

The Only Mountain Worth Climbing

An Historical and Philosophical
Exploration of Outward Bound
and Its Link to Education

by Thomas James

Outward Bound is more than a set of methods and activities. It represents a core of values, a philosophy of education. In this broader sense, as well as in its applications as a specific method of learning, Outward Bound has a deep historical affinity with conventional schooling.

The historical background is useful to consider when trying to understand the power of Outward Bound for improving schooling processes today. The moving spirit of Outward Bound, Kurt Hahn, employed challenge and outdoor adventure not for their own sake, but as a way of teaching perseverance, skill, teamwork, leadership, and compassionate service to the students at Gordonstoun, the school he founded in the 1930s. Having provided equipment and training, Hahn then established watch patrols for emergencies along the Scottish coast using teams of the privileged students from his high school. Hahn also decided to include other children from poor families living near Gordonstoun. He created a sense of moral community around demanding personal commitments to such things as fitness, craftsmanship, and service. He later widened this program into more systematic proposals such as the County Badge Scheme, Outward Bound, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Hahn's inclusion of poor children along with the rich established a cardinal principle that became part of Outward Bound in later years: bring together people from different social classes in common pursuits leading to self-discovery and service to others.

With the coming of World War II, Kurt Hahn became aware of the devastating toll that German submarines were taking on the British ships in the North Sea. Building upon his experience as an educator who had used challenging outdoor activities requiring cooperation and craftsmanship along with academic learning, he and others devised a program of intensive training from initiatives he had been running at this school. The program became Outward Bound, which took its name from the nautical term for a ship leaving port on a sea journey.

Outward Bound developed into a separate organization during the war and eventually became a worldwide movement in its own right, resulting in several dozen schools all over the world. But it is significant that the program first took shape, pedagogically, as an educational innovation arising from a secondary school.



Your disability is your
opportunity.



To understand the potential of Outward Bound for helping teachers and learners in schools, it is useful to look more closely at Hahn's educational values. This chapter considers Hahn the educator, the roots of his educational vision, and the relevance of his ideas to classrooms and schools today. Since only a brief introductory sketch can be provided here, I will also suggest some references at the end for readers wishing to explore Hahn and his educational vision in greater depth.

Let us begin by looking more closely at Kurt Hahn's life and times. Born in 1886, Hahn was the second of four sons in a Jewish family in Berlin. Schooled with conventional German rigor at the Wilhelms gymnasium, he graduated in 1904, the year in which he experienced a sunstroke that left

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him with a recurring disability for the rest of his life. Hahn went on to Oxford from 1904 to 1906 to read classics, with the support of his father, Oskar Hahn, industrialist and anglophile. From 1906 to 1910 he studied at various universities—without, however, completing any degree. Returning to England in 1910, he continued to study at Oxford, and convalesced during the summers at Moray in northeastern Scotland, until the beginning of the Great War in 1914 called him home to Germany. Kurt Hahn never achieved a degree beyond his secondary schooling.

During the war, Hahn served as a reader for the German Foreign Office and then the Supreme Command, reviewing English-language newspapers to gauge popular opinion. Politically, he allied himself with those inside the German government who were seeking a negotiated peace in Western Europe instead of protracted war. Perceived as a liberal within the political spectrum of his day, Hahn advocated greater restraint in pushing German war aims. He espoused a code of responsibility that would be equally binding in war and peace; he used his influence behind the scenes to remind those in power about conciliatory factions at work within the governments of enemy nations.

At the end of the war, Prince Max von Baden asked Hahn to become his personal secretary. An articulate and enterprising young man, Hahn helped Prince Max, Germany's last imperial chancellor, to complete his memoirs, probably writing as much as editing. Whatever the form of their collaboration, the two men left a record of tough-minded idealism and political vigilance. When Prince Max returned to spend his last years at the ancestral castle of his family at Schloss Salem, by Lake Constance, he took Kurt Hahn with him and they discussed projects to renew the ethical traditions of German social life, traditions they believed were threatened not only by extremism on the right and left, but by incomprehension, moral failings, and lack of will in the middle. In 1920, with Prince Max as benefactor, Hahn opened Salem School in part of the castle.

Salem School, which still operates today, was influenced by the educational ideas of Plato, Cecil Reddie's Abbotsholme and other English schools started by German educators under the leadership of Herman Lietz. Salem represented an attempt to create a healthy environment in which young people could learn habits of life that would protect them against what Hahn saw as the deteriorating values of modern life. He identified the worst declines as

those in fitness, memory and imagination, and compassion.

Directing the school from 1920 until 1933, Hahn placed greater emphasis on noncompetitive physical activities and democratic forms of social cooperation than was the case in conventional German schools. At the urging of Prince Max, he incorporated egalitarian aims into the design of the school; while Salem naturally attracted the children of the wealthy, it also made space for, and actively sought, less privileged students. Emulating the Cistercian monks who had inhabited the castle for many centuries, the students and teachers at Salem School helped the surrounding communities through various forms of service, including a fire brigade.



Among the unusual assumptions underlying all forms of instruction at Salem was Hahn's conviction that students should experience failure as well as success.



