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Publisher Routledge

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Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t777550184>

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Online Publication Date: 01 January 2004

To cite this Article Potter, Tom G. and Henderson, Bob(2004)'Canadian outdoor adventure education: Hear the challenge — Learn the lessons',Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning,4:1,69 — 87

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14729670485200441

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14729670485200441>

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Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education: Hear the Challenge – Learn the Lessons

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Abstract

Canada is the second largest country in the world by area. With its diverse geophysical features and relatively small population density it is a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts of all types. In the Canadian outdoor adventure education field there is an awakened acknowledgement of the centrality of Native peoples that pervades its practice today. There is also a strong sense of a real and mythical north that pervades a Canadian approach. This paper provides a brief geophysical, historical, and socio-political overview of Canada infused with outdoor adventure educators' interests. An interpretative essay describing the ways and times of outdoor adventure education in Canada follows, which includes the authors' attempt to capture a collective sense of the field that is distinctively a 'Canadian way'. This, of course, is an opinionated view. The authors believe that Canada's varied geography and climate, Canada's history, Canada's influences and differences from the United States, and Canadian outdoor educators' tendency to integrate the curricular aspects of environment and adventure education are highly influential for most Canadian outdoor educators. This paper also offers a discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of Canadian adventure education and provides a description of outdoor adventure education in Canada including risk management and liability.

Introduction

This paper provides a brief overview of outdoor adventure education in Canada. Relevant geographical, historical and political background will be followed by an interpretative essay on outdoor adventure education in Canada with an attempt to be true and fair to the diversity of Canada's peoples, landscape—based activities and corresponding philosophies. We, the authors, will also attempt to seek out a common denominator of Canadian outdoor adventure education, which will constitute an interpretative opinionated view. We use the term 'outdoor education' to denote the overarching curricular enriching education in the outdoors that includes practices of environmental and adventure education.

Geophysical Setting

Canada is the second largest country in the world by area; it borders the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic oceans and has four distinct seasons. With its diverse geophysical features and relatively small population density it is a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts. Occupying the northern part of North America with a population exceeding 31 million, Canada covers nearly 10 million sq. km. (The Green Guide: Canada, 2003). This is an average population density of just over three people per sq.

km. Even though Canadians are relatively well spread out, 83% of the population is concentrated within 300 km of the southern border shared with the United States, the longest undefended international border in the world. Nunavut, Canada's newly designated northern territory supports only 29,000 people in its over two million sq. km., resulting in a population density of 72,000 sq. km. per person; it is one of the most thinly populated regions on Earth (Ferguson, 2000). While travel is exceedingly expensive in Nunavut, adventure travel is encouraged by the Nunavut government. Ecotourism is on the rise given various initiatives from both educational and commercial agencies.

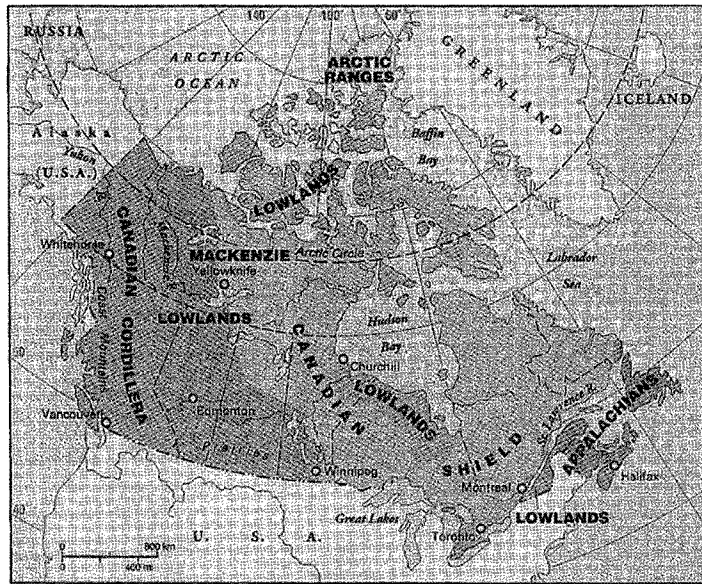
Canada measures north to south about 4,600 km, stretches more than 5,500 km east to west and spans six time zones (The Green Guide: Canada, 2003). Canada, so claimed by John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor-General of Canada from 1935–40, is “impossible to describe . . . , for it is built on a scale outside that of humanity” (cited in Michelin Tourist Guide: Canada, 1989, p.12). Given this scale, one notable type of outdoor adventure undertaking in Canada involves multi-seasonal travel experiences, such as a six-month adventure crossing a portion of Canada by canoe in summer and dog team/snowshoe over winter. Canoeing, cycling, hiking and sledding travel experiences, all share literature of “epic” proportions rather than epic feats of first ascents, and day river runs or coastal crossings. Such epic travel adventures tend to influence the geographically and historically based Canadian adventure psyche.

Half of the world's lakes and one-fifth of the world's fresh water lie within Canada, as does the longest coastal shoreline of any country in the world. Shared with the United States, Lake Superior is the biggest, deepest and coldest (average temperature is 4°C) of the five Great Lakes. By surface area it is the largest body of fresh water in the world. With its ocean-like features, many know it as an inland sea. Its northern Canadian shores are rocky and isolated; it offers world-class sea kayaking experiences and influences the Canadian arts from authors and singer-songwriters to painters. While Lake Superior is a centre of attention for the geography and outdoor adventure interests in central Canada, one might also mention other important areas such as the rugged West Coast Trail and Broken Islands of the Pacific coastline or the allure of the central Arctic's Thelon River.

