Happy Anniversary OA
We have a lot to celebrate this year and this issue of Tiger Trails is full of good news. First I want to thank all of you for your support of OA over the years, particularly over the past several years as we have dealt with the challenges of a limited budget. Once again members of the Friends of OA came to the rescue with annual membership fees totaling over $24,000. This year is the largest number of donors ever! I want to thank everyone who has contributed to OA over the past three years. Your contributions have allowed us to re-energize trips and programs during the academic year. OA continues to need your support so this year for OA’s 30th Anniversary our goal is for to increase participation so that 30% of all leaders join the Friends of OA and support the program.

Princeton Establishes OA Endowment Project
Over the past three years we have been working with the university to address the budget for OA and to plan how to sustain and develop the program over the next thirty years. I am very pleased to report that in May the university approved raising a significant endowment for Outdoor Action. This would not have been possible without the support of Vice President for Campus Life Janet Dickerson who included OA in a larger fund raising request. We’ve identified three major goals for the endowment:
- Raise funds to supplement trip fees with financial aid so that all Princeton students can participate
- Secure funds to maintain excellence in student leadership development
- Provide funding to support a rich set of outdoor education and leadership development programs and activities to be offered during the academic year

I cannot begin to tell you how excited I am about what this means for OA’s future. Current leaders are so enthusiastic about how we can improve the program and expand our outreach to the campus and beyond. This endowment will provide OA with a level of financial security that the program has never had. It will be a big job to reach our goal and will take a number of years but we have the full support of the University Development Office. I will keep you all up to date on our progress.

Rick Curtis ’79
Director, Outdoor Action

OA Leader Training Undergoes Transformation
Our goal has always been to provide excellent training for OA leaders and over the past thirty years OA has been a model in leadership development at the college level. This year we’ve implemented several major changes which will make an even bigger difference in the leadership education of Princeton students. We have expanded Leader Training into a semester-long activity with the 6-day Leader Training Trip as the final activity either over Intersession in January or at the traditional time over ‘Dead Week’ in May.

‘Dead Week’ in May.
One big change in the Leader Training Program is with first aid. The HEART (Health Education and Rescue Training) first aid course was started back in 1984 by Doug Weinberg ’86, Dan Ronel ’86 and others. One of the mainstays of leader training has always been students teaching other students. The limitation of HEART, as our own ‘home-grown’ course, is that it did not offer any recognized first aid certification. We have just completed an instructor certification process for all the HEART instructors so that they are now certified to teach a nationally recognized 20-hour Wilderness First Aid course certified through the American Safety and Health Institute (ASHI). We can now issue a Wilderness First Aid certification card to all students who complete the course. At the same time, we are continuing to rely upon the time-tested curriculum that we use, as it meets or exceeds all of the ASHI standards. We will continue to offer a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) course each year and afterwards run an ASHI Instructor Training course to certify the new WFR candidates as first aid instructors.

The other major new component of the semester-long training is a series of five Leader Training Course classes based on an expedition planning model. Each week leaders-in-training will work in small groups planning an expedition including route, equipment, food, etc., while learning critical concepts like Leave No Trace, safety management, equipment use, etc., in preparation for their upcoming Leader Training Trip. By separating the ‘pre-trip’ planning skills that students need to learn from the skills they learn on the trail we are create more time on the Leader Training Trip for practicing and developing leadership skills. This is really ‘raising the bar’ for leaders, providing a more consistent and a higher level of skill development.

Another benefit to the semester long program is that it gives us more time to train and prepare Leader Trainers for their incredibly challenging job of building new leaders. We now accept applications and interview Leader Trainer candidates at the beginning of the semester. Those that are selected participate in a series of Leader Trainer retreats and training workshops as well as help teach the Leader Training Course classes. Leader Trainers, currently 27 sophomores through seniors, are really excited about the new program.
This is an excerpt from the article written by Kathy Witkowsky that appeared in National CrossTalk - the journal of the Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (www.highereducation.org/crosstalk). Kathy camped and hiked with several Frosh Trip groups for three days.