The curriculum at Salem prepared young people for higher education, but not without laying the groundwork for a life of moral and civic virtue, the chief aims of the school. Among the unusual assumptions underlying all forms of instruction at Salem was Hahn's conviction that students should experience failure as well as success. They should learn to overcome negative inclinations within themselves and prevail against all adversity.

He believed, moreover, that students should learn to discipline their own needs and desires for the good of the community. They should realize through their own experience the connection between self-discovery and service. He also insisted that true learning required periods of silence and solitude as well as directed activity. Each day the students took a silent walk to commune with nature and revitalize their powers of reflection.

To keep mental and physical growth in balance, Hahn developed the notion of training play for his students, each of whom committed himself to an

individually designed, gradually more challenging regimen of physical exercise and personal hygiene. Unlike the physical education program of other schools, the aim of the training plan was simply to establish good living habits, not to produce high levels of performance in competitive games.

An assassin failed to end Hahn's life in 1923. Still in his early thirties, the schoolmaster was controversial, a gadfly, a target because he was a moral leader far beyond the lives of his students and teachers. The director of Salem—the school's name means "peace"—idolized few men in his lifetime, but one incident he often recounted was the confrontation between Max Weber, Germany's most distinguished social scientist, and an angry crowd of leftist demonstrators in 1918. Weber shouted that he had never crawled before kings and emperors in the past, and he was not going to crawl before any mob now.

Similarly, Kurt Hahn refused to back down from the moral aims that animated every aspect of education as far as he was concerned. In a nation frighteningly polarized by the right and the left in political debate, Hahn forced educational issues into the larger discussion of how society should be organized, and what people must do to maintain human decency in a world of conflict. No idyllic schoolmaster's life awaited him.

When it finally came, in the early 1930s, the controversy that pushed Kurt Hahn out of Germany involved the right, not the left. As the Nazis rose to power, the director of Salem School became an outspoken opponent. In 1932 a group of fascist storm troopers kicked a leftist activist to death before the eyes of his mother. Adolph Hitler immediately praised the action of his followers. Kurt Hahn wrote to the alumni of Salem, telling them to choose between Salem and Hitler. A man who knew Hahn at the time called it "the bravest deed in cold blood that I have ever witnessed." When he became chief of state in 1933, Hitler imprisoned Hahn. Fortunately for the embattled educator, he still had friends in Britain who remembered his idealism and his hopes for friendship between the two nations. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and others helped to arrange for Hahn's release and timely emigration to England in 1933.

Within a year of his arrival, Kurt Hahn started another institution, Gordonstoun, which became one of Britain's most distinguished progressive schools and served as a model for similar schools in other countries. In the following decades, Hahn's educational vision served as the moving spirit for new



Sculpture by Laurie Sevigny from the Facing History and Ourselves Summit. Photograph by Scott Hart/Expeditionary Learning.

institutions and programs of worldwide renown; the Moray Badge and County Badge Schemes and their successor, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards; Outward Bound; the Trevelyan Scholarships; and the United World Colleges.

Reaching back into this pre-history of Outward Bound, we might well look for the origins of the idea in 1913 instead of 1941, when Outward Bound was founded. For in the summer of 1913, instead of vacationing, as he hoped, with a friend in Scotland, and while recuperating from the sunstroke he had suffered a few years before, Kurt Hahn outlined his idea for a school based on principles set forth in Plato's *Republic*. Hahn was twenty-eight years old and had never run a school, or even taught in one. The ideal school he imagined never came into being, but it exerted a profound influence on all his subsequent efforts as an educator and statesman: Salem School, in Germany, in 1920; Gordonstoun School, in Scotland, in 1934; Outward Bound in Wales, in 1941; and Atlantic College, in England, in 1962.

In *English Progressive Schools*, Robert Skidelsky analyzes Hahn's debt to Plato as follows:

Plato was a political reformer who sought to recall the Athenians to the old civic virtues eroded, as he saw it, by democratic enthusiasm and soft living. His aim was to educate a class of leaders in a "healthy pasture" remote from the corrupting environment, whose task it would be to regenerate society. Hahn must have been haunted by similar visions of decay as, inspired by these ideas, he drew up a plan in 1913 for a school modeled on Platonic principles. The war that broke out a year later and ended in the collapse of Germany was to give them a new urgency: to convert what might have remained a purely academic speculation into an active campaign for social and political regeneration.

Outward Bound places unusual emphasis on physical challenge, not as an end in itself, but as an instrument for training the will to strive for mastery. There is also the insistent use of action, instead of states of mind, to describe the reality of the individual. Education is tied unequivocally to experience, to what one does and not so much to one's attitudes and opinions.

A thread running from Plato through Hahn and through Outward Bound is the responsibility of individuals to make their own personal goals consonant with social necessity. Not only is the part subordinated to the whole, but the part cannot even understand its own identity, its relations and its responsibility, until it has grasped the nature of the whole. Having stood up to Hitler before being exiled from Nazi Germany in 1933, Hahn believed in individual freedom, but he believed that students should be impelled into experiences that would teach them the bonds of social life necessary to protect such freedom. He took from Plato the idea that a human being cannot achieve perfection without becoming part of a perfect society—that is, without creating social harmony to sustain the harmonious life of the individual.