Much of Canada is a sparsely populated, highly glaciated region termed the ‘Canadian Shield’. This highly influenced horseshoe shaped geographic feature surrounding Hudson Bay dominates more than half of the country (see Figure 1). This region is composed of extremely old and hard rock (thus the name “Shield”) and is characterised by innumerable lakes, shallow rivers and extensive forests (though heavily logged in more southerly regions) on an undulating plateau worn down in glaciations which finished “only” 10,000 years ago at the retreat of the last ice age (The Green Guide: Canada, 2003). A great deal of this area which is inaccessible by road, presents multi-day travel experiences of all kinds and offers perhaps the world's best wilderness canoeing. Here the canoe and the snowshoe are king, defining the dominant characteristics of the traditional form of Canadian outdoor education. The Prairies, the mid-western portion of the country, form a “relatively” flat fertile area of seemingly endless sky. Canada's western Cordillera is a great sweep of mountains, including the highest point in Canada (the second highest point on the continent, Mount Logan at 5,950 meters). The Cordillera and related river valleys and trenches cover the entire western portion (about a quarter) of the country before dropping steeply westward into the Pacific Ocean. Eastern Canada is mostly noted for its extensive rocky shoreline and short speedy rivers. Indeed the coastline of Nova Scotia (one of four Atlantic provinces) stretches for 7,400 km despite the province's overall length of only 575 km and width of 130 km (The Green Guide: Canada, 2003). Tundra and ice dominate the ‘Canadian north.’ This “north” above tree line in continental Canada, including the Arctic Archipelago, is rarely visited by Canadians from the south, although the last decade has seen a dramatic rise in visitors from all

Figure 1. Map of Canada

Map
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reference:
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The Green Guide
Canada 9th
Edition
au*2003-10



parts of the globe seeking to experience Canada's northern rivers, ice, wildlife, and vast remoteness. The population here is primarily indigenous Inuit and Dene peoples who live mostly in coastal communities spread throughout the expansive region. This distinctive northern land mass has a long dark winter season and a short, intense summer characterised by the midnight sun, a profusion of wildflowers and significant migrations of wildfowl. In Canada, temperature variations between the four seasons are often significant. For example, the town of Snag, near Beaver Creek, in the Yukon Territory is known for having the lowest officially recorded ambient temperature at a human settlement in North America, -64°C . In the Yukon summer though, temperatures may exceed 25°C (McClellan, 1987).

Canada's first National Park, Banff National Park in Alberta, was established in 1885. Now about 244,540 sq. km of Canada has been protected in 41 National Parks (The Green Guide: Canada, 2003). Additional work is underway to establish national parks in the 14 natural regions that remain un-represented. Further protection is afforded through Provincial Park systems and growing non-government initiatives continue to foster the work of voluntary private lands stewardship. A relatively new part of the National Park system is the two National Marine Conservation Areas designated to protect marine and Great Lake environments. Additionally, a Federal, Provincial and Territorial government co-operative, The Canadian Heritage Rivers System, has 31 nominated and 22 designated Canadian rivers. An exciting new initiative, the Trans Canada Trail, once complete will be approximately 15,000 km long, involve all ten Provinces and three Territories and reach the three oceans. While seemingly vast, the current level of protection of Canada's natural areas is not nearly large enough to protect the nation's diverse natural ecosystems. Competing interests of mining, logging, hydroelectric generation, fossil fuel extraction and usage, and urban development severely threaten Canada's natural areas (Gayton, 1997). Of particular note is the melting of the permafrost over vast northern terrain due to global warming (Fick, 2002). This phenomenon is now a much studied concern of national and global significance.

Much of the Canadian environment, especially in northern Canada, remains wild, despite the encroachment of resource extraction industries. While the more northern parks are relatively self-sustaining, the more southerly ones are becoming isolated islands of wild lands. With this in mind much work is being done to connect these areas with protected corridors. Throughout Canada, tensions between environmental preservation and development are present and often most contested in association with regional and national parks status (Mitchell, 2004). Environmental industrial hot spots and air-borne/water based toxins are being increasingly monitored. The challenges are mostly to enact and enforce adequate environmental legislation.

National and Provincial Parks in Canada offer many varied opportunities for outdoor recreation. While the importance of these areas is undisputed, public lands that have little or no formal protection are also critical for those seeking outdoor experiences. In Canada non-protected public wild lands are shared by all Canadians, but especially by natural resource based industries and outdoor recreators. Here, no user fees and few regulations for Canadians apply (with some provincial differences). While the immense size of some of these areas naturally reduces conflicts between different user groups (i.e., foresters and canoeists), the combination of modern technology, the increase in demand for Canada's hydro-electric power, fossil fuels, trees, minerals and massive increases in participation in outdoor pursuits increasingly places stakeholders on a collision course. A prime example of this is in Canada's Northwest where diamond drilling and extraction is rapidly altering the landscape, affecting animal migration routes, and reducing the quality of wilderness experiences (Boyчук, 2004).

A Brief History of Canada

It is thought that humans first colonised Canada approximately 15,000 years ago by migrating overland when low sea levels created a land bridge between Asia and Alaska (Ferguson, 2000); however, this land-bridge theory has recently been contested (Dewar, 2001). Their descendants are the Native Indians and Inuit (formally referred to as Eskimo), and long before Europeans arrived in Canada a wide diversity of aboriginal societies had long-since evolved in every area of the country. In fact there were more than 50 separate Native languages spoken before European occupation (Ferguson, 2000). Unfortunately, in addition to trade items, the Europeans also brought deadly infectious diseases that were previously unknown to the Native populations. Consequently, during the 17th and early 18th centuries entire Native populations collapsed catastrophically and cultures were wiped out. Ethno—historians estimate that during this time the Native population of North America (estimated to be between 10 to 18 million) fell by about 95% (Ferguson, 2000).

Outdoor experiential educators in Canada should readily acknowledge the centrality of Native peoples that pervades our practice today. For certain programmes, and the population of outdoor enthusiasts generally, there is an awakened sense of acknowledgement and inquiry into indigenous spiritual practices to accompany the more obvious Native people's role of providing technologies for shelter, travel and survival best suited to the Canadian landscape. Despite the impact of European diseases in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the Canadian government's assimilation practices of the early to mid 20th century (Ferguson, 2000), many First Nation peoples have proven resilient to earlier negative forces and now enter a time of increased optimism. As such, Native leadership and Native programmes in outdoor education are now on the rise in many parts of Canada.

While Norsemen explored portions of the shores of Eastern Canada during the 10th century, and Europeans fished here as early as the 15th century, the first permanent European habitation did not take place until the 17th century (Ferguson, 2000). Competition between the English and the French for furs, particularly the beaver pelts that were in great demand in Europe for the manufacture of fashionable hats, began to shape the economic, cultural and social history of the country in the early 1600s (Michelin Tourist Guide: Canada, 1989). The French established themselves in what is now Southern Quebec and explored half of the continent in their quest for furs supplied largely by Native trappers. The English began to compete with them in 1670 through a much more northerly position through the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company. Following the British conquest in 1759/1760 the North West Company developed a transcontinental canoe route from Montreal to the North West (a distance of about 3,000 km). Their explorers also travelled to the Pacific coast (another 1,000 km) in an attempt to find new routes to transport trade goods and furs (Ferguson, 2000). As such many Canadian communities began as early fur trading posts. Today, some communities, (e.g., La Pas, Manitoba) celebrate this past with annual canoe races along historical routes, and portions of the old Trans-Canada Route are commonly incorporated into adventure education trips.

