

A New Climbing Wall for Outdoor Action



Designer's rendering of the new climbing wall

Back in 1982 a group of OA Leaders began talking about what it would be like to have a climbing wall on campus. After searching for an unused space with a high ceiling and receiving permission from the University in 1983 an intrepid team built one of the first college climbing walls in the country. Since then 'The Wall' has been an integral part of OA programming. The wall was expanded in 1989 through the incredible design efforts of renowned climber **Mike Freeman** who worked in the Engineering School and one of the original sections was rebuilt in 1997. Over the years thousands of Princeton students, staff, and alumni have climbed there, and many, including people like **Professor John Gager**, began their life-long love of the sport of climbing at the wall.

After 23 years 'The Wall' is going to be retired in January when the Armory is demolished to make way for the new Chemistry Building. I am very excited to report that the University is building a new state-of-the-art climbing wall for OA inside one of the central columns of the football stadium at a cost of approximately \$180,000. After extensive research into climbing wall manufacturers we identified Entre Prises (www.epusa.com) in Bend, Oregon. They are the largest and oldest manufacturer of climbing walls in the country and their walls have been featured on ESPN's X-games, Chelsea Piers in New York, and the REI flagship store in Seattle. The wall will encompass two rooms. The top rope climbing room will be 30 feet high and 55 feet across with 12 belay stations and doubles the square footage of the old climbing wall. It incorporates the latest in climbing wall technology with both

vertical and overhanging sections as well as a roof and three artificial cracks. The bouldering room will have an overhanging arch structure and a belay teaching area. The new wall is scheduled for completion in January 2007 and will be opening at the start of the second semester in February.

When we 'retire' the old wall at the end of the fall semester it will be like saying goodbye to an old (and somewhat dusty) friend. 'The Wall' has served Princeton well for the past 23 years. I can recall when we were building it. Dozens of people scurrying back and forth building the frame, hauling the plywood sheeting up into the air, fixing belay points on the steel beams overhead, and screwing on climbing holds.

Over the years the climbing community at Princeton has continued to be a vibrant part of campus life and one of the most successful aspects of Outdoor Action. Hundreds of students benefit from the wall each year. The spirit of the wall was captured in the recent Bouldering Competition held in October. The wall was packed with people all trying to score points on the bouldering problems. Everyone helped each other work out the moves and cheered each other on, each person more interested in collaboration than competition.

The new facility will significantly expand the numbers of people who can climb and will also allow us to expand our use of the wall for team building programs and community service. We will be establishing a new community service program in connection with Peak Potential, a program in New Jersey called that teaches children with disabilities to climb as part of their physical therapy. Peak Potential was started by **Dr. Jenfu Cheng '93** a former OA leader who worked at the climbing wall and is a pediatric psychiatrist at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital.

We hope that you'll come back and climb with us at the new wall at Alumni Day in February or Reunions in June.

Rick Curtis

Rick Curtis '79
Director, Outdoor Action

OA's 33rd Annual Frosh Trip

Frosh Trip 2006 was extremely successful. We had 577 participants from the Class of 2010 and 145 student OA Leaders including four alumni on 66 different six-day wilderness trips. In addition we had 34 Support team members and 10 Command Center Managers for a total of 766 students involved in the program. This year's incoming class is 1,220 so we enrolled 47.3% of the class. There were trips in various trail areas in Pennsylvania, the Delaware Water Gap in New Jersey, Catskills in New York, and the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont.

This year's trip was our most diverse ever with 41 international students from 16 different countries. The diversity on OA trips is part of the magic that happens on the trail. You can read what some of this year's international student participants had to say about their Frosh Trip experiences on page 4 or see Frosh Trip on the big screen by ordering a copy of this year's Frosh Trip slide show on DVD.

Frosh Trip: Learning for the Trail & Beyond

Encouraging Difficult Conversations

by Dan Box '07

OA has long prided itself on easing the transition to college for hundreds of freshmen each year. From academics to the social scene, Frosh Trip leaders were tasked with giving their freshmen much of the knowledge they needed to smoothly transition to Princeton. For many years, however, some of the most important topics were considered taboo.

Not anymore.