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This is the overall structure of the argument in the *Republic*, and it is also the most important lesson of an Outward Bound course, the lesson without which personal development is of questionable value. In a small group away from the degenerate ways of the world, the individual student comes to grips with what must be done to create a just society. In attempting to construct such a challenge, Hahn placed compassion above all other values of Outward Bound because it among all emotions is capable of reconciling individual strength with collective need.

The prospect of wholeness, the possibility, at least, of human life becoming an equilibrium sustained by harmony and balance, is what makes this form of education even thinkable. Skidelsky again offers a lucid analysis of the source of Hahn's thinking:

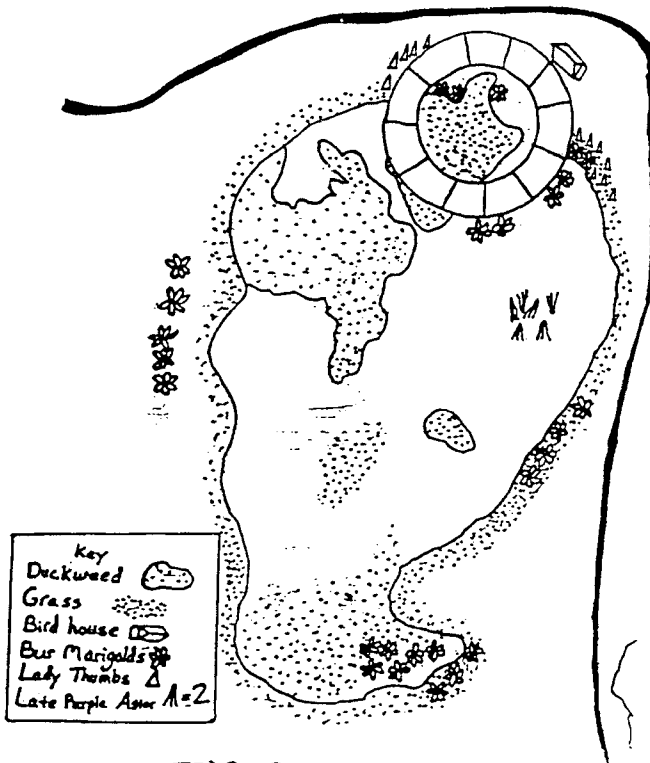
The second idea which Hahn assimilated was Plato's notion that the principle of perfection was harmony and balance. The perfection of the body, he held, depends upon a harmony of its elements. Virtue (the health of the soul) is the harmony or balance between the various faculties of the psyche: reason, the appetites and spirit.

Virtue in the state is the harmony between its functional elements: thinkers, soldiers and artisans. The same principle can be extended indefinitely—to relations between states, and so on.

This passage sheds some light on Hahn's interest in giving his students experiences that would complement their strengths and weaknesses. In his speeches he said he wanted to turn introverts inside out and extroverts outside in. He wanted the poor to help the rich break their "enervating sense of privilege" and the rich to help the poor in building a true "aristocracy of talent."

The schools he founded sent bookworms to the playing fields and jocks to the reading room. He did not produce outstanding athletes, but his students exhibited consistently high levels of fitness, accomplishment and social spirit. He said he valued mastery in the sphere of one's weakness over performance in the sphere of one's strength.

The preceding paragraphs do not record Hahn's debt to other thinkers, such as Rousseau, Goethe and William James, to name a few. William James, for example, in his "The Moral Equivalent of Wars," asked if it is not possible in time of peace to build the kind of social spirit and productivity one takes for granted in time of war. Hahn saw Outward



WALLER'S POND

A map from the Field Guide created by fifth graders at Table Mound Elementary School in Dubuque, Iowa, as part of their learning expedition, Pond Life. Students went to local ponds, took samples of pond life, and after identifying their findings, created the Field Guide so other students could learn from their discoveries.

Bound as an answer to that question. Goethe wrote of an education that would need to occur in a place apart, a "Pedagogical Province," so that individuals could be strengthened and given skills to survive, individually and collectively, in the debilitating environment of human society as we know it. Hahn was indebted to Rousseau, both for the idea that awakening an individual's collective concern is the key to healthy personal development and also for Rousseau's assumption that Nature is an educator in its own right, more akin to the true nature of a human being than is the society that humans have built for themselves.

Hahn remarked once that we are in the Western world confronted by a progressive inhumanity of the society in which we live. He said that he saw Outward Bound as a countervailing force against the decline of initiative due, in his words, to the widespread disease of "spectatoritis," the decline of skill and care due to the weakening traditions of crafts-

manship, and the decline of concern about one's neighbor due to the unseemly haste with which daily life is conducted. In 1930, three years before his exile from Germany for opposing Hitler, he drew up "The Seven Laws of Salem" to describe his educational methods.

❖ First Law

"Give children the opportunity for self-discovery.