Canadian Confederation occurred in 1867 to bring district governments together into a central government federation; since, the federal and provincial governments have often squabbled. All Canadian governments generally place highest value on human rights and social order, followed by individual rights and freedom. National qualities that unite Canadians include: respect for authority, hunger for security, a yearning for peace, order and strong parliamentary government (Berton, 1982). The country has experienced few revolutions or wars on its soil, preferring to solve disputes through political means. Canadians are known internationally for peacekeeping initiatives.

Socio—Political Landscape

Canada's economy is largely natural resource based: forestry, mining, oil and gas production, hydro-electricity, agriculture and manufacturing. Canada is also following other "developed" nations in global shifts towards technological—based industries. Due to its vast size, the country's transportation system is vital. Shipping by water, rail, air and roadways are all significant to this system. The 3790 km long St. Lawrence Seaway allows ocean-going vessels to travel just east of the east/west geographical centre of the country, to an elevation of 183m., from the Atlantic Ocean. Isolated communities in Canada's north primarily rely on air and sea support for most of their needs; a unique and less expensive mode of transport to some of these remote communities are the winter roads scratched out on the lakes and rivers for transport via truck.

Canada is a federal state; ten provinces and three territories constitute Canada's political makeup, including the new territory, Nunavut, with a primarily indigenous government. The nation's capital, Ottawa, is located in the south-eastern portion of the country. The Prime Minister, the leader of the majority party in Parliament, has to win an election at least every five years. Parliament consists of an elected chamber, the House of Commons, and an appointed Senate. Canada is an officially bilingual country, offering the majority of government services in both French and English. Political tensions between federal and provincial governments, particularly with French speaking Quebec, have been a central and contentious issue for the last two generations.

The first non-indigenous settlements were from the British and French; approximately 37% of the Canadian population is from British descent and 32% French. The balance of immigrants is of primarily German, Italian, Ukrainian, Dutch, Polish, and Asian origin (The Green Guide: Canada, 2003). Toronto, Canada's largest city is considered to be one of the world's most multi-cultural cities. Canada has a substantial indigenous population; about one million are of aboriginal descent. In recent years Canada's First Nations have made progress in settling many land claim disputes with Provincial and Federal governments; however, more claims are yet to be raised and settled. Often described as an early colonial uncertainty and a "pallid national identity", Canadians are thought to regularly define themselves based on what they are not. For example, as Canadians, we are not British or American or French; we are often hyphenated Canadians, such as Indo-Canadians, Euro-Canadians, and so on. Expressing a national Canadian identity is an ongoing challenge for us since the country's political beginnings with confederation in 1867 (Tippit, 2000). Many assert that Canadian identity is tied to the vast north just beyond all our communities and is understood in ways particular to each community/region. Many of our Canadian icons, the canoe, the beaver, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, are all ties to an historic and contemporary north. This same, real and symbolic north is linked to Canadian adventure education sensibilities.

The Canadian Way

The general collective sense of outdoor adventure education in Canada, one that Canadian outdoor educators might agree is one that is significantly and distinctively a "Canadian way", is difficult to capture. We, the authors, believe that Canada's varied geography and climate, Canada's history, and its influences and differences from the United States are important characteristics in considering a Canadian outdoor education. It is also our view that the tendency to integrate the curricular aspects of environment and adventure education further characterises Canadian outdoor education. This Canadian tendency denotes a primary difference from American and British outdoor education which has a focus on residential and day use centres. The group self-propelled outdoor travel experience and the myths and realities of the north also provide a likely resonance.

Canada's geographical breadth and linguistic differences means that outdoor educators may not know much about each other, but they do share certain common theories and practices, and unifying myths and symbols. Furthermore, their participation in various international associations, such as the Association for Experiential Education and the North American Association for Environmental Education, have suggested that they, as Canadian delegates, are better viewed as international delegates, not blended with American interests. In short, we believe, there is a distinctive Canadian approach to outdoor education, not universal, but common across Canada, and, should not be perceived to be too closely linked to American ways of adventure education as a "North American" approach. Rather, links can more wisely be considered on geographical terms along northern lines. For example, influences from American states such as Maine, New York, Minnesota, and Washington and Scandinavia seem to make sense as Canadian adventure educators seek out colleagues and literature.

With a self-propelled group travel focus and a perception of "wild" remote landscape of the Canadian north as a setting (be that north a short distance from one's urban home) there is a holistic view of an education "of" and/or "with" the outdoors that denotes a relational presence to the practices and way of the Canadian north. A place-based study is connected to travel, where it is important that students are travelling. Curricular enrichment of specific subject disciplines such as geography,

history and anthropology are actually readily incorporated with the overall experience (Henderson, 2001).

In this way, the requirement to develop and use the technical skills (often travel and camping skills), personal development and group skills is blended with, one might say, the 'green' and 'warm' skills of a complementary eco-adventure focus (Henderson, 2001). This knowledge realm involves a green learning in environmental and heritage awareness; a land-fullness, to counter Aldo Leopold's fear in the 1940s, that "... education and culture have become synonymous with landlessness" (Leopold, 1966, p.210), or to put it another way, what the Swedes call "Hemmablind" (translation: "home blind/home ignorant"); an inability to see and value what is at home. "Green knowledge" and understandings, well suited to adventure travel, involve this active attention to the place of travel and how we dwell within it. The centrality of Native peoples in providing a material culture for travel and shelter is a part of this knowledge. "Warm" understandings (or ways of being) involve a necessary unlearning of an urban/schooled cultural context that is alienated from ways of meeting nature closer to the fundamentals of living more sustainably and harmoniously in tune with the Earth. The ecopsychologist might call this a need for re-learning the never forgotten, "already familiar" human impulse to connect to the Earth as home (Pivnick, 1997). Warm skills engage the learner in an active "being", being comfortable, being home in nature. What needs to be unlearned is a fear of and detachment from nature.

