems to leave the Consedines, with their descriptions of Outward Bound as a violent and uncaring macho culture, rather exposed.

Except for the rather intriguing fact that the Consedines' criticisms are echoed by a handful of very experienced and well-respected outdoor experts.

We are not talking about friends of the Consedines or new age men into encounter groups and rebirthing who object to Outward Bound's hard-line masculinity. We are talking about a group of men — including a number of former Outward Bound instructors — who are probably among the most experienced outdoor educators and practitioners in the country.

Men who know more about the extremes of risk taking and dicing with death in the outdoors than the whole of the Outward Bound Trust put together.

They include: Graeme Dingle, founder of the Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Turangi; John Entwistle, president of the New Zealand Mountain Guides' Association and one of the country's most experienced high-altitude mountain guides; Ray Button, former Outward Bound instructor in Scotland and Devon and former chief instructor at the Outdoor Pursuits Centre; and Mick Hopkinson, former director of OPC and national assessor for the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors' Association (NZOIA).

In addition, I spoke to a number of former Outward Bound instructors who, for fear of retaliation next time they go job hunting, asked not to be named.

It would be wrong to imply that all these people share the Consedine's most extreme criticisms of the Outward Bound philosophy; indeed, some of them actually believe the philosophy is fine — just the practice that is flawed.

Their concerns are wide ranging and encompass philosophical as well as very practical criticisms of Outward Bound. Some of their concerns may well end up being addressed by the independent auditors going through Outward Bound — in fact it is highly likely, given that one of the two auditors, Grant Davidson, is currently director of OPC, Outward Bound's closest commercial rival and the centre from which many of Outward Bound's critics have emerged.

TO UNDERSTAND THE philosophical underbelly of this debate you have to step back briefly into history and examine Outward Bound's origins.

The movement was spearheaded in Britain during World War II by the famous educationist Kurt Hahn. He was consulted by Laurence Holt, chairman of the Blue Funnel Line, and asked to help train the young marines in skills that would help them survive war — specifically survive at sea in lifeboats.

Hahn devised a rigorous training programme for the young merchant seaman, with spectacular results. In peacetime the training school survived to become the first Outward Bound school.

Hahn was an influential and charismatic figure driven by a powerful commitment to youth, the notion of service and enterprise. He wrote of the Outward Bound movement: "It is culpable neglect not to impel youth into adventure."

I have first-hand experience of this philosophy, having spent two years as a teenager at a Kurt Hahn-founded international college on the Welsh coast. There we threw ourselves into icy swimming pools before breakfast, rescued locals (and sheep) from beaches and cliff faces and wandered in freezing circles around the barren Welsh Brecon beacons learning what it is to "serve and strive".

In September 1962, New Zealand's governor general, Viscount Cobham, opened the Outward Bound school at Anakiwa with these words: "Outward Bound sets out not to cure delinquency but to prevent it... It needs no very profound psychologist to know that about nine-tenths of what is known as juvenile delinquency stems from every young creature's innate need for something tough and dangerous to cut his teeth on."

"Outward Bound teaches a boy [girls were not admitted until

October 1973] that there are some situations which cannot be met by a telephone call to the police or fire brigade or local welfare officer."

That was more than 30 years ago, but Viscount Cobham's sentiments will probably ring true for thousands of New Zealanders today.

Around the world the Outward Bound movement has waxed and waned; in some areas it has been transformed by new ideas about outdoor education, new emphasis more appropriate to a postwar world. But at Cobham it has stayed, proudly, and some say stubbornly, unchanged.

Bruce Cardwell, who also refused to be photographed, told his instructors at Outward Bound that Anakiwa remained the purest Outward Bound college in the world: truest to its founder's philosophy and to the original spirit of the movement.

It's a difficult thing to define in theory, but easy enough in practice.

Cold showers, early morning midwinter swims, a military-style obedience of instructors, a total detachment from the world outside Anakiwa, a fierce pressure to succeed and not admit defeat — even, as we have seen, in the face of death.

And perhaps above all a strong and early emphasis on self-reliance; instructors hold their groups at arm's length and the worst they can be accused of is nannying their students or compromising the group's self-reliance.

The concept remains deeply attractive to those who believe the generations of young people who have not experienced the challenges and sacrifices of war and whose closest encounters with adventure amount to visits to a video parlour are in desperate need of real challenge.