Every boy and girl has *grande passion*, often hidden and unrealized to the end of life. The educator cannot hope and may not try to find it out by psychoanalytical methods. It can and will be revealed by the child coming into close touch with a number of different activities. When a child has come 'into his own,' you will often hear a shout of joy, or be thrilled by some other manifestation of primitive happiness."

❖ Second Law

"Make the children meet with triumph and defeat.

It is possible to wait on a child's inclinations and gifts and to arrange carefully for an unbroken series of successes. You may make him happy in this way—I doubt it—but you certainly disqualify him for the battle of life. Salem believes you ought to discover the child's weakness as well as his strength. Allow him to engage in enterprises in which he is likely to fail, and do not hush up his failure. Teach him to overcome defeat."

❖ Third Law

"Give the children the opportunity of self-effacement in the common cause.

Send the youngsters out to undertake tasks which are of definite importance for the community. Tell them from the start: 'You are a crew, not passengers. Let the responsible boys and girls shoulder duties big enough, when negligently performed, to wreck the State.'

❖ Fourth Law

“Provide periods of silence.

Follow the great precedent of the Quakers. Unless the present day generation acquires early habits of quiet and reflection, it will be speedily and prematurely used up by the nerve-exhausting and distracting civilization of today.”

❖ Fifth Law

“Train the imagination.

You must call it into action, otherwise it becomes atrophied like a muscle not in use. The power to resist the pressing stimulus of the hour and the moment cannot be acquired in later life; it often depends on the ability to visualize what you plan and hope and fear for the future. Self-indulgence is in many cases due to the lack of vision.”

❖ Sixth Law

“Make games (i.e. competition) important but not predominant.

Athletes don't suffer by being put in their place. In fact you restore the dignity of the usurper by dethroning him.”

❖ Seventh Law

“Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege.

Let them share the experiences of an enthralling school life with sons and daughters of those who have to struggle for their existence. No school can build up a tradition of self-discipline and vigorous but joyous endeavor unless at least 30 percent of the children come from homes where life is not only simple but hard.”

Writing in 1941, Hahn listed the benefits that such an education offered the individual student: “He will have a trained heart and a trained nervous system which will stand him in good stead in fever, exposure and shock; he will have acquired spring and powers of acceleration; he will have built up stamina and know how to tap his hidden resources.

He may enjoy the well-being which goes with a willing body. He will have trained his tenacity and patience, his initiative and forethought, his power of observation and his power of care. He will have developed steadfastness and he will be able to say ‘No’ to the whims of the moment. He will have stimulated and nourished health interests until they



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become lively and deep, and perhaps develop into a passion. The average boy when first confronted with these tests will nearly always find some which look forbidding, almost hopelessly out of his reach; others he will find easy and appealing to his innate strength; but once he has started training he will be gripped by magic—a very simple magic, the magic of the puzzle . . . and he will struggle on against odds until one day he is winning through in spite of some disability. There always is some disability; but in the end he will triumph, turning defeat into victory, thus overcoming his own defeatism.”

Kurt Hahn brought intensity to Outward Bound by asking difficult questions: “Can a demanding active service to their fellow man, in need and in danger, become an absorbing leisure activity for an ever increasing number of young people?” And he came up with difficult answers: “We need an aristocracy of service as an example to inspire others to do likewise.”

Hahn said he wanted to introduce into the art of life-saving the meticulous care which is generally devoted to the art of war, and he quoted William James to the effect that inspiration tends to evaporate, leaving no trace on future conduct, unless it is translated into action. He suggested to Outward Bound that the secret of education was to teach young people the inner strength that comes from serving others. “There are three ways to win the

young. There's persuasion, there is compulsion and there is attraction. You can preach at them: that is the hook without the worm; you can order them to volunteer: that is dishonest; you can call on them, '*you are needed,*' and that appeal hardly ever fails." He reasoned that "the experience of helping a fellow man in danger, or even of training in a realistic manner to be ready to give his help, tends to change the balance of power in a youth's inner life with the result that compassion can become the master motive."



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Not long after leaving prison in Germany and just after founding Gordonstoun in Scotland, Hahn described the three essential approaches to education that he saw about him. He called them the Ionian, the Spartan and the Platonic. "The first believes that the individual ought be nurtured and humored, regardless of the interests of the community. According to the second, the individual may and should be neglected for the benefit of the state. The third, the Platonic view, believes that any nation is a slovenly guardian of its own interests if it does not do all it can to make the individual citizen discover his own powers. And it further believes that the individual becomes a cripple from his or her own point of view if he is not qualified by education to serve the community."

In school, Hahn asked his students to pledge themselves to the "training plan" establishing personal goals and a code of responsibility. Outward Bound instructors make a similar appeal to their students today, though not in the detailed terms used

by Hahn at Salem and Gordonstoun, and it is a crucial aspect of the Outward Bound experience. The individual commitment of the student, the expressed desire to accomplish a worthy goal by means of the course, becomes, in effect, the moral basis of the community, the foundation both of compassion and of achievement.