What attracts Canadian educators to indigenous knowledge (knowledge native to the place) is similar to what the Norwegian call the "friluftsliv tradition", (translation: "a way home to the open air" (Faarlund, 1993, p.157). The "nature as home" metaphor is a far cry from the "nature as machine" or "nature as challenge arena"— as "sparring partner", that can dominate adventure education, but not necessarily by definition. As green and warm ecologically based attentions are added to the practice of a Canadian outdoor adventure, we see an integrated capstone experience to outdoor education most often framed as a travel experience. Such experiences, no matter the particular region, aspire to a "wild" nature, where the canoe is the central symbol and northern travel heritage stories can be shared to imbue the experience with connections to the past. This is perhaps in keeping with the cowboy and horse as a symbol in America (and some of the Canadian west) and ski heritage and Arctic exploration to the Norwegian context of outdoor life.

Canadian Adventure Education: An Integrated Fabric of Geography and History

Within Canada's space and place is a rich heritage of indigenous peoples, as well as explorers, settlers and early resource industry-based pioneers. Most of the people from the "Old World" came seeking their fortunes or a simple home in the "New World". Canadians share an overwhelming sense of geography with a heritage of peoples having lived, explored and settled within the present-day borders. Their stories, as we come to know them, inspire an ever—widening view as we gaze at the vast, overwhelming space of Canada. We Canadians strive to make this space a place of our personal and collective cultural memory. Many of our ways of being on the land have come to us through the material culture of Canadian Indigenous peoples; for example, the canoe, the snowshoe, certain shelter styles and manners of clothing, not to mention stories, legends and place-names connected to places and events. While certain exploration and pioneering stories are more easily assimilated and understood, Native peoples' stories and traditions represent an engaging curiosity. Much from such traditions are not to be assimilated, appropriated or even understood by other cultures. However, much can be "explored" and respected imaginatively. A gaze back towards the

past can serve to move our cultures forward together as we dwell on this well-storied Canadian soil, for there are many Canadian traditions that must stand side by side. Nonetheless travel heritage and interpretation, pioneer lifestyle, and Indigenous peoples' material culture and spiritual view are all part of storytelling, craft, and skill understanding in Canadian outdoor adventure education. Historically, and presently, Canadian outdoor educators aspire to coastal travel: east and west and far north. We know of dog sledding and horse packing travels of exploration, early recreation, and mostly, the work of the day-to-day reality of living in the interior part of the country. First and foremost we know the travel by waterways of canoe men: *coureurs de bois*, (the French semi-outlaw runners of the woods and the hired hands of the fur trade), and the *voyageurs*, (canoe men who crossed the country via a network of waterways in an epic era of fur trade). One Canadian culture critic said, "Their story captivates us ... a saga of common men set against a vast and indifferent landscape. The *voyageur* is as Canadian as a gunslinger is American or a samurai is Japanese" (Ferguson, 1997, p. 55).

In the Parliamentary House of Commons in 1936, Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, said "that if some countries have too much history, we have too much geography" (Colombo, 1974, p. 306). For the outdoor educator, there is an excitement in 'too much' geography and history to know. It is geography that will forever prove challenging to our imagination. It is a space that outdoor adventure educators yearn to make our "place", a setting in which we seek identity. The Canadian outdoors elicits a personal response toward meaning and integrity where we are challenged to behave and to belong.

In our outdoor adventure programmes educators seek the authentic risks and challenges through group work and personal development that come with this rich integrity of a still wild space. Canada is a land where you can still travel by canoe and feel the vastness of remote space that "immigrants" to Canada call "wilderness", or "wild-ness". Wilderness is the common term for wild lands and is as much a state of mind as a physical entity. Canada is a scarcely populated, rugged country that is significantly free of human constructs, and yet an ideological construct rich in Canadian folklore and imagination, and central to much Canadian fictional literature. People can still have the privilege of travelling the land experiencing it much the same way our predecessors did centuries ago. Canadian outdoor educators are primarily integrators of various content areas while at an actual site, be it heritage and/or nature interpretation. These educators are storytellers working experientially within the story, re-experiencing the travel modes, visiting in an authentic way a particular site or event of the land. They are skilled in the ways of remote travel and camping, often with one foot in the past, very much aware of values of traditional methods, and one foot in the present. A credo for a Canadian outdoor adventure educator might be not to rely on books, but to go there (Hume, 1989). Canadian outdoor educators strive to move their students from the imagined wild and pristine "North" to the experienced "North", where moose, beaver, wind blown white pine, rustic cabin and loon are real, not cultural icons on coffee mugs.

We, the authors, acknowledge centrally that when you "go there", there might be a resource extraction industry or the insidious works of airborne toxins, that the mythical "north of adventure" is also a home and an economic resource base to many. Also, there might be a group, less aware of Canada's geography or story, sharing the space. These possibilities add vigour to the Canadian adventure education experience. There is a rich purpose in the task of extending people's "field of care" to the remote spaces of Canada. Without such care, the integrity of the Canadian "wilderness" will disappear. It will be transplanted first by pockets of space or islands of wilderness in the form of

managed parks (an oxymoron in the Canadian northern context). Finally, Canadian outdoor adventure would lose that special quality of re-creating and re-interpreting the old northern work ways within the context of play. Canadian outdoor educators cherish this integrity of space, the wildness of the Canadian North, parks and other natural areas, and take people to these spaces to draw out their wilderness from within themselves and their appreciation and understanding of wild spaces. In turn, instilling a care for and a feeling of belonging to this space as place is a strong rationale for the curriculum. The aspiration of a quintessentially Canadian outdoor adventure education is, then, to take people beyond the urban environment with a spirit of adventure to 'belong' to the natural world, to 'find' this land and relate to it as a friend (Martin, 1999), as a home out of the city.