It was a warm and rainy late August night in a northwest New Jersey forest, and things were not going well for Princeton University junior Scott Welfel and Princeton sophomore Aiala Levy. As volunteer leaders for Princeton’s Outdoor Action frosh trip, an optional orientation, they were trying desperately to make this six-day camping experience a pleasant one for the eight freshmen assigned to them.

After all, this was the first official activity as Princeton students for these 17- and 18-year-olds, and an opportunity not only to learn about the outdoors but also to bond with each other and boost their self-esteem. The idea was for them to start the school year with a support system in place, feeling good about who they were and what they had to offer. Such wilderness orientations have become commonplace at colleges and universities throughout the country. With about half the incoming freshman class participating, Princeton’s is among the largest.

Scott and Aiala (pronounced “EYE-la”) had been through many hours of training to ensure that this orientation would be successful. But from the despairing looks on their group members' wet and dirty faces, they were failing miserably.

Bad enough that the group had slept poorly the previous night, crammed next to each other on a tarp and kept awake by an endless procession of daddy-longlegs that crawled over them. And that they were all sweaty and tired from a seven-mile hike earlier that day. And that it had been more than 48 hours since they’d been able to shower, change their t-shirts or use their cell phones, which they had surrendered to Aiala when they packed up back on campus.

Now it was pouring, they were soaked and hungry, their campsite was a sea of mud, Scott couldn’t get the camp stove to stay lit, and their makeshift tent—a blue plastic tarp strung between two trees—was leaking. They seemed to have completely forgotten about their group’s “full-value contract”—the orange-and-black plastic football on which they had each written one positive quality they hoped to contribute to the group and one goal for the week. A staple of the Outdoor Action frosh trip, full-value contracts can be signed on other objects, such as Frisbees, but the purpose is always the same: to serve as a tangible reminder of group and individual goals.

Emily, a gregarious blond ballerina from Farmington Hills, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, had written on the football: “enthusiasm” and “tough it out.” Now she was in tears. “There are puddles in the tent!” she sobbed. Alfredo, a shy, soft-spoken young man from Pico Rivera, California, outside of Los Angeles, who had barely eaten since the trip began, blurted out what everyone else seemed to be thinking: “I want to go home!” So much for “learning to live without meat,” or the “relaxation” he’d hoped to add.

Their faces brightened considerably when Aiala suggested that perhaps the group could spend the night inside the dining hall of the Princeton-Blairstown Center, the summer camp whose grounds they were on. They immediately began collecting their sleeping bags to make the quarter mile trek there.

But then Scott, who had stepped away from the group to phone his boss’ office back at Princeton (group leaders all have cellular or satellite phones in case of emergencies), returned, looking chagrined: A leaky tarp, he had been told, did not qualify as an emergency. So he had rustled up two extra sheets of plastic from the summer camp, and even though they weren’t big enough to cover the entire length of the group tarp, he hoped they would
stem the worst of the leaks.

Scott, a sweet and lanky 20-year-old philosophy major from Roseland, New Jersey, initially had been so excited about introducing his group to the outdoors that he had written “share the love,” and “stokedness,” on the toy football. Now even he felt defeated. Looking back, said Scott, “At that point I decided, the kids aren’t going to like the trip, but let’s just get through it, and I’ll look at it as a learning experience.”

So he did the only thing he could think of: He leveled with his group. “This sucks,” he acknowledged. “But we have to deal with this.”

And then something funny happened. They did deal with it. They slung the new tarps over the center of the old one. They made a little dam at the uphill end of the ground tarp so it would prevent any more water from flowing in. Rearranged their sleeping bags and pads, crowding them closer together into the driest section of the tarp. And then they took cover, fortifying themselves against the damp, at Scott and Aiala’s insistence, with peanut butter, tortillas and trail mix.

When the rain let up a bit, Scott managed to light the stove, and everyone—even Alfredo and Emily, who by then had apologized for her meltdown-emerged from the tarp long enough to have a chicken fajita. Afterwards, without being asked, they all helped lug the nylon sacks filled with food to a spot several hundred feet from the campsite, where they hoisted the sacks high overhead, out of reach of black bears and other forest critters. The rope was so wet it required a group effort to get a grip on it, but there was singing and laughter as they tugged in unison.

