



The Southland Times | Saturday, 26 July 2008

Bounding forward

A lot of what happens on Outward Bound is inward. JEREMY ROBINSON went to learn some lessons the hard way. (Which wasn't such a bad way).

Mind. Body. Soul. Discovery. No limits.

Merely words. But put in the context of an idea, like they are at Outward Bound, and you have something powerful.

The idea that founded Outward Bound was a simple philosophy: "We are all better than we know." My experience began at Picton on June 20 when Scott Watch 522 was formed.

Scott 522 was a disability (no limits) tailored course totalling 11 students from throughout New Zealand.

My condition, a severe brain injury, challenges me with fatigue and underpowered thinking, among other things.

There were other medical conditions in Scott 522, but no one dwelled on them. There were new challenges ahead.

We were told PT (physical training) was a cornerstone of Outward Bound. Every day at Anakiwa started at 6am with drills, followed by a 3.2km run under a bright moon. A compulsory jump into the mid-winter ocean was followed by a cleansing cold shower before breakfast.

Cellphones, iPods, and even books were collected. They were a "distraction" from living in the moment. No place for cigarettes, alcohol, coffee or hot showers, either.

They were "privileges" , not rights.

Early on, we were reminded of the importance of being positive (aka "getting hard") and our instructors, Kerin and Cherie, gave us the first of many inspirational readings.

It finished like this: "Life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. We are in charge of our attitudes." Words of wisdom are a huge part of life at Anakiwa. They're read before main meals, are on plaques at doorways and even on stepping stones leading to watch-houses.

"Never, never give up," insists one.

"You only fail if you fail to try," states another.

For 192 hours we were to exercise, eat, sleep and breathe Anakiwa's philosophies together. We faced challenges like high ropes courses, rafting, hiking, running, kayaking, sailing and isolation.

Though we didn't know each other, or necessarily gel, the members of Scott 522 grew close from challenging ourselves and each other.

After just eight days, we had formed an unconditional bond.

Each member had their own strengths and weaknesses. One day a person would appear

comfortable. By the next challenge, that person was on the back foot and had to look to a watchmate for advice and support.

This kind of day-to-day existence solidifies the core values of Outward Bound. Compassion. Greatness. Responsibility.

Integrity.

Never told what was coming tomorrow or even that afternoon, we had to adapt. And in this environment, around a campfire or sharing a bivouac, we were still able to celebrate life without our distractions or recreational drugs.

We were lucky enough to be cooked great feeds every day but handwashing clothes became a daily ritual.

Forced to slow down and live in the moment, I was able to appreciate how much of life I take for granted.

It's an interesting way to live and reminded me how consumer life makes me dependant, weak and shallow.

I remember getting out of soaking PT gear one day, sharing a laugh about what Paris Hilton might be up to "back in the world" and what the price of petrol might be.

Kerin warned us how easy it was to be disillusioned returning to our lifestyles.

Without distraction at Anakiwa, we could think clearly about what we felt was important — so returning to the pace of a consumer lifestyle could be a challenge in itself.

While tramping along the Queen Charlotte Track, Kerin mentioned how depressing he found watching the news. It was hard to take after the "sanctuary of Anakiwa" .

Despite these occupational hazards, Outward Bound has won the best place to work award for the second year — and it shows. The instructors are motivated and passionate.

They don't just talk the talk, they walk the walk.

For many, the most introspective moment of Outward Bound is the solo.

Taken into the native bush with rations, you can bivouac for up to 72 hours with only wildlife for company and not even a wristwatch to pass time. I woke to the sound of tuis, wondering why the hell I hadn't done this before.

By week's end I re-discovered that, as hard as things can get, they can always get harder.

Although I believe I can take whatever is thrown my way, it's so much more rewarding as part of a group.

Lending help, asking for help, sharing skills and working towards a common victory.

Life always goes on, no matter how uncomfortable it is.

I will go back to the Anakiwa school for another course. In the meantime I'll remember a key reading my instructors passed on to me: Be mindful of your thoughts, your thoughts become your words.

Be mindful of your words, your words become your actions.

Be mindful of your actions, your actions become your habits.

Be mindful of your habits, your habits become your character.

Be mindful of your character, your character becomes your destiny.

QUICK FACTS

- » Outward Bound (a sailing term for ships leaving the safety of harbour) was founded by Kurt Hahn in 1941.
- » More than 41 countries have joined the self-discovery adventure school.
- » 522 classes (45,000-plus people) have attended New Zealand's Anakiwa Outward Bound school since 1962.
- » Each class has "watches" of 14 students and each watch bears the name of an inspirational Kiwi.

COURSES

- » Mind Body Soul (16 to 18 years) 21 days.
 - » Discovery (27 to 80 years) eight days.
 - » No Limits (16-plus years) eight days.
 - » Classic (18 to 26 years) 21 days.
 - » Masters (27 to 80 years) 21 days.
 - » Navigator (23-plus years, three years' employment) eight days.
 - » Custom courses also available.
- » Jeremy Robinson went on Outward Bound with the support of the Norman Jones Foundation. The foundation has awarded Outward Bound scholarships every year since 1991. Many local and national scholarships are around for those who need help to attend Outward Bound (0800 OUTWARD for more details).

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