It is also a philosophy which fits neatly with the New Zealand pioneer culture — using the bush as a tool to make men out of boys.

Cobham is without doubt the most successful and financially strong Outward Bound school in the world today. It has 4500 financial members throughout New Zealand and its total assets as at December 1992 were listed at \$4.3 million.

In the outdoor industry Outward Bound's methods have a label: deep-end learning. The idea, quite simply, is that young people will learn best when they are thrown on their own resources — when they are placed in demanding situations and forced to rely on every last resource they can muster to deal with the challenge.

The environment becomes a battleground where the battles are as much psychological as physical.

Graeme Dingle founded the Outdoor Pursuits Centre at Turangi in 1972; his philosophy was quite deliberately diametrically opposed to Outward Bound's: "The thing that pisses me off about the Outward Bound philosophy, and always has, is that there's no attempt to get people involved in the outdoors and so have a long-term relationship with outdoor activities."

"Consciously, at the end of their experience at Outward Bound, many people will say, 'That was great, I had a fantastic time, the best in my life.' But subconsciously they are saying, 'Shit, I'm glad that's over. I never want to go back into that environment again in my life, it was so harsh'."

Dingle says he is personally a great believer in the importance of risk taking and as the years pass he is probably more in tune with Outward Bound's hard-line attitude to risk. "It's quite hypocritical of parents and employers to say to Outward Bound, take our children and change and develop them but don't subject them to any risks. That's spineless and stupid."

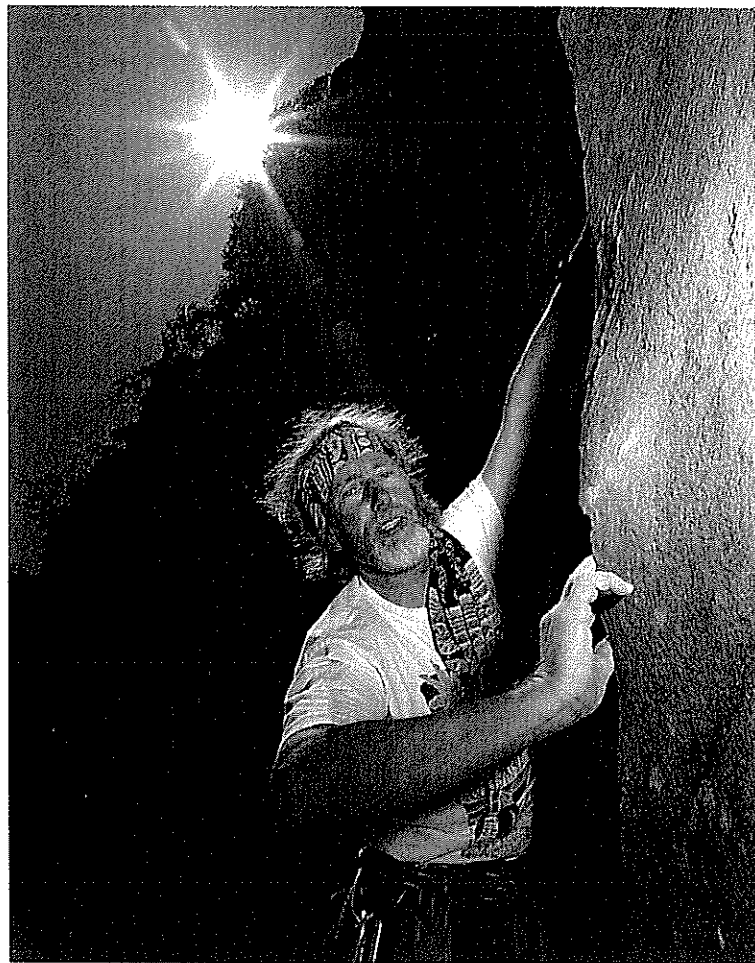
"I believe that risk taking is an inherent part of being human and without it we are doomed. There is a constant battle in this society between the people who want everything in life to be safe and comfortable and people like me who say no, risk is justified."

But Dingle's views on risk taking in the outdoors, like other critics John Entwistle and Mick Hopkinson, are hedged by all sorts of caveats.

Caveats concerning the level of hard skills needed by instructors overseeing the risk taking; the sort of skills needed by students before they should be subjected to risk and the sort of social skills required by instructors as they assess the readiness of groups and individuals facing those risks.