This spirit of adventure to "belong" is perhaps the most trying in our winter months. New Brunswick poet Alden Nowlan once said, "December is thirteen months long, July's one afternoon" (cited in MacGregor, 2002, p.183). Urban radio weather forecasts the gloom of cold temperatures with wind-chill factor warnings. Generally throughout Canadian culture, there is little encouragement to explore 'winter's playground', but rather we fight the season. Strangely, while over 800,000 Canadian retirees flee to warmer climates in the southern United States for winter, Canadians must acknowledge that "without winter, the North [read Canada] is only a direction, not a place; the two are inseparable" (Coates & Morrison, 2001, p. 24). Our Queen's representative, Governor-General Adriene Clarkson in her 2003 New Years' Eve message boldly stated, "we are a northern culture." Yes, but we generally like to look out of frosted windows and rooms with cozy fireplaces to this still and silent blanket of white snowfields. Our aesthetic for winter and much else of the north is only derived from looking out, not being within. As national newspaper columnist Lysiane Gagnon recently wrote, "we are a reluctant semi-northern people longing for a milder climate" (Gagnon, 2003). So culturally, our strong attraction to the north is more a mythical one.

Against this cultural backdrop, the winter camping experience takes on significance as an adventure and a cultural awakening for a celebration of survival and an entry into a core/essential northern experience. Winter is a vital part of the Canadian landscape and tightly woven into our culture, traditions and stories. Teaching winter living skills can offer a window of rich experiential education opportunities for students to experience various traditional and modern modes of winter travel and living (i.e., snowshoeing, skiing, travelling on frozen rivers, tenting, snow shelter and wall tent/wood stove camping). Learning to live comfortably and safely in a cold and seemingly hostile environment can be an extremely rewarding and motivating experience for students. Winter skills are a valuable offering, in part, because if students do not gain this experience in school, most are unlikely ever to be exposed to many winter educational opportunities. Winter programmes tend to have less room for error and, subsequently, often have a greater degree of risk than summer programmes. Also, because fewer people venture out in winter, valuable educational objectives can be realised without venturing too far a-field.

As authors we have compared our thoughts concerning the possibility of a singular Canadian perspective of outdoor adventure education. We have, separately and together, reviewed Canadian educational adventure programmes. We have sought input from others in the field. Here, we provide what we believe are commonly shared views, thereby constructing a dominant view of outdoor adventure programming in Canada. However, a singular Canadian outdoor adventure education view is not possible, rather what we outline is more of a particularly Canadian way stemming from our collective geography and history. Our central premise is that the Canadian integrated travel experience, tied into past stories of place, is, not the, curriculum across the country.

What is a Canadian Outdoor Adventure Education?

Outdoor adventure education in Canada follows the dominant perspective of concern for intra-personal and inter-personal skills development (Priest, 1986). Hence, personal and group skill development is central to outdoor teaching as part of a holistic process. It is common, in a country with such a rich outdoor travel recreation heritage, for our practice to be perceived first and foremost as recreation. That is, the activities are enjoyable, provide a sense of well-being and likely teach some physical and technical skills along the way. However, if these activities represent a planned curriculum towards a set of learning objectives, then they are a means to an educational end and are thus primarily educational rather than recreational (Horwood & Raffan, 1988). Technical skill development allows participants to explore not only the wilderness beyond, but also, most critically, their personal wildernesses within (Smith, 1990). Our knowledge of the breadth of outdoor programmes encourages us to suggest that Canadian outdoor education tends to blend camping/travel skills with intra/interpersonal and environmental—based field skills. Programmes are less categorised as adventure, environmental and camping education. Given this attention to wilderness travel, Canadian outdoor educators are collectively, (to the extent that one can talk this way), less singularly enamoured with low-level initiatives, such as balance beam walks, and high ropes courses. These tend to be used in conjunction with other programme qualities. This being said, there are many highly regarded Canadian specialists in this area of practice.

There is an integration or curriculum enrichment quality adding interdisciplinary teaching strategies to the physical and intra-personal and inter-personal skills of conventional outdoor adventure education. Integration of environmental education/field interpretation subject matter (biology, geography, astronomy) as well as the special opportunities for Canadian heritage skill development (history, geography, literature, anthropology, Native studies) is common in the Canadian context. This is due to the emphasis of the group travel experience on the land in a setting that may be coastline, mountain, rivers, lakes, and forests based, and within a context that is certainly heavily influenced by the dramatic nature of our four distinctive seasons, where annual temperatures can easily fluctuate between plus 35°C to minus 35°C. The seasons provide a changing ambience within the landscape and offer outdoor enthusiasts a wealth of activities, perspectives and modes of travel and camping from which to explore the land: skiing, dog sledding, quinzhee (snow shelter) building, ice climbing, sailing, hiking, white water and sea kayaking, etc. In summer one may paddle a northern lake in an intense headwind; month's later one may return to snowshoe the same lake, this time immersed in winter tranquillity. The extremes of seasons provide a diverse richness to our experience with the land.

Canadian outdoor adventure education is experientially tied to travel in the landscape. Because the land is such a visceral reality—based arena of travel experiences for students, outdoor educators are less inclined to employ the largely American “adventure programming” use of metaphor for transferring adventure to day-to-day realities and make use of group simulation initiative tasks. There is an attempt at a deep knowing here; the apprehension of Canada as a storied landscape, one that students can re-experience. Outdoor educators tend to tell stories of dwelling, discovery, exploration and settlement while “on trip” to encourage students to come to know and learn that the land is not an empty place, but rather echoes with meaning. As such, for example, students come to understand the transcontinental voyageur canoe men's travels in the early 1800's with their own toil and sweat. They come to know the lyrical descriptions of travel and adventure through

many peoples' stories. As they travel with one eye to the past and one in the present they learn the stories that complement their own. This adventure is not so much adventure "in" the outdoors, as it is adventure "with" a specific place in time where educators hope to sever the bondage of linear time, aware of the past and a future here.

The rich potential of coming to know Canadian heritage experientially through visceral re-experiencing is more than matched by our exposure to the genuinely awesome power of nature, the "more-than-human world" (Abram, 1996). The outdoor adventure travel experience may attempt to consciously remove participants from unsustainable cultural constructs and invite learners to be open to an integrity of the wild in their lives, an increased personal relationship with wild lands, not romanticized, but of increased understanding. Canadian educators, Nicky Duenkel and Harvey Scott (1994) assert that: "In a wilderness environment, outdoor educators are in ideal positions to encourage participants to renegotiate meanings and understandings of everyday life realities, thereby assisting in the transition to a wilderness realm of reality. The outdoor educator's role is therefore, much greater than it may first appear" (p. 42). They suggest educators can work towards: "dispelling the myth of dualism and encouraging the feeling that humans are a part of, and not apart from, the natural world; provide insight into the fact that everyday life realities and wilderness realities are not separate, but co-exist; [and], develop a sense of humility in the greater scheme of things" (Duenkel & Scott, 1994, p. 43). This too, we believe is a rich aspiration for Canadian outdoor adventure educators. It is also a daunting quest for one's spirit of adventure. It involves unleashing the mind bound by the urban-schooled context and encourages a surfacing of a disorienting and fleeting, wild—experiential connectedness. Canadian novelist, Wayland Drew (1989) has put this state into clean expression throughout his novel *Halfway Man*. "It's because I can't tell the difference between me and this lake, those sounds, that moon. It's because I don't know where I end and the wildness begins" (p. 164). In wild places, people can examine, given contrasts, the way they live and experience transferable ways they would like to live.