Another important element that Hahn brought to Outward Bound was adventure—with all the risk it entails. He believed that education should cultivate a passion for life and that this can be accomplished only through experience, a shared sense of moment in the journey toward an exciting goal. Mountaineering and sailing were integral parts of his program at Gordonstoun, and he made space in all his programs for student initiative—an expedition, a project, a sailing voyage. Hahn welcomed powerful emotions, such as awe, fear, exultant triumph. Part of his lifelong aspiration, part of the "whole" he sought through programs like Outward Bound, was that the experience accessible to any human being, at any level of ability, could be charged with joy and wonder in the doing.

Hahn also understood the educational value of working with small groups of students. He probably took this idea from military organization as it came into the youth movements of the late 19th century, especially the Scouting movement of Lord Baden-Powell in England. Hahn saw small groups as a way to develop natural leadership abilities he thought were present in most people, but such an inquiry would eventually miss the point. They were suppressed by the dependency, passivity, and bureaucratic impersonality of modern life. Such groups place heavy social pressures on individual initiative, yet at the same time they require it absolutely. Small groups require tremendous amounts of energy to reach the consensus necessary to meet objectives. Natural leaders emerge when a group must solve real problems instead of playing games with an unnatural reward system. A genuine community begins to appear on a small scale.

A concern encompassing all the rest was Hahn's dedication to community service. As Hahn saw it, the link between individual and school depended for its meaning upon the link between school and society. The notion came into Outward Bound in the form of rescue service, and it has since been applied to diverse needs in communities and the natural environment.

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With such distinctive origins, it is only natural that Outward Bound should seek to ally itself more closely with conventional schooling. As the Outward Bound movement expanded after World War II, it was carried into the United States initially by educators such as Joshua L. Miner of Phillips Academy, Andover, and F. Charles Froelicher of Colorado Academy. From the 1960s through the 1970s, Outward Bound sought as an explicit aim to influence American schooling by persuading teachers and administrators to adapt experiential methods from the outdoor program to enhance formal learning.

The aim was not to manage such projects. Outward Bound turned over its ideas to school personnel for development within the schools, both public and private. For example, the Outward Bound schools set up teachers' courses and attempted to transmit ideals and methods in order to make an imprint on the dominant pattern of schooling for adolescents. The responses of participants from conventional schools emphasized the pedagogical vitality of experiential methods as well as the team building and depth of mutual commitment elicited from students on Outward Bound courses. Studies of in-school adaptations produced some alternative models and promising but ambiguous results.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Project Adventure, an offshoot of Outward Bound started by instructors wishing to work more closely with conventional schools, achieved success in applying experiential methods derived from Outward Bound to the schools. Project Adventure, which has been identified as an exemplary model by the National Diffusion Program of the U.S. Department of Education, went on to develop a repertoire of its own, paralleled by other creative offshoot programs, to assist in adventure programming, teacher training, and counseling.



Students from the Rafael Hernandez Bilingual School in Boston observe and document wildlife for a learning expedition on pond life. Photograph by Brian Smith/NASDC.

By the mid-1970s, Outward Bound was part of a larger movement in the United States, referred to broadly as experiential education. The movement had some impact through generating alternative programs for adaptation by public and private schools, including not only outdoor education but such widely implemented strategies as action learning, experience-based career education, and cultural journalism. But while it had philosophical roots in common with these innovations, Outward Bound pursued a strategy of staying apart organizationally, mostly offering ideas and short-term training, then hoping that mainstream institutions would replicate what might prove most effective.

In the remainder of this chapter I would like to offer a personal interpretation of Kurt Hahn's vision of learning, one that attempts to connect the events of his life with his ideas. I believe it is this vision of Hahn's that shows most clearly what Outward Bound has to offer American education.

Kurt Hahn understood weakness better than strength. The goal of learning, in his view, was compensatory: to purify the destructive inclinations of the human personality, to redress the imbalances in modern ways of living, to develop each person's disabilities to their maximum potential, and to place new-found strength in service of those in need. Kurt Hahn was suspicious of presumed excellence; he paid scant attention to the glories of unsurpassed individual performance, whether it be on the playing fields at Eton or the examination ordeal of the German gymnasium. He understood, as few educators have so well, the tender fears of young people, their alienation before the rigors and rituals of adult

power. He understood how wrong it was to vanquish them with that power to make them learn. This strategy would only deepen their confusion about the meaning of their lives, making them cynical, lacking in humanity, even if it strengthened them. Hahn's favorite story was the Good Samaritan, wherein the strong, those clearly in a position to help the most, failed to act. It was the outsider, the weak, the despised who taught what it means to be a civilized human being.

Where did Hahn learn this, and if he once felt it himself, how did he convert his own weakness into an enduring vision of education? We must look, I believe, to the most tumultuous time of life to see the emerging center. In late adolescence, on the threshold of higher education and adult life, Hahn felt the impact of three events that changed his life.

The first was an expedition, some days of fresh air and majestic surroundings on a walking tour of the Dolomite Alps. One can well imagine the exhilaration of a boy in his teens on such a rite of passage. Famed for their bold, other worldly shapes, their awe-inspiring hues of light and shadow from

sunrise to sunset, the Dolomites imprinted on Hahn an inextinguishable love of natural beauty. As an educator, he would always be devising ways to turn his classrooms out of doors, putting his students into motion and forcing his teachers to come to grips with the healing powers of direct experience.