Dingle says Outward Bound has always argued that the business of personal growth and character development can be achieved most quickly when people are in out-of-control situations: "So the adrenalin is pumping and every fibre of their being is saying 'panic' and the Outward Bound philosophy is hanging over the top of them saying, 'Get a grip on yourself lad and think about the others in your group.'"

Dingle says obviously the Outdoor Pursuits Centre wants



Graeme Dingle founded the Outdoor Pursuits Centre at Turangi in 1972: "The thing that pisses me off about Outward Bound philosophy is that there's no attempt to get people involved in the outdoors and so have a long-term relationship with outdoor activities."

these qualities to emerge in their students as well, but the "objectives and immediate goals of the two organisations are quite different. Outward Bound's philosophy almost demands deep-end learning — freezing cold water by definition will be 'better for you' than blood temperature water. Personally I don't believe that — if anyone told me to jump in the sea I'd tell them to get stuffed."

"At OPC the philosophy comes from wanting people to feel as comfortable and secure as possible in the environment, and the idea is to teach them the hard skills — like the basics of good

kayaking and climbing — to ensure they are in control and can deal with the risks and challenges.”

Dingle says the danger with the deep-end learning approach is that it can be psychologically damaging to those who don't make the grade: “I was never prepared to accept that you will lose the more delicate ones with a deep-end approach. With graduated learning there is less risk of the student losing their self-esteem or being bullied by peer pressure to do something they are totally unprepared for.

“I have never enjoyed being pushed around or the threat of humiliation if you don't come up to scratch, and with Outward Bound that's a real risk.”

North & South asked Outward Bound how many students in

to be there — they all thought I was mad. I emerged totally committed and wanting nothing more than to become an Outward Bound instructor.”

Which is exactly what he became, first in the Scottish school and then in Devon. Button came to New Zealand in 1975 and went to work with Dingle at OPC where he remained for eight years — seven as chief instructor.

Despite his exposure to and respect for Dingle's philosophy, Button remains a strong supporter of the Outward Bound movement, its goals and commitment to deep-end learning.

But he does believe Anakiwa has lost its way by refusing to listen to its critics, refusing to move with the times and refusing to acknowledge the deep-seated structural problems which have led to four fatalities in 13 years.

“One of the comments I have heard from the Outward Bound Trust hierarchy is, ‘We have something that works, why change?’ That disturbs me. They do have a formula that works but it is dated. Society and the entire outdoor education business has changed since 1962, but Outward Bound refuses to adapt. I think they are deliberately resisting change because they are threatened by it.”

The arrogance Button alludes to was borne out in comments made by Des Lyons when discussing the external audit with *North & South*. He insisted Outward Bound had no need of an external safety audit and had only agreed to it as a means of placating the Consedines.

Button says the deaths at Outward Bound are a sure signal of a massive organisational problem: “Each death is predicated by hundreds of near misses or lesser accidents. The deaths are just the tip of an iceberg.”

During the inquest, director Bruce Cardwell was asked how many incidents there had been at Outward Bound in the past year. He could recall 40 or 50, ranging from a stubbed toe to a broken collar bone. Nothing out of the ordinary for an outdoor programme.

North & South asked Outward Bound for a record of all incidents during the last five years involving hospitalisation or emergency evacuation of a group.

The statistics provided by Outward Bound only cover a two-year period but in that time, out of 1530 students, 27 were forced to leave the course for medical reasons, 11 of which involved injury accidents. One required hospitalisation.

