

THIRTY FIVE YEARS (*PLUS*) IN THE GAY OUTDOORS

HOW IT STARTED

In December 1985, an avid cross country skier thought that it would be fun to share his enthusiasm for the sport with other gay men. So he placed an ad in “The West Ender” seeking others who might be interested in skiing. It worked! A subsequent issue of the club newsletter noted: “A dozen or so men got together and spent the winter enjoying the freedom of the outdoors with a supportive group of gay friends.” *Out and About* was born!

According to some of the original members of this group, the first ski outings were in Jan. 1986. The original ski club proved very successful. However, when summer arrived, the guys missed the companionship they had on the ski trips. So they started planning other outdoor activities. Soon there was a year round calendar of things to do. Then, as now, everything was done by enthusiastic volunteers who planned and lead the activities. The volunteer system was so effective that the July 1993 edition of the club newsletter contained the following:

“The concepts behind Out and About are unique and powerful. There is no Executive body: only volunteers who lead events, organize functions, tend to group business and look after our cross country skiing and cycling activities. Members with experience freely share their knowledge with those less experienced to foster participation by more members in more activities. Our events always seem to engender fantastic group camaraderie and empathy.”

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

At first the club had no name, but on one of the earlier trips to Hope, the group spent a day or two in a rented cabin, and a few hours of brainstorming produced the name “Out and About”. Apparently there were lots of ideas but they finally settled on the concept that “We are out and we are about!” The third club newsletter bore the new name. Eventually the newsletter also acquired the

colourful name “Bushwacker”. Likely there were a lot of giggles associated with the choice of that title and the possible interpretations of it.

ENTER THE INTERNET

Early membership communications relied almost entirely on the quarterly publication and distribution of the Bushwacker. There were also telephone committees and networks to facilitate communications that couldn't wait for the next newsletter. The arrival of computers and the Internet soon changed all of that. Our first website was created by a member volunteer in 1999. This new technology greatly changed the way the club functions because it allowed for constant posting of events and notification of new postings. “Bushwacker” ceased to be published around 2012 in favour of an increasing internet presence.

MEETUP.COM AND A NEW WEBSITE

By the summer of 2015, the original website had grown “long in the tooth” and was difficult to maintain or enhance. We adopted Meetup.com as a method to advertise our events and attract new members as well. A couple of years later another member created a new, mostly information website (it does not support scheduling) which remains as oavancouver.org. As of this writing (April 2020) Meetup shows about 250 members (some of whom are still in their 3 month trial phase)

BECOMING A REGISTERED SOCIETY

Up until 1998 the club had very little formal structure. However, in Sept. 1998, because of legal concerns, we incorporated as a society under the British Columbia “Society Act” and filed the name “ Out and About Gay Men’s Outdoor Adventure Society”. This incorporation required the club to have a more formal structure so we now do have a Board of Directors and other structure as required by the Society Act. However, the club still adheres to the original volunteer structure for organizing and running events and hopes to retain that operational structure. The club officers confine their functions to those administrative responsibilities required under the Society Act. Planning of all events falls to individual club members. What you see on our Meetup.com calendar is there because someone created an event and published it. To facilitate and encourage

this planning, the club has always had quarterly planning meetings. Club members gather at these meetings to discuss the results of past events and put forward their plans for future events.

Periodic meetings are still held, as it is felt they provide a good stimulus for ideas, as well as a fine opportunity for a social gathering. The past thirty five years have seen a great variety of outdoor and social events appear on the club calendars. In addition to the original skiing we have done a lot of hiking, camping, backpacking, cycling, canoeing, kayaking, horseback riding, downhill skiing, houseboat trips as well as potluck dinners, games nights and a whole variety of social events. For many years we had entries in the Gay Pride Parade. We also had a group who organized Murder Mystery Weekends every year, with scripts prepared by enthusiastic volunteers. These were highly popular weekend getaways to Manning Park where a scripted murder mystery was reenacted over the weekend.

Another of our highlights has been an annual exchange with the Portland Adventure group. We acted as hosts to visitors from Portland during Gay Pride weekend and were in turn invited to Portland for the Labour Day weekend. We have been featured in many gay media items. Though most of our activities have been local, we have had trips organized to Big Sur, Death Valley, Hawaii, Mexico and various parts of British Columbia, other parts of Canada and the United States. So thank you founding members for coming up with this great idea. You have provided many guys with many hours of fun in the outdoors.

Not only has *Out and About* provided a great networking system to get guys together who enjoy outdoor activities, it has also been a superb social networking system through which many lifelong friendships and relationships have developed. As someone wrote in one of our early newsletters: "Out and About is a great way to experience the outdoors and indulge in the joy of living, but it also offers us the chance to meet new people and make new friends." A great addition to the gay community in Vancouver!

WK June 2011

SB April 2020