

Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks

Reviewed by Alex Prins

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Wild Exposure Pty Ltd. (2015). Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks. [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.goodbarber.roproject&hl=en>

Brew time. After a morning of marking, I slam the lid of the laptop shut and head down the street for a well-earned coffee. The cafe is full, yet strangely quiet. I order a coffee and look round; no newspapers. I cast my eye over the small area dedicated for those of us who have time to sit down and savour our coffee. Yep, definitely quiet and, unfortunately, no papers that I can see. Everyone is on the phone, not talking, but playing? Reading? Working? "Apping"? That reminds me; I have a bit of apping to do myself. I sit down and join the small crowd, pulling out my phone as I do so. It's ironic that I have stumbled upon a chance to review an app.

This was the year I aimed to go "tech free" in my teaching, back to the ol' days some may say. My plan was to implement handwritten essays in the field; mud maps and the "crafting of things" on a grand scale. To avoid, as much as possible, the digital world. It is probably unsurprising that I encountered a few bumps in the road, such as electronic teaching platforms, assignment submission queries, weather apps, and now the new whizz-bang Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks from the people at Wild Exposure. By the time my coffee arrives the APPbag is well and truly open. Aimed at outdoor educators and guides, it is a collection of resources, including: icebreakers, program themes and briefs, readings, quotes, initiatives, games and activities, checklists, program debriefs, bushfire safety, and more. I look up, taking a sip of my short black, and notice the local paper on the seat beside me; but by now, I am keen to see what's inside my APPbag. By no means am I a tech guru, so what follows is just the humble opinion of an "average Joe" who works with students in the bush.

The Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks aims to encompass multiple versions of outdoor education, from the school-based context to scouts, girl guides, and beyond. Depending on who you are and why you are in the outdoors will determine the helpfulness of this app. It will appeal both to those new to the field and old hands who have forgotten more than the rest of us know. Those establishing their career will find support and handy hints about program planning and checklists, as well as a solid array of activities and icebreakers. For the more experienced who are prepared to keep learning, new ideas can be found to

tweak and mould into your existing repertoire. Gentle reminders are also present for things that might have been missed or forgotten along the way.

The app is clearly designed to be continually adaptive, responding to suggestions from users, and does not pretend to be a comprehensive manual. The crew at Wild Exposure ask for feedback and ideas from those "coalface" app users who are willing to assist with improvements. More than likely, as more and more outdoor edders jump on board, the resources will build and the current gaps within the app will slowly close. Over time, the Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks may become the go-to resource for practitioners.

The information within the app relating to checklists, health and safety, teaching, and planning are simple, easy to read, and accurate. The information presented will be helpful for most; however, as good educators know, caution and a pinch of salt is needed. Take what you can, reflect, and then wisely apply the information as your needs and context require. Likewise, explanations for activities and icebreakers are straightforward and easy to implement. Currently, the app contains a good spread of icebreakers and minor activities to choose from that suit a range of contexts, ages, and purposes for those outside with students. More in depth educational activities for specific audiences are a bit light, as are the "books and readings for your collection" — but again, I get the impression these will grow over time. The assemblage of readings and quotes within the app are off to a good start, and are a handy resource to have at your fingertips out in the field when a teachable moment arises.

The Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks is easy to find and easy to use. Local photos, and work from practitioners and students alike, is a nice touch. The home page of the app lays out nine options from which to choose. The introduction, the first toggle in the top left, includes a welcome that sets the scene and highlights other particulars, including a clear set of instructions on how to operate the app. The other eight options are labelled clearly and hint at what may be behind the toggle, such as: "Start & End," where icebreakers, arrival ideas, program themes, and so

on are located. The home screen is easy to find and is only ever two taps away. This is just as well because navigating through the three main sections — “Start & End,” “During,” and “Resources” — where most of the information is held, can be time consuming. Frustration may follow if what you are searching for is missing. As the app grows, frustration from missing facets will dwindle, but the app may become a little messy and chaotic with the extra resources. However, I am sure the smart tech gurus at Wild Exposure have already lined up a solution.

I look up and see a few too many empty coffee cups. It is also lunchtime. I don't want to go tech free after all. I don't want to overlook or miss out on innovative, exciting changes in our industry. The Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks is a great idea that in time will develop into a handy, easy, and portable tool for outdoor educators and guides alike. If I were writing to the local rag on the seat next to me, the Outdoor Ed APPbag of Tricks would appear in the “thumbs up” section.

About the reviewer

Alex Prins is a lecturer in the Bachelor of Sport & Outdoor Recreation at Monash University. He has worked in outdoor education for several years at both the secondary and tertiary level. His professional and personal interests blur on beach learning about and becoming a skilled coast man. He is heading back to a secondary school setting at St Peters in south east Melbourne.
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