But something else happened on this expedition. A second event added to these other feelings a specific passion, strong enough to organize his self-discovery into a lifelong vocation. Two English schoolboys who accompanied Hahn gave him a gift, a book called *Emlohstobba* by the German educator Herman Lietz. The title of the book was the name of their school, Abbotsholme, spelled backwards. Lietz wrote rapturously of life inside that school, where he served as master of studies for a sabbatical year under the innovative headmaster, Cecil Reddie. When Lietz returned to Germany, he fathered the country school movement there, inspiring others to begin schools more healthful for young people than the prevailing system of the time.

For Hahn this book was a momentous gift. Along with the living example of the two students from



The Cree Brigade reaches the boundary waters of Minnesota during an Outward Bound wilderness course for Dubuque, Iowa, school teachers. Susan Whitty navigates at the bow while Wendy Miller steers at the stern. Photograph by Mike Krapfl/Dubuque Telegraph Herald.

Abbotsholme, who impressed him with their healthy love of life, and the sheer beauty of their alpine journey together, young Hahn must have felt in himself a new conviction of life's possibilities. Coming at a time when his own formal education was marching lockstep through the authoritarian, rigidly academic curriculum of the gymnasium, the alternative vision of a more humane and democratic school, capable of fostering more perfect human beings, seized his imagination with a force that can be judged only by abandoning strict chronology and looking ahead to the seventy indefatigable years of institution-building that lay ahead of him.

It was not on that trip, however, that Hahn imagined the school he hoped to build. Two years later, the year of his graduation from the gymnasium, a third event completed his initiation. He suffered the life-threatening sunstroke that permanently changed his life. Never again would he have the freedom to trek or sail long pleasurable distances out of doors. Nor was it certain, in the weeks following the accident, whether he would recover enough to participate in normal functions of life. Depression set in, squelching his hopes. One would not be surprised if his boyhood dreams became cruel reminders of all that was not possible now. His life was a washout, a failure before it had really begun.

Here, and not in his later life of so many memorable accomplishments, the educational genius of the man is to be found. The center emerged as a discovery of who he really was inside, the gift of suddenly knowing what he had to do, and would do, when he bumped up against his own limitations. It was the scale of values, the plan of life, the desired future he asserted as his response to adversity when it came.

Adversity came to Hahn in several forms, all of which must have seemed insuperable from his perspective in a darkened room as he recovered from his accident. The physical disability would always be present in his life. It would be necessary for him to wear a broad-brimmed hat to protect his head from the sunlight. Frail in the heat, he would have to flee northward to a cooler climate for the summers. Periodically, he would need to undergo major operations to relieve the fluid pressure within his head. All this he knew, or could well imagine, in those months of convalescence.

In his darkened room, Kurt Hahn regenerated his spirit with a vision of what he could do with his life. He decided that he would someday start a school modeled on principles drawn from Plato's *Republic*,

a school that would expand the wholesome influence he identified with Herman Lietz and Cecil Reddie's Abbotsholme. How much of the vision came to him at that time and how much later is not clear, but he grasped the essential outline. The school would harmonize the social and intellectual differences between its students by operating as a community of participation and active service. It would seek out the natural qualities of leadership, skill, and responsibility possessed by all in different ways when they see that they are truly needed. His school of the future would harmonize the wild and discordant personality of the adolescent by demonstrating that true need.



Passion must not be
treated lightly.



Once again, it is difficult to say how much of that vision became evident to Hahn during his recovery and how much came to him as glimpses and inklings which he later converted into plans and traditions. That the center emerged, though, is indisputable, both by his own account and because of the central place he gave to his thoughts during the dark night of the soul in later educational projects.

How could his vision be made believable to the alienated young? Closer to home, how could Kurt Hahn himself, in his debility and depression, bring himself to believe in a better life? Forced by the accident to reflect upon his own childhood, to seek out some deeper matrix of meaning to keep his spirits up, Hahn came face to face with his own youthful passion. That there exists, in everyone, a grand passion, an outlandish thirst for adventure, a desire to live boldly and vividly in the journey through life, sprang forth as the most salient lesson of his life-long pedagogy.

That was not all, however, and it was not enough. For now the Dolomites and the classics flowed together to become Hahn's vision of the good. Dwelling for a time in his imagined world of Plato as he dreamed of a future school, feeling his spirit awakening to a great sense of purpose in that semi-darkness after the sunstroke, Hahn made the crucial connection. Passion must not be treated lightly. Its deep

springs in human nature must not be poisoned. Above all, it must not be misdirected and turned to inhumane ends. The grand passion of the young must be embraced in wholesome ways by adult power. It must be nurtured instead of deformed or punished. Its creative force must be harnessed to the quest for a good society, the aim of Plato's educational designs. To accomplish this purpose would require more than a school in a traditional sense. Some separation from the existing human world, into the intensity of a journey-quest, confronting challenges and transforming opportunities for service, could change the balance of power in young people, Hahn believed. Then they would be more inclined to use their lives, back in the world from which they came, to bring the good society into being.