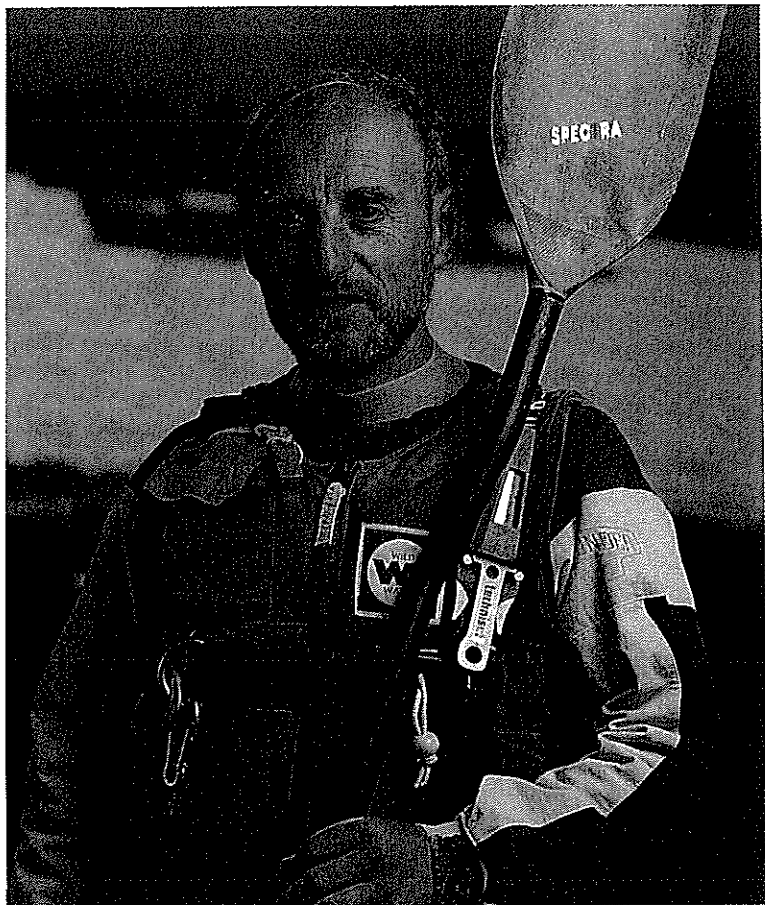
No statistics on emergency evacuations were provided and nor could the school state how often the groups were one or two days late returning from an expedition, as this is regarded as a “normal operation situation”.

Former Outward Bound instructors told me the official record is not a good indication of the actual number of near misses. The culture of the school mitigates against instructors and students officially reporting these.

But I did track down two people who had been on courses in the two months immediately preceding Suzanne Consedine's course. Both had been involved in incidents that Bruce Cardwell should have remembered quite well: in one case a woman being rescued from Bush One after she developed hypothermia within hours of being left by her group instructor, and in the second, a man being flown out of the bush after he fell off a rock face during the second unaccompanied bush exercise. He lost a considerable amount of blood from a head injury and sprained an ankle as well. His watch ended up spending six days instead of three in the bush. Earlier in the same course a watch member developed first-degree hypothermia while kayaking in freezing weather conditions in the Nelson Lakes. He was hospitalised.

The interesting thing about these two incidents is the impact they had on the two people I spoke with:

Mere Grey, a 23-year-old married woman with a three-year-old child, emerged from her course thoroughly disenchanted with Outward Bound. She had to be carried out of the bush after



Former Outward Bound instructor Ray Button remains a strong supporter of the movement, but believes it has lost its way by refusing to listen to critics and to acknowledge deep seated structural problems leading to four fatalities in 13 years.

the past five years had abandoned the course because they could not handle its demands. Anakiwa's records show that in the past two years about 14 students had chosen to leave without completing the course.

FOR ALL DINGLE'S concerns, it is also clear that for many people Outward Bound is the beginning of a love affair with the outdoors.

Ray Button is one such man — a man who saved his pennies as an apprentice in England to fulfil a boyhood dream to go on an Outward Bound course.

“Out of 130 students I was the only one who actually wanted

becoming hypothermic during the unaccompanied section of the Bush One exercise.

Grey is no city slicker: she has an army background and has been on numerous army bush exercises, she grew up as an active member of the Mount Cheeseman ski club and trained as a ski patroller. She knew all about the dangers of hypothermia.

The morning the instructor was due to leave her party during Bush One, the weather had turned foul and everybody had spent a very wet and cold night out. "All our sleeping bags were wet, one of the tents was ripped and the flies were torn. We told our instructor we thought it was too dangerous to go on alone but he simply fobbed us off and told us our fears were groundless."

Grey was unconscious for a number of hours and her watch members later confided they were concerned she wasn't going to make it. She was taken back to Cobham by stretcher and spent three days recuperating before resuming her activities. "I wanted to leave, and said so, but I was told this wasn't possible because I owed it to the group to carry on."

Conversely, Rob Barrett, a fencing contractor who is also in the territorials and has trained as an army medic, found his Outward Bound experience totally rewarding. Although he had to deal with suspected hypothermia and a serious rock fall in his watch, he was clearly in his element.