Under the guidance of Camilo Azcarate, the University Ombudsman, the Leader Training Committee has participated in several workshops aimed at learning how to facilitate some of the difficult conversations that can arise on Frosh Trip, including politics, religion, gender, and socioeconomic differences. This past fall, Dr. Azcarate held a similar workshop for all OA leaders during the pre-trip soft skills refresher known as Leave a Trace Day. With the help of the leader trainers, Dr. Azcarate demonstrated that avoiding difficult topics doesn't



Group BF29 in the Black Forest, PA

make them go away, but with the right guidance from leaders, students can explore their differences in a safe environment.

This echoes what President Tilghman said in her 2006 Commencement address, "...I fear we are at risk of losing an essential ingredient of a vital democracy and a humane worldwide community—listening to one another with open minds and mutual respect." "Dr. Azcarate's message focuses on keeping conversations both respectful and productive," noted Lizzy Hammer, a junior leader trainer. "The conversation doesn't have to be comfortable for all involved, but it should always be safe."

Andy Brett '07, another leader trainer, elaborated. "The leader's job is to make sure that all the participants in the conversation feel safe. But uncomfortable conversations can mirror parts of the Princeton experience, which tells us that it's OK to question someone's assertions or beliefs, as long as it's done respectfully. That can be one of the best ways to learn about others and about yourself." Often, the most difficult part of facilitating can be deciding exactly when it's necessary. "The two frosh trip groups I've led have had very different tolerance levels for certain topics, which can make it a challenge to determine an acceptable level of uncomfortability," remarked OA leader Alex Brousseau '08. Indeed, much of Dr. Azcarate's training focuses on when a conversation should be facilitated or stopped. He notes that it's OK to call a time-out in a conversation and put it off until there's more time to devote to it—or until people have had time to reflect on what was said.

This emphasis on having difficult conversations during the trip doesn't mean the old Frosh Trip model is being phased out; to the contrary, the goal is to enhance the Frosh Trip experience to prepare students for the truly important conversations they'll encounter at Princeton and in the world beyond FitzRandolph gate.

Leadership Skills for Life

by Rory Truex '07

If you can pass the "lost frosh simulation" on your Outdoor Action Leader Training Trip, you can do just about anything. At least that's what I tell myself. This past year I worked with Princeton in Asia to develop a new service program, Summer of Service (SOS). I led a group of ten

Princeton undergraduates (including several other OA Leaders) on an eight-week trip in rural China to found an English immersion program for Chinese university students of minority backgrounds. The SOS trip was by far the most difficult and rewarding leadership experience I've had, and OA training helped me every step of the way.

OA gives you confidence, a confidence that extends beyond the outdoors. I can remember the "lost frosh sim" quite well. It was about 11 at night, and we had gotten into camp late after suffering a host of simulations. I was feeling grumpy and hypoglycemic. Then John was missing, and it was my job to organize the group and find him. Naturally, one of the other Leader Trainers went ASR (acute stress reaction) on me, and I distinctly recall a feeling of hopelessness as I watched everything collapse around me. Then it happened, that sort of calm self-assuredness that guides us through these crisis situations, and I was able to get the group together and finish out the sim. I can't count the times I had that mix of emotions in China this past summer. Something would go wrong (program



Group S35 in Pennsylvania



C84 in the Catskills takes a break on the summit

participants lost in Beijing, late for class, violently ill, etc.), and after that initial jolt of worry, the self-assuredness guided me through until the problem was solved. It's when you trust your judgment that you can take on a leadership role, and OA develops that judgment.

In China, the soft skills were even more important. People are more likely to suffer from homesickness and culture shock than severe hypothermia and volume shock. The magic of OA lies in the group, the bonding that occurs over the week as a result of forming, norming, storming, and performing. It is the job of the OA leader to guide the group through these processes and make sure all members are comfortable and productive. China layered the stages of culture shock on top of the stages of group dynamics, resulting in an interesting blend of group issues and personal challenges. I can recall the first week; about half the group clicked instantly, while a couple individuals seemed to be left out because they had more difficulty adjusting to the new environment. That's a Rick Curtis classic. My 'leader radar' picked it up, and after a few good feelings talks and some group activities, the problem was solved and the SOS group was whole again.

I initially embarked on OA leader training hoping to learn some



OA Leaders contribute a tremendous amount to Princeton

outdoor skills, meet new people, and lead a frosh trip in the fall. It has taken me two frosh trips and the Summer of Service program to realize that I carry OA with me even when I'm not in the woods. The training has made me a more socially conscious human being, a more thoughtful friend, and a more capable leader. This next year, two new leaders will take over Summer of Service, and they will face the array of challenges that come with running an English immersion program in rural China. These challenges are not too different from those we face in the woods with our frosh every September, and I firmly believe that the best training for these future leaders is not Chinese instruction or cultural sensitivity class, but a week in the woods on a Leader Training Trip. The lessons learned on those trips outlive the games and memories that teach them, and they can be applied to any leadership situation.