And that was when everything began to shift. By the next morning, the group’s mood was as sunny as the weather, which had completely cleared up. A short hike that day in Worthington State Forest provided the setting for a number of amusing riddles and other group games. By the next morning, Emily reported that she had slept “great,” a relief since she thought she might be fighting the colds. For her, the OA Frosh Trip was seen as one of the pivotal entry experiences for incoming students. Here is what the committee report (available at www.princeton.edu/~vp/cpcu/Freshman_Year_Social_Experience_Report.htm) had to say.

“There is overwhelming consensus that for those who participate (upwards of 600 students), OA is a highly positive experience. Strong bonds are forged as students work hard together and must trust and rely on each other. The OA leader is key to the experience. As an older student who knows Princeton well, the leader can connect group members with many other Princeton students once they return to campus. The OA dance, held the night participants return to campus, is a tremendous success. However, freshmen who did not participate in OA, but who arrive the day after OA participants have returned from their trips, report feeling envious of the closeness they see among OA participants and, initially, feel somewhat excluded.”

Recent research shows that wilderness orientation programs like the Frosh Trip can have a lasting impact on students’ experience of college. Brent Bell, a PhD candidate from the University of New Hampshire, did a major research study of freshmen and sophomores at Princeton and Harvard examining the role of pre-orientation experiences in social adjustment to college. He examined the levels of social support that students felt about college by comparing students who participated in a wilderness orientation program like the Frosh Trip, a community service pre-orientation program, international student pre-orientation, full varsity sports, or no pre-orientation experience. The specific variables he measured were social integration, attachment, tangible support, competence, and nuturance.

Overall his results show that participants on wilderness orientation programs score significantly higher on total social support than those students who did not participate in any pre-orientation experience. The most interesting part of his study is that the effects of the trip last into sophomore year. When you compare the levels of social support of sophomores who participated in Frosh Trip the year before to sophomores who did not participate in any pre-orientation experience, the Frosh Trip students still score higher.
Reunions & Commencement Events

The end of the 2004 academic year was extremely busy with a number of events at Reunions and Commencement. After a two year hiatus we have returned to our full programming schedule during Reunions with rock climbing, canoeing and kayaking on Friday and Saturday along with special events for children from the 25th Reunion Class—(1979) on Friday evening.

On Saturday we had a fantastic slide presentation by Robert Peck ’74, a Fellow at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. In the summer of 2001, Robert and a group of eminent scholars retraced the steps of the 1899 Harriman two-month expedition to Alaska, Siberia, and the Bering Sea, observing a century of change. The original expedition included the charismatic conservationist John Muir, the nature writer John Burroughs, the photographer Edward Curtis, and many of America’s leading scientists. Their travels and discoveries helped to create a baseline for our present knowledge of the flora, fauna, and native cultures of that remote part of the world.

Warren “Philo” Elmer ’69 was the keynote panelist for the Josh Miner ’43 Experiential Education Panel entitled “Princetonians Reflect on Service.” The panel focused on how individuals incorporate the ethic of service into their lives and careers. Panelists included George Rupp ’64 – President, International Rescue Committee; Rajiv Vinnakota ’93 – Managing Director, The SEED Foundation; Melissa Wu ’99 – Deputy Director, The TEAK Fellowship.

Come back and join us May 26-29, 2005 for a full range of OA activities and speakers at Reunions.

Josh Miner ’43 Experiential Education Award Winner – Warren “Philo” Elmer ’69

This year’s Josh Miner award winner at Reunions was Warren “Philo” Elmer ’69. The award is presented each year at Reunions to an alumnus(a) who has made significant contributions to the field of outdoor or experiential education. The award citation:

Philo Elmer has served the experiential education field for nearly four decades. He has functioned variously as a teacher, environmental educator, adventure programmer, entrepreneur, program director, executive director, and board member. He co-founded the Association for Challenge Course Technology, brought diverse programs together to form the Association for Experiential Education’s (AEE) mid-Atlantic Region, and sat on AEE’s board. In addition to being involved in both Outdoor Action and Princeton-Blairstown Center in virtually every capacity imaginable, he has helped introduce or substantially expand experiential programming at dozens of schools and universities, dozens of treatment centers and corporate education facilities, and literally hundreds of camps and outdoor centers. He has led adventure programming in more than forty states and overseas, working with well over 200,000 participants in the process. From the Boy Scouts to the Girl Scouts, from Project USE to Project Adventure, from Outward Bound to Inward Bound, there are few if any organizations in our field Philo has not influenced. On behalf of the many, many people you have taught, trained, coached, facilitated, mentored, and influenced, Philo, thank you.