With the center in view, the chronology of Kurt Hahn's life takes on greater meaning. Expelled from the land of his birth, the schoolmaster continued his career in Britain, which became a second homeland for him. When he opened Gordonstoun in 1934, Hahn carried the Salem tradition to the new setting, and he brought staff and students with him. New features appeared, such as the addition of rescue training to the service program. And some of the old practices changed, or were presented differently, in response to the cultural milieu of the British Isles. All this, of course, is to be expected in transplanting the design of an institution from one place and time to another. Certainly the transition was made easier by the strong affinity of Hahn's thinking with the traditions of Abbotsholme and the English public schools. What stands out, nonetheless, is the fact that Hahn was able in so short a time to create a new institution which, like his first school, would become known around the world for its distinctive educational practices.

If Hahn had not been restless, if he had not felt driven toward wider applications of his principles beyond any school he might ever create, he would perhaps have settled to a longer career as the eccentric headmaster of a school favored by the English aristocracy. But he was not satisfied. He began to organize a constellation of other education forms around Gordonstoun, using the school as a staging ground for programs through which he hoped to instruct the whole society around him in the first lessons of sound living and civic responsibility. The Moray Badge Scheme took form in 1936, followed quickly by the larger and better known County Badge a year later.



You will find that the
good artisan has a greater
horror of unfinished work
than the schoolmaster.



Along the way, Hahn experimented with short courses to discover the combination of challenging experiences that might help young people discover new ways of organizing their lives and working with other people. In 1941, with Laurence Holt, Hahn started Outward Bound as a short course. Initially, the goal was to strengthen the will of young men so that they could prevail against adversity as Great Britain faced staggering losses at sea during World War II. After the program had demonstrated its effectiveness, it continued to expand during the post-war years, furnishing opportunities for personal and social growth to many people beyond the original clientele of boys and young men.

Chronology alone cannot account for Hahn's widening sphere of educational activity. Only by grasping how he continued to draw both from a sense of weakness and from the strong idealism at the center of his being can we understand his intuitive leaps as he created new programs over the years. Hahn perceived clearly that schools as we know them are not equal to the urgent problem of social life in this century. Even the best schools probably damage as much as develop the volatile inner lives of young people.

One reason for this unintended consequence is that schools represent only a partial solution to a much more pervasive problem. The problem of how to educate the whole person cannot be resolved without learning how to civilize human communities, which in turn cannot be done without preparing the entire world society in the arts of living harmoniously at the highest levels of potential activity and understanding. Hahn's debt to Plato was his conviction that education must embrace all these aspects of human life. A vision of what is most desirable in education must embody not only some notion of how the whole is to be organized, but what it will take for that whole to be good. Without a vision of wholeness, without at least a hope that the



Students from the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver explore their city. Photograph by Cyrus McCrimmon/Rocky Mountain News.

compassionate community might someday be realized on a worldwide scale, people are not inclined to live on humane terms with one another.

Exiled to the British Isles, Kurt Hahn was restless at the center of his being. Carrying with him an unflinching impression of the expanding Third Reich and its effects on European civilization, he could never be satisfied with the auspicious beginning of a school. Soon after his arrival he began to write and speak in public, deploring the general lack of fitness among the British people. He urged his hosts to recognize the need for programs on a large scale that would combine individual training plans with group projects to build stronger civic consciousness.

Out of such concerns he initiated the Moray and County Badge Schemes. The latter quickly expanded and became further elaborated in many counties across the British Isles, spreading even to other

countries in the British Commonwealth. The County Badge granted public recognition to young people who completed a planned course of challenges. They first adopted a training plan of physical conditioning and personal health habits. Then they undertook an arduous expedition requiring group decision-making as well as individual effort. They also completed a project demanding new skills and craftsmanship. Finally, they engaged in service activities, experiencing the value of compassion through direct action on behalf of the community or specific people in need.

At the beginning of the war, the County Badge contained most of the essential features of the Outward Bound program as it would develop in the future years. Indeed, the secretary and key promoter of the County Badge Experimental Committee, James Hogan, became the first warden of the first Outward Bound School at Aberdovey, in Wales. Yet there was a difference, and it was more than the residential setting and month-long sustained program of Outward Bound. Although both programs offered models for changing how individuals organized their lives, there was something more universal and enduring about Outward Bound.

Hahn had realized how close are weakness and strength in the most powerful forms of education. In his own day, he perceived clearly, while others did not, the subtle line that distinguishes compassionate service from destructive egotism. On the one hand, he feared the lack of will among those whose lives stood in the path of the advancing Third Reich. Hence his call for programs like the County Badge to build fitness and commit young people to civic ideas. But on the other hand, he recognized the affinity between his methods and those of the Nazis, one used for the good, the other for deadly ends.