Getting Dirty and Getting to Know Yourself: Self Discovery on OA

by Meredith Kleiner '07

"Only Princeton kids would have a conversation like this!" This exclamation can be heard leaping from the mouths of freshman on any Outdoor Action Frosh Trip. The cause being conversations ranging from how fun algorithms are to discussing the current politics of some obscure country that the bright young freshmen's older leaders have never even heard of. Each year I lead a trip I find myself more and more amazed at how diverse and interesting the incoming freshmen are. It is no surprise they find themselves in such fascinating conversations for they are newly minted Princeton students. But what makes these freshmen even greater is that by the end of those grimy five days in OA they become themselves, which is far more interesting than being just a Princeton student.

One would be hard pressed to find an incoming freshman who did not have a preconceived idea of what a 'Princeton student' is. As a senior, I look at them through lenses of experience and see the thought bubbles above their heads "I'm the quintessential math major," "I'm the sweet Princeton athlete," and of course, "I'm going to have to buy more polo shirts to fit in here!" Outdoor Action bursts all of these bubbles. If every freshman remained irrevocably pinned to their bubble thought, Princeton would be a miserably dull place.

Anyone who has participated in a Frosh Trip can attest to the fact that walking into Dillon Gym on that very first day at Princeton could easily be classified as anxiety producing. Instead of encountering

A Hitchhiker on OA

by Glenn Morris '72

For forty-five minutes or so, Outdoor Adventure group, OA94, sprawled on sun-warmed rocks precipitously looming above the Delaware Water Gap a thousand feet below. It was the first break on a day long hike and it was spectacular. Two skeins of geese, looking as small as pigeons, followed the Delaware River south. Only the grumble of traffic traveling Interstate 80 sullied the moment.

For me, a tag along on the hike at the invitation of OA Director Rick Curtis '79 and the welcoming consent of the comfortably melded group, it was an "Oh My Gosh" stop. I tried awkwardly to share my enthusiasm, but for troop OA94, this was not an interpretive overlook, but a place to hang and munch at the end of a steep hike. Seven more miles of an easy-going ramble remained.

The camaraderie and trust of the group unfolded over the rest of the trek. OA94 mingled, joked and razzed one another along the trail. Apprehension and personal uneasiness had vanished. I had caught up with them two days before they would leave the shared challenge of one unknown experience before moving into dorms to face another. They were all grins, giggles and a few bug bites.

Through OA94, I sampled a healthier, better rounded Princeton than the one I experienced as a freshman in 1968. (Outdoor Action did not exist!) This is evidence that, as I have grown older, Princeton has grown wiser about its opportunities to nurture and educate the whole being of the students who are in its trust.

Outdoor Action and the Frosh Trip, represent one of the best examples of an institution exploring ways to broaden its traditional scope in order to become a more fulfilling educational experience.

Yeah, really.

And now that you're on the other side, it was just a walk in the park, right?

Case made.

There's something else. You can never really explain Outdoor Action and the Frosh Trip to someone who has never experienced anything like it. But you can show someone the whole new world, within and without, you discovered when you were there.

Thanks to OA94.

OA Alumni News & Notes

'The Princeton Student,' the freshmen encounter over one hundred screaming Princeton students, also known as OA Leaders, shouting "OA" and "10" at the top of their lungs. They face the daunting image of people in costumes, waving flags and the occasional blow up animal, shouting at the top of their lungs muddled letters and numbers "BF26LH97G13!" What's even worse: there is not a polo shirt in site. Where are all the "Princeton students"? You're looking at them, all those wild OA Leaders.

Outdoor Action is truly a unique experience. OA encourages freshmen to leave behind the categorized 'Princeton student' and be themselves. It puts together twelve real Princeton students, twenty-four hours a day, for six days in a row. By challenging themselves in a safe environment like OA, the freshmen get to know themselves as they get to know their peers. By realizing how different they all are from each other, and with encouragement from their leaders, they understand that being a Princeton student is not about assimilating to the existing stereotype, but rather reshaping Princeton by bringing their own personal spice to the mix. At the end of those transforming six days of Frosh trip, the freshmen return dirty and smelly, there is no question of that. But there is also no question that through all the bug bites and grime their confidence and individuality shines through like the excited white-toothed smile on a wilderness-dirtied face.