For more information about the Josh Miner ’43 award see www.princeton.edu/~oa/alumni/miner.shtml

OA’s 30th Anniversary in July 2004 in the White Mountains

Thirty years of wilderness adventures is something to celebrate and the very best way to do that is to have another wilderness adventure. For OA's 30th we stayed at the Appalachian Mountain Club Highland Lodge at Crawford Notch in the White Mountains from July 21 - July 25, 2004. The brand new Highland Lodge is in a superb mountain setting nestled in Crawford Notch in the heart of the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire.

Heading to the top of Mt. Eisenhower - Victoria Hewitt, Colin Ely, Keith Ely ’79, Anne Helsely Marchbanks ’80, Dick Getnick ’64, Kathleen Guinee ’95, Kevin Roberdeau S’95, Cecily Baskir ’96

In attendance were John Gager Faculty, Dick Getnick ’64, Mary Begley ’75, Gladys Epting ’75, Russell Frye ’75, Ed Seliga ’75, Bill Katen-Narvell ’76 and Alexandra Katen-Narvell ’08, Rick Curtis ’79, Keith Ely ’79, Anne Helsley-Marchbanks ’80, Lisa Fernandez ’83 and Rich Remnick ’83, Bill Plonk ’83, Barry Saiff’83, David Sternlieb ‘83, Bruce Esrig ’85 and Yana Kane-Esrig ’85, Chris Round ’88, Kathleen Guinee ’95, Cecily Baskir ’96, Katherine Byers ’00, Brian Henn ’05, Chris Rizzi ’05, Holly Zindulis ’05 along with spouses, children, and friends. The Class of 1983 takes the prize for having the most participants and Barry Saiff ’83 gets the prize for the longest distance traveled (San Francisco).

The days were spent with things like local hikes to places like Zealand Falls, and the summit of Mt. Eisenhower. Some people spent a day rock climbing and rappelling, kayaking on Lake Umbagog or mountain biking on area trails. In the evenings after a wonderful home cooked dinner we enjoyed a variety of programs. Keith Ely ’79 showed us fantastic slides from the ‘early days’ of OA. Remember fishnet t-shirts, wool pants, and 60/40 jackets? Bill “TigerPaw” Plonk ’83 wowed us a talk about his 2002 thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail and Rick Curtis ’79 showed slides from his winter
2002 trip to New Zealand. All the participants thought the Highland Center was a great location for an alumni and family event so watch for a future OA program back in the White Mountains.

**OA Welcomes Jennifer Bornkamp**

A new member of the OA Team, Jennifer Bornkamp, joined us in May. Jennifer came to us from Rutgers where she worked on campus diversity issues. In just a few short months Jennifer has really streamlined the operation of the OA Office.

**Notes from the Trailhead**

Send us your latest stories and tidbits for Tiger Trails on the enclosed membership form.

**Russell Frye '75** reports that he spent his 50th birthday in the refined hiking venue of the Cinque Terre region of Italy. “Sleep trails between super-picturesque towns on the Mediterranean coast (and magically seemingly uphill the whole way), but punctuated by meals at outdoor cafes looking over the water and swimming in the sea.”

**Ben Runkle '00** “I’ve enjoyed my move to Berkley from Boston. I’m in the environmental engineering PhD program. This summer I went to Honduras with my folks and sister to do a Habitat for Humanity program – excellent work, nice people and a beautiful country.”

**Mike Errecart '01** writes, “No new adventures to report, sadly – just braving the jungle of New York and McKinsey at the moment. I did go out to South Africa for a couple weeks last year, and had a great time climbing and hiking around Cape Town and the Drakensburg.”