Where is Outdoor Adventure Education in Canada?

In Canada, outdoor adventure education is happening on many fronts and in many ways; yet, generalisations can easily be made. Summer youth camps, schools, colleges, universities, community and commercial programmes are the main settings for adventure education. Each setting offers a variety of leadership development, team building initiatives, technical skills development, environmental awareness and travel experience. Some programmes, such as Outward Bound Canada, have a strong community service component; again, the highlight of many Canadian programmes is, typically, the extended field trip, the camping trip.

Few institutions in Canada utilize ropes courses as their exclusive adventure offering due to fairly accessible natural areas. The notable exception might be in Southern Ontario where one quarter of the nation's population resides and where access to natural areas is more time consuming; therefore, the majority of ropes courses in Canada are to be found here as well as the proliferation of indoor climbing facilities. In Canada group initiatives, low and high level ropes programmes are usually part of a sequential group oriented programme culminating in a travel experience.

Youth Camps

The summer camp tradition has solid roots throughout Canada, particularly on the blue lake and rocky shore lakes of the Canadian Shield. Many of Canada's estimated 1500 summer camps (Marsh, 1988) maintain the "traditional" adventure offerings of canoeing, sailing and swimming, and, of course the travel experience, be it by canoe, hike or horse-back. Many camps preserve their roots, which are in travel experiences far from their home base. For example some run senior trips as forty-plus day outings on Arctic waterways.

Most camp tripping traditions offer travel programmes closer to their home base and use their immediate mountain, lake and/or river country for their three to 21 day trips. Some run extended trips in the cross-country style; they bus to distant departure points and return to home base by canoe over 20 to 50 day periods connecting provincial parks and reserves via main artery travel ways. Some camps offer two-month leadership programmes where campers travel to lake, river and coastal settings. Most of these camps run ropes programmes, ecology and skills sessions as preludes to the 'long distance trip'. Additionally, drawing on the knowledge and traditions of Canadian indigenous peoples, First Nations' camps offer both Native and non-native participants an opportunity to connect with indigenous traditions and culture.

Schools

Schools are significant providers of outdoor adventure education with many exciting new programmes starting up yearly and others closing down due to budget cuts and changing priorities. Outdoor adventure education has never been at the top of the priority list for most school boards. There was a hey-day in the early 1970s and early 1980s, generally, when many school boards opened publicly funded outdoor education centres and funded teachers to attend outdoor and environmental teacher conferences. Provincial professional associations were created and teacher in-service programmes common. Starting in the early 1990s many school board outdoor education centres closed, shifting to privately funded centres on a user-fee basis. Consequently, over the last decade, memberships in outdoor professional associations in Canada have dropped substantially. For example, The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario in the mid 1980s could boast over 800 members, but now supports under 250 members. An exciting initiative in recent years is the forming of "friends" groups, (e.g., FLOE —The Friends of Lasting Outdoor Education) who are committed to preserving publicly funded outdoor education centres. Outdoor education, when not connected to visits to centres, is most often connected to specific courses such as physical education, personal life management, and environmental studies. Often schools will support outdoor pursuits and environmental clubs within an extra-curricular agenda.

The most exciting initiative at the secondary level is the recent creation of integrated curriculum programmes, which usually involve one or two teachers co-ordinating one class for one semester of four credited-courses. Many programmes in British Columbia do an excellent job blending theory with study out-of-doors and outdoor travel and have, subsequently, won Canada wide recognition. In the Province of Ontario, a proliferation of such programmes began in the early 1990s. Certainly in 2004 there are approximately 30 integrated curriculum programmes in Ontario. Listing a few programme names goes a long way toward explaining course objectives: TERRA = Teaching Ecological Responsibility Recreation and Adventure; CELP= Community Environmental Leadership Programmes; Earth Odyssey; Experience Canada; Environmental Awareness Program; Experimental Science; Beyond the Walls; Ventures North. Courses that are most commonly

connected to the integrated curriculum programme model include Outdoor Physical Education, Environmental Science, Geography and Leadership. Often the fourth credit reflects a teacher's area of special interest. For example, some programmes create a community magazine concerning local histories for a cultural journalism credit. The adventure-based field trip within a school's local area can act as an intentional bioregional exploration. For example, students in one programme portage out from the school property to the local river and paddle and pole upstream to a provincial day-use park, returning again by local waterway two days later. Also students with Experience Canada have traveled afar to Labrador and elsewhere to study environmental and political land issues. While it is likely that many students are currently benefiting from these programmes, the reality in Canada is that these programmes are the exception to the rule. The survival of outdoor education in elementary and secondary schooling is of critical importance to outdoor education in Canada. Preserving existing offerings and finding new inroads for outdoor education into new curriculum documents since 1990 is an ongoing challenge.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges that traditionally have had an outdoor adventure education component have recently begun to promote ecotourism credits or specialised offerings. While most outdoor programmes in Canada use relatively modern equipment, others strive to balance the modern approach with traditional methods, equipment and camp crafts. Some help to link elementary, high school, college and/or university students with Canadian bush skills heritage by teaching basic survival and bush craft skills with an emphasis on natural materials, rather than high-tech innovations. Canadian bush craft skills, such as traditional forms of fire lighting, shelter building, tool making and foraging, liberate students to live in the bush for substantial periods with a minimal dependence on modern materials and tools. Furthermore, it is perceived by these practising educators that such traditional skills foster a greater sense of connection and security with nature as "home", nurture independence and encourage students to appreciate and respect Canada's rich cultural heritage. Ironically, these 'antiquated' methods are far less expensive than contemporary low impact/leave no trace methods such as use of camp stoves and nylon self-standing dome tents.

