



CAMPING FOR CREDIT

OUTDOOR EDUCATION OVER SPRING AND SUMMER BREAK

by Dave Rich

The idea of "summer school" normally has about as much appeal as, say, "bad hangover" or "jail time." But gaining credits over spring or summer break can be a heck of a lot more exciting than 8 a.m. chem labs when you're learning to rock climb, kayak, or mountaineer — in classrooms like Yosemite National Park and Baja's Sea of Cortez.

Outdoor and experiential education programs teach a range of skills that will improve your ability to exist in and, the schools say, out of the wilderness. Each program has a different philosophy and agenda, but they all offer courses in very cool settings. Besides, even the biggest slacker wouldn't want to blow off a class in sea kayaking off the coast of Maine. Check out what these organizations are offering, then find out if your school will give you course credit.

Wildlands Studies. The agenda at Wildlands is to "get people into the backcountry to look at real-world issues affecting endangered wildlife populations or large-scale wilderness areas." Projects in the past have included documenting timber wolf populations in Idaho, Montana, and Washington; assessing wilderness lands and coastal habitats on Vancouver Island, British Columbia; and studying environmental problems and their relationships to local cultures in New Zealand, Thailand, and Nepal. Tuition is lower than at other outdoor education programs (ranging from \$385 for a 2-week, 3-credit course to \$775 for a 6-week, 9-credit course) because you're more of a T.A. than a student: you live in the bush, joining backcountry research teams as a working field associate. Phone: (707)632-5665.

Outward Bound. "OB" was founded in 1967 "to teach respect for self, concern for others, leadership, and care for the environment." Although Outward Bound instructors teach map reading, belaying, minimum-impact camping, and other "hard skills," learning these is not the end, but rather a means to gain confidence and self-esteem. This philosophy is most apparent in OB's trademark "solo," a one- to three-day experience meant not as a test of survival, but rather a time for solitude and reflection. OB offers 700 courses in 22 states, from four-day outings focusing on single skills such as canoeing, rock climbing, and desert trekking, to semester-long expeditions that cover the whole outdoor education gamut. Courses cost from \$90 to \$110 per day. Call (800)243-8520.