**Ryan “Hard Man” Martin '01** writes “I picked up a few new sports this year, the main ones being mountain biking and snowboarding. I just spend a week in Moab, UT, and at this point have biked all the best trails there. I also just finished my first winter in a ski town and logged my first 80+ day season on the mountain. In the process, I became a pretty good snowboarder, able to do most of the hardest stuff on Mount Crested Butte, a mountain known for its extreme runs.”

**Robert Neely ’03** reports that he is working at the Island School, a high school semester abroad program in the Bahamas. “One of my duties is as a kayak instructor for a 4-day and an 8-day trip. I’ve introduced “Jump-Shake-Your Booty” (no way!) and some other games I learned from OA. We debrief often and thoroughly; Rick would be proud!”

**Anna Evans ’03** is in Hanoi, Vietnam, working for “Save the Children.” She went over for Princeton in Asia (PIA). She loves her job and loves Hanoi. She went to Thailand for the Christmas holidays and visited other Princeton PIA’s.

**Stephanie Dashuell ’03** is in Venezuela teaching environmental education, supported by a fellowship from Princeton in Latin America.

**For the latest OA Information**

[www.princeton.edu/~oa](http://www.princeton.edu/~oa)

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**Reflections of a Leader Trainer**

*by Brent Scharschmidt ’05*

In late August of this year, with Frosh Trip 2004 approaching, the Leader Training Committee email list sprang back to life after its summer hiatus: Amy Saltzman ’05, having just returned from Fiji, wrote, “I can’t wait to play knee tag in only seven more days!… I LOVE OA!!!!!!” (Knee tag, for those unfamiliar with the game, is a hiking warm-up where you get people out by tagging their knee while trying to protect your own.) The leader trainers who had just graduated in June, however, hadn’t yet been removed from the list. Amy’s email prompted this response from Caitlin Loomis ’04, one of the recent graduates: “Shhh… THIS IS NOT FAIR.” Now, just eight short months from my own graduation, I’m already dreading that time when I too will have to say goodbye to Outdoor Action.

When I first decided to become an OA leader, I had no idea how much the role would impact my time at Princeton. Going through leader-training is an extreme experience, as each trainee is responsible for navigating a group of peers through the backcountry, must respond to medical emergencies and group dynamic issues, and is given constant feedback from the leader trainers. The level of self-awareness that results from the training process is profound, and can produce great leadership skills if one is willing to reflect critically and take suggestions to heart.

After being one of coordinators for Frosh Trip 2003 and leading my first trip that year, I applied to be a leader trainer as a way of extending my OA experience through the school year. What I found was a group of the sharpest, most sensitive, and most altruistic people on campus. The leader training committee is responsible for every aspect of Outdoor Action, from planning and teaching the curriculum that trains up to one hundred new leaders each year, to evaluating leaders after training trips, to deciding on the best ways for OA to reach out to the University community at large. Our bi-monthly meetings have been some of my most rewarding times at Princeton, when all twenty-five leader trainers come together to work through the various issues that arise in such an extensive program. We take the bonds forged during these exhaustive brainstorming sessions and put them to use becoming activists on campus, participating in other University activities that support the goals of our own program. Outdoor Action is an organization that values and respects diversity: when dependent on ten other people for your own survival in the backcountry, there is no room for prejudice or narrow-mindedness. And as leaders, not only with OA but also on campus, we have been proud to participate in events like the “Gay? Fine by Me” day and “Take Back the Night” march.

Leaders and leader-trainers alike will vouch that the impact of OA on their lives is not constrained to a one-week period at the beginning of September. OA gives us the tools to become better friends, more open-minded thinkers, and sharper problem-solvers. With every day spent in the wilderness, we learn more about life and more about ourselves. We make friends who change us, encounter situations that force us to examine our values, and learn about the great responsibility and power that comes with leadership. For those of us who have taken a more active role in the program, the rewards have increased exponentially. In eight months, it will be very hard to leave this all behind.

*Brent Scharschmidt ’05 is a senior from San Francisco, California.*