There are several very different training routes to becoming an accomplished outdoor leader in Canada. These include intensive commercial leadership training programmes, which are highly applied (e.g., Yamnaska and Canadian Outdoor Leadership Training—COLT); college programmes that are usually two years in length and include a balance between theory and practice (e.g., University College of the Cariboo offers an outdoor guiding certificate); three or four year university programmes that offer the highest level of theory and less applied practice (e.g., Lakehead University, unique in the country offers a full honours degree programme in outdoor recreation, parks and tourism); or through apprenticeship programmes (e.g., Outward Bound Canada) or extended commitment to summer and/or year-round residential camp/outdoor centres. Many aspiring outdoor leaders find a combination of two or three of the aforementioned possibilities are ideal, as each is complimentary to one another, especially with theory and practical development. As of late some excellent mainstay Canadian outdoor university programmes have closed while a few new ones have emerged. The real growth in the last five years has taken place at the college level with several new offerings nation-wide.

The Canadian university contribution to adventure education has historically been more practical and less theoretical. Hence, specialist university graduate programmes are not common in Canada.

Undergraduate and graduate students typically pursue outdoor adventure education through Education, Kinesiology, Canadian Studies and Environmental Studies programmes. Typically aspirant graduate students adopt a creative approach and first seek out professors with similar interests within a university programme.

Community and Commercial Programmes

Community programmes and club organisations have long traditions in many urban and rural settings. Most offer a variety of outdoor leadership programmes including travel experiences and local camps. Three Cree (Indigenous peoples) communities in Northern Quebec run a community ‘teen’ project that teaches youth traditional travel skills where canoe ‘brigades’ travel to other communities. Here, it is hoped that they can create their own eco-tourism adventure river travel business within a Cree cultural context. Many outdoor travel clubs offer field trips to community members. Such groups sponsor symposia and monthly speaker series to complement their outdoor program. While Canada’s population is increasingly urban, it is also true that the family is another source, and arguably a most potent source, for outdoor adventure experiences. Family weekend trips to provincial parks for mountain hiking, river float trips and lake circuit routes in provincial parks and local areas are all very common experiences.

Commercial travel programmes also extend across the country and there has been a recent push and rapid rise in adventure based tourism and corresponding rise in college programmes with a focus in eco-tourism degrees. Marketing of Canadian adventure travel packages has intensified within Canada but particularly in Europe. These are primarily adult skill based/recreationally focused outdoor adventure programmes such as horse packing, cross-country hut-to-hut skiing, sea kayaking, northern tandem whitewater canoe trips and voyageur canoe re-enactment expeditions. Though less common than travel-based programmes there are a number of commercial adventure training programmes. Three outdoor adventure leadership programmes, Yamnaska, COLT (Canadian Outdoor Leadership Training) and Outward Bound Canada, offer three month career training beyond college and university education. Since the mid-1970s Outward Bound has successfully operated in Canada rightly priding itself in offering inventive programmes for special populations. Examples of these programmes include a “Women of Courage” programme designed for women who are survivors of abuse, a programme to mesh Outward Bound with aboriginal communities named from the Ojibway language Giwaykiwin, (meaning ‘Coming Home’), and a Youth-at-Risk programme. Corporate training programmes represent a small niche market in the Canadian outdoor adventure education scene, though they certainly exist mostly in Canada’s large urban centres. It is interesting that this section of outdoor adventure education in Canada has not developed to the extent that commercial adventure travel and field expeditions have.

Accessibility

Canadians tend to value the need for greater participation in outdoor activity for people with special needs more than in the past (Potter & Cuthbertson, 2002). Along with this societal shift, theoretical and technological advances specific to populations’ specific needs are helping to broaden the field. The most progressive area for fostering participation in outdoor activity among people with special needs, especially youth, are Canada’s summer camps. For example, according to the Ontario Camping Association (2001) the Province of Ontario alone has at least 89 residential camps that have the resources to offer inclusive programming to meet the needs of children, teenagers and/or adults with some type of disability or special need. Ontario also offers at least 21 other segregated residential camps that cater specifically to people with special needs (Ontario Camping Association, 2001).

While accessibility to outdoor experiences are growing in Canada much work remains to be done in this area (Potter & Cuthbertson, 2002). Due to the evolving Canadian demographics of an increasingly older, more educated and affluent population, coupled with an attitudinal shift that is more proactive toward special populations, the number of people requiring and demanding special services to participate in outdoor programmes is increasing (Staples, 2001).

One of the challenges of meeting this growing need is that few outdoor education and recreation specialists in Canada have the theoretical or practical skills necessary to ensure the growth and development of accessible outdoor programmes. The paucity of post-secondary academic programmes in Canada offering inclusive and special outdoor education/recreation is certainly partially responsible for this dilemma. Canadian post-secondary institutions are just beginning to respond to this growing demand.

Risk Management and Liability

Canadian adventure educators seek to manage risk in an attempt to enhance the safety of all participants. They also acknowledge that it is neither possible nor desirable to eliminate all risk. Perceived risk, an inherent element of adventure education, can have personal and educational benefits (Ewert, 1989). The goal in conducting adventure education courses is “not to eliminate or avoid risk, but to prepare students through technical training and the development of judgement so that they may more effectively assess and manage risk in a variety of outdoor settings and activities” (O’Connell, Potter, Cuthbertson, Swatton, Dymont, Cusack & Breunig, 2003, p. 3). And while risk is inherently attached to adventure education, in today’s society so too are the influential and growing issues of legal liability.

Whilst lawsuits arising from adventure education activities have become common in the United States, these are far less common in Canada, but the trend is being felt here. The large number of American outdoor education related liability suits and the often-high monetary settlements that have followed, have caused providers of adventure education to become increasingly aware of and concerned with risk management and exposure to lawsuits (Powell & Fields, 2002).