Professor John Gager, OA Leader & Climber retires

Professor John Gager, a well-known faculty member in the Department of Religion, retired this year after more than 35 years of teaching at Princeton. John has been an Outdoor Action leader and an active mentor in OA's rock climbing community since the early 1990's. He served as master of Forbes College from 1992 to 2000. In 1998, he received the President's Award for Distinguished Teaching and in May 2006 received Princeton's Behrman Award for distinguished achievement in the humanities. John will be continuing his involvement as a member of the Friends of OA Board and as the faculty advisor to the Climbing Program.

Josh Miner '43 Award Winner

This years' **Josh Miner '43** Experiential Education award was presented at Reunions to **Marty Johnson '81**. The award is given annually to "a graduate of Princeton University who has provided outstanding leadership in the fields of experiential or outdoor education." Marty is president and founder of **Isles, Inc.**, a Trenton-based community development organization. Founded in 1981 when Marty was a senior at Princeton University, Isles manages self-help programs in community planning and research, real estate development, environmental health, urban agriculture, job training and education, wealth creation and regional organizing and analysis.



GR50 - New friends on the Appalachian Trail in Vermont

Notes from the Trailhead

Send us your latest stories on the enclosed membership form.

Bernie Van Der Hoeven '59 stated "Winky and I did a five-day backpacking trip to the Wind River Range, WY, in July—spectacular! Will do another trip in Eastern Sierras, CA, this July and then back to Wind River in 2007—as long as my body can handle 35 lbs. for 10-12 miles!

David Kane '81 has been doing lots of whitewater and ocean surf kayaking in Maryland as well as a yearly mountain bike trip down the C&O Canal.

Rick and Shannon Rochelle '87 are both working for NOLS Alaska (National Outdoor Leadership School) in administrative roles and as instructors.

Torrey McMillan '95 completed the Canadian Ski Marathon last February for the second time (100 miles, 2 days, classical Nordic skiing). She's hoping to finish building her cedar-strip sea kayak this summer so she can get it on the water in Maine at the end of the summer.

Meredith Currier '98 is working for Hurricane Island Outward Bound as the Program Director for Experiential Programs in Traditional Wooden Boatbuilding/Sail Training.

Anna Levy-Warren '01 and Louis Turgel ('01) were married in the Berkshire's in September. She writes "Our fabulous 'outdoorsy' Princeton friends bought us a gift certificate to kayak to our hearts content in our choice of amazing locations which we are looking forward to doing!"

Nicole "Chinook" McClean '02 headed off to Cape Town, South Africa for some hiking and then headed to the White Nile in Uganda for some grade 5 whitewater raft guiding.

Casey Passmore '05 is working for the San Joaquin Outdoor School, teaching fifth and sixth graders outdoor education in the beautiful coastal redwoods near Santa Cruz, CA.

Former Leader Trainers **Meghan Mullarkey '02** and **Wilkie Kiefer '04** were married in Seattle on August 26 with a number of OA friends including OA Director **Rick Curtis '79** at the wedding.

Quotes from FT 2006 Participants

My OA trip was my first experience in U.S. and I fully took advantage of it. I learned many new things, I met many wonderful people and I admired the beautiful sceneries of US landscapes. My friends (and here I mean all my colleagues from L45) introduced me to a new country and a new lifestyle. I will always remember this trip as one of the best I've ever had.

- freshman from Chisinau, Moldova

Taking the OA trip was the second wonderful decision I have made about my college life (the first was deciding to go to Princeton). As an international student never been to the U.S. before, my OA group gave me a warm welcome. Not only did I learn the basic skills of backpacking, camping, and canoeing, I also made my first group of college friends, and enjoyed an unforgettable trip.

- freshman from Beijing, China

I really had a good time with VA71, and, taking into account that I am from Romania, and those were basically my first 7 days in the U.S., the trip was surely a way of discovering the country and the people for me. All my nine trip colleagues offered me very distinctive characters, but overall, I really was able to discover their common values and beliefs, way of life, and means of living and thus attribute these to a more general American sense of living. On the "outdoor" part of the experience, I thoroughly enjoyed hiking and camping and the most, the woods.

- freshman from Lasi, Romania