There is an irony in this affinity, since Hahn was criticized by some in England for importing the paramilitary methods of the Hitler Youth. The irony is that the Hitler Youth movement did not discover the intensive methods of socialization they used to unleash the energies of the young. Rather, they borrowed from the leading educators of the day and applied the methods to their own goals. Hahn knew this well, for he had seen Hitler Youth before he left Germany. Their leaders had adapted and twisted to demonic purposes the training plan of Salem. Hahn had witnessed, therefore, the effects of reaching the whole person with the fascist plan of life instead of a Samaritan ethic. Hitler and his followers were

reinforcing the passion of the young, giving them a spirit of adventure, introducing them to self-development and cooperation in the outdoors, then giving them meaningful opportunities to serve. Hahn recognized that there was no time for complacency. The weakness of the status quo must be acknowledged. All education must be made activist, or else the humane values upon which western democracies were built would succumb to a determined usurper.

Not even in its desperate beginnings before the onslaught of the Third Reich did Outward Bound ever train young people for war, but it arose fully conscious of the challenge presented by the Hitler Youth, that nationwide mobilization of young people to serve the cause of world conquest and genocide. Never did anyone press Outward Bound toward becoming a preparation for violence, and in this respect it would always remain distinct from youth mobilizations under totalitarian regimes. Yet it is difficult to imagine how Outward Bound would ever have come into being if it had not been for Hahn's recognition of the weakness of democratic cultures before well-organized forms of authoritarian education that were appallingly efficient at stirring up the passions of the young for collective violence.

Through Outward Bound, Hahn hoped to foster a deeper intensity of commitment in the rite of passage from youth to adult life. He was intent on creating more dramatic challenges and victories for the young than were available in conventional forms of schooling. Advocating a more arduous quest than was present in the institutions around him, Hahn was working from a disability greater than his own, a collective predicament verging on catastrophe. In England during the German Blitzkrieg, it was by no means apocalyptic to argue that there would need to be a new education, reconstructed on a massive scale, to produce the compassionate army needed to preserve what was left of civilization at home. Hahn believed that an intensive program of training, expedition, reflection and service would make a difference.



We need opportunities for
active service in peace time.



That belief survived beyond the exigencies of war, but Hahn's own direct role quickly receded once the philosophical values were in place to launch Outward Bound. While Hahn continued to influence Outward Bound, it soon took on a life of its own under the vigorous leadership of many people drawn to its idealism and hardy lifestyle over the years. Taking an image from Plato, Hahn likened himself to a midwife of educational projects as he sparked ideas for new endeavors and then left much of the development and maintenance to others. Outward Bound sea and mountain schools proliferated across several continents in the following decades. As it adapted itself to different cultures in later years, Outward Bound lost its wartime urgency, but it maintained a zest for adventure and Hahn's legacy of moral purpose.

Outward Bound has come to mean many things in different places and for the great variety of people who are drawn to it, but at its heart, in every time and place, is Hahn's own center, his conviction that it is possible, even in a relatively short time, to introduce greater balance and compassion into human lives by impelling people into experiences which show them they can rise above adversity and overcome their own defeatism, make more of their lives than they thought they could, and learn to serve others with their strength.

Hahn's postwar contributions include several other projects of which he considered himself more midwife than instigator. It would be most accurate to characterize him as the moving spirit, since his arts of persuasion were decisive in each case. The Trevelyan Scholarships, for example, provided funds for young people to attend Oxford and Cambridge based on experimental as well as academic criteria: applicants were asked to complete a project of their own design, which would be reviewed by a selection panel. Shortly after a recurrence of his sunstroke in the early 1950s, Hahn helped to launch the Duke of Edinburgh Award, a program similar to the County Badge but much more widely developed throughout the British Commonwealth. His crowning achievement after the war was the United World Colleges, which began with the founding of Atlantic College in 1962.

If Outward Bound's origins are to be found in the war, those of the United World Colleges appear in the desire to build institutions that will offer a living example of what it means to be at peace. Taking students from 16 to 19, equivalent to the sixth

form in England or the last two years before postsecondary education in the United States, these colleges bring together boys and girls from all over the world, from competing social economic systems, from rivaling cultures and religions. The program fosters world citizenship, an interconnected leadership of people who have experienced a collective life of active dialogue and peacemaking service. The curriculum, like that of Gordonstoun, combines both academic and experiential challenges, but the institutions have developed in new directions under their diverse leadership, leaving some of Hahn's education practices behind while preserving others. Kurt Hahn's original insight that such institutions were possible stands as perhaps the greatest legacy of his influence as they continued to thrive and expand in the 1980s.



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Returning to Germany for his last days, Kurt Hahn died near Salem, in Hermannsberg, on December 14, 1974. The entry in Britain's *Dictionary of National Biography* calls him "headmaster and citizen of humanity." Hahn's educational influence persists under such organizations as the Round Square Conference, comprised of schools modeled on Salem and Gordonstoun. His genius in devising short-term educational experiences has not stopped infusing energy and inspiration into the Outward Bound Trust, which oversees Outward Bound schools throughout the world. His love of peace flourishes in the United World Colleges, not to mention the many other institutions and individuals who continue to embody his ideals. This man's educational vision remains, becoming like an adventure, arising from weakness to teach about strength, turning self-discovery into acts of compassion, everywhere defending human decency.