Two particular adventure education accidents have been partially responsible for bringing the issues of risk management and liability to the forefront of adventure education in Canada. In June 1978, on the first day of their extended outdoor education school trip, 12 boys and one leader drowned in cold water while trying to cross Lake Timiskaming in the Province of Quebec when all four of their group’s large voyageur canoes overturned after being hit by a sudden windstorm. This event has remained in the collective consciousness of the Canadian canoe travel guiding community (Raffan, 2002). The second tragedy occurred in February 2003 when seven high school students, who were backcountry skiing with their outdoor education class, were killed after being buried by a massive avalanche in Western Canada’s Rocky Mountains. Reactions to these accidents were swift and divisive. Some questioned the educational value of the activities while others defended the schools and the instructors and extolled the virtues of their schools’ well-established adventure education programmes. Accidents such as these focus attention on the value and management of risk in educational settings, make it more difficult for educators and administrators to support outdoor education, make insurance more difficult for educational institutions to arrange and encourage officials to enact more stringent policies and regulations with respect to outdoor education and back-country travel.

In Canada, the present focus on risk management and liability is having both positive and negative outcomes for the field. Private industry operators of nature-based tourism are leading the adoption of higher standards of care; for example lower client to instructor ratios and more highly qualified staff. As such, many residential summer camps and educational institutions (primary, secondary and post-secondary) are re-evaluating their risk management plans and updating them accordingly. Higher standards of 'client care' in the backcountry are more expensive and both public and private agencies are struggling to determine the appropriate 'level of care' while preserving their programmes. While high paying consumers of nature-based tourism may demand access to satellite phones, global positioning systems, the latest of outdoor equipment and low client to instructor ratios, many outdoor education programmes and individuals find these measures burdensome; and, costs to students in the field soar (Bisson, 2001). Furthermore, some who espouse traditional approaches find the many new demands defy their programme objectives.

There is no doubt that heightening the standard of care has led to the adoption of more vigilant and stringent operating procedures. Some procedures have been enacted by government, such as the recent regulatory changes relating to boat operation on marine and inland waters. While the Canadian Coast Guard regulations relating to watercraft operator competence, etc. have been generally met with positive support, some other new government regulations are problematic for outdoor educators. The Marine Liability Act of 2001, for example, well intended to establish uniform safety regulations for passenger and car carrying boats, lumps kayaks, canoes and inflatable rafts into the same Act as ferries and ships. Consequently, many outdoor educators and adventure travel operators have been forced to increase their liability insurance four-fold and will no longer be allowed to have clients/students sign waivers stating that they understand the risks associated in a given water based activity (Campbell, 2002). It is too early to determine how this situation will unfold.

There is evidence that some providers have become so focused on protecting themselves from liability that they now pay less attention to other aspects of their programmes, such as social justice and leadership theories (Warren, 1999). Furthermore, with the constant anxiety of being sued, outdoor instructors seem likely to decrease the amount of responsibility they encourage students to take. This issue of over-protection coupled with the push toward high technology equipment on-trip (i.e., satellite phones and global positioning systems (GPS)) can run counter to the traditions and philosophies of outdoor education and detract from or mitigate the intended educational experience (Cuthbertson, Socha & Potter, 2004).

Most outdoor organisations in Canada are working hard to strengthen their risk management procedures. For example, advanced wilderness first aid qualifications are becoming a standard of the sector and increasingly providers employ well trained and qualified staff. Certification in outdoor skills can increase the competency of field staff. Recognising that certification is only one aspect of an outdoor leaders' quality, many institutions, such as Outward Bound Canada, place emphasis on staff experience. Furthermore, salaries rarely reflect the expensive and time-consuming process of attaining and maintaining certification. However some providers, such as Outward Bound Canada, do help staff pay for their certification courses and/or offer extensive staff training courses themselves.

Certification for canoe and cross-country ski instruction are dominant countrywide but national outdoor leadership standards remain rare in Canada (compared to America) and most skill development and leadership training is still handled in-house. Efforts to create a Canadian outdoor leadership or programme accreditation system have not generated enthusiasm. The Association for Experiential Education Accreditation Programme, which accredits outdoor programmes that pass a comprehensive safety review, is extremely popular in the United States but has yet to gain much attention in Canada. In Canada, risk management is having a significant impact on the field of outdoor adventure education. The future is uncertain as to where this may lead and who will gain and who will lose.

Conclusion

The Canadian quest for the adventure educational setting is the seeking, no matter how illusory, of the “pristine”. Whether it really be there or not, Canadian outdoor educators cling to notions of uncorrupted, unnamed, uncultivated; “so many uns!” as nature writer Sue Ellen Campbell (1996) has said of the pristine. This unspoiled Earth—the pristine, in Canada has long been a peopled and storied place. It is not “wilderness” but it is a wilder nature. Canadian outdoor educators tend to turn a blind eye to aeroplanes’ white fading vapour trails overhead and the knowledge of airborne toxins impacting the northern ecosystems. They seek this wilder nature for their students, and in so doing expose them the ways of our North. They offer them the adventures of camping and travel skills, intra—and inter—personal skills, nature and heritage interpretation, survival/bushcraft skills and knowledge of new technologies (e.g., GPS). They hope to fill their hearts and imaginations with the pristine—the landscape from which Canadian exploration and settlement stories originated. Canadian outdoor educators hope to connect people to a well storied landscape that gives Canadians so many of their icons: the beaver, the canoe, the loon, the snowshoe, the majestic white pine, the open sublime space, the winter stillness. And so, Canadian outdoor educators take people to find a personal and collective adventure of the spirit that they can find there.

Most Canadians are now urban southern Canadians who think of themselves as living in a country special for its “wilderness” or wild lands. Perhaps many of us Canadians think we live close to this wild space. Some of us travel to, have come to know, or live in Canada’s wild space as a “place”, rich in personal meanings. For many Canadians, the home-grown cultural products, icons, artefacts, listed above, have less and less to do with our day-to-day experiences. The loon call is fading for us, canoeing and winter living skills are distant and the “place” of the bush is too much “a space of wilderness” that is empty of stories. One solid role of Canadian outdoor adventure education is to reconnect people with our detached, yet enchanted view to “the North” to help the land echo with personal experience. Following the sentiments of so much of Canadian fictional literature, the outdoor educator shares the visions of novelists Yves Thériault and Margaret Atwood. Thériault urges us that “he [*sic*] who fails to respond to nature-as-teacher is doomed to emotional and spiritual sterility”, and Atwood encourages us, “to let the wilds in” (in Mitcham, 1983, p. 85–95).

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Authors Note

This paper is a revised and extended version of a paper published in the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 2001, Vol. 6, pp. 225–242. This paper is written for an international audience and in respect to following the Country Focus format for the JAEOL.