While a group went out to raise the alarm after the rock fall, Barrett spent his time digging out camping sites and steps in the ridge face where the party had stopped, making a stretcher for the injured man and tending to him and the group's morale.

He feels Outward Bound has been unfairly attacked over the Consedine death and was not at all bothered by the near misses in his own course: "I'm very pro Outward Bound. I think once they start accompanying groups or putting up safety nets they spoil the purpose of what they are trying to do."

YOU HAVE TO WONDER what might have happened to that group if Barrett had not been with them.

And for Button, these two accounts simply serve to emphasise his point about the catalogue of near misses leading up to a death.

He says the problem with deep-end learning, where groups are held at arm's length from their instructors, is that it increases the real risks of something going wrong.

And the greater the real — as opposed to contrived or perceived — risks, the greater the onus on the Outward Bound Trust to ensure it has a body of highly skilled and experienced instructors.

At the moment, Outward Bound's instructors are on two-and-a-half-year contracts with a rapid replacement of experienced instructors with newcomers. Critics, like Button, say this prevents the school from building up a core of very experienced instructors.

In the past, Outward Bound has not required its instructors to have New Zealand Outdoor Instructors' Association qualifications in any of the skills taught at the school. Instructors have received on-the-job training for six months before qualifying as sole instructors.

Button says it's vital that outdoor instructors working with a programme as demanding as Outward Bound's be highly skilled in each of the facets of the programme: relaxed enough on the cliff face or in a kayak to be able to give 100 per cent attention to their group and to assessing its readiness to move on.

So the instructors must not only be highly skilled and experienced, they must also be very good at assessing individuals and groups and making good judgements about when they can be left — safely — to their own devices.

A mistake in such assessments can — and has — cost lives.

Button believes the lack of long-term, experienced instructors at Outward Bound is part of the problem, but the other and perhaps most important part, is the hierarchy of control within the

organisation which prevents the instructors from really owning and running the programme according to their own best judgements.

"I think the trust needs to be educated about the real needs of the school. They are the ones employing the directors and holding the purse strings and dictating the terms."

Other Outward Bound instructors have backed up Button's claims, saying that the trust believes it can run this very demanding programme without giving the school the resources to run the programme safely.

To run such a programme safely, they say, requires more staff, better-trained staff and more-experienced staff.

The programme is very demanding on staff, and the system set up by Outward Bound deals with this by expecting rapid burn-out and staff turnover. A safer solution would be to increase the staff numbers so student and instructor ratios in areas like kayaking and bush expeditions were lower and instructors were able to pace themselves better.

For example, *North & South* understands that the reason Outward Bound abandoned shadowing throughout Bush One so quickly after the death of Aaron Henwood was because instructors opposed it, claiming that they would burn out later in the course if they did not have down time at this point in the course.

Button believes that Outward Bound needs have no fear of losing its edge through change. But he believes if it resists change for much longer, it stands to lose a great deal.

WHAT WOULD Suzanne Consedine, the journalist, have made of this debate had she walked out of Anakiwa alive?

Her parents think she was too mature and wise a woman to have been sucked in by the hype of Outward Bound graduates.

I'm not so sure. I never met Suzanne Consedine and I don't for a minute doubt her parents' assessment of her maturity. She was by all accounts an extremely talented and skilled young journalist, unusually well known and unusually successful for one so young.

But anybody who has survived something as physically and psychologically challenging as Outward Bound must have a sense of achievement and pride. War is not pleasant, but look at the sort of loyalty and camaraderie it engenders in the survivors.

The point of course is that she did not survive and that Outward Bound should have made sure she did.

For decades this national icon has survived such fatalities, shielded from all criticism by a national culture that celebrates blood, sweat and tears — and by a powerful and wealthy old boy network with tentacles in just about every facet of New Zealand business and professions.

The question is whether, in dying, Suzanne Consedine may finally hold this august body accountable for the young lives placed in its hands each year. ■

An independent study of 950 Outward Bound graduates between 1986 and 1987 found significant changes in the students' perceptions of their own confidence, abilities, motivation and self-esteem. All of which seems to leave the Consedines, with their descriptions of Outward Bound as a violent and uncaring macho culture, rather exposed.

