



The Story of the Colorado Outward Bound School

How the Colorado Outward Bound School came to be.

Kurt Hahn was born in 1886 in Berlin, Germany to Jewish parents. When he was nineteen, Hahn suffered a severe sunstroke. His recovery required him to stay inside, in dark conditions for a year and avoid sun and heat for the rest of his life. During this time, Hahn developed an idea for a new kind of school that would focus on nurturing personal responsibility, kindness, and justice.

Hahn identified **six declines** that he felt were the fall of modern youth:

1. **Decline of Fitness** due to modern methods of locomotion/activity
2. **Decline of Initiative and Enterprise** due to the widespread disease of spectatoritis (excessive indulgence in forms of amusement in which one is a passive spectator rather than an active participant)
3. **Decline of Memory and Imagination** due to the confused restlessness of modern life
4. **Decline of Skill and Care** due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship
5. **Decline of Self-Discipline** due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquilizers
6. **Decline of Compassion** due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted or “spiritual death”

In response to these declines, Hahn also came up with **four solutions** to combat these declines.

1. **Fitness Training** – to compete with one’s self in physical fitness; in doing so, train the discipline and determination of the mind through the body
2. **Expeditions** – to engage in long, challenging endurance tasks
3. **Projects** – involving crafts and manual skills
4. **Rescue Service** – first aid, fire-fighting, etc.

Seven years later, after a successful academic and professional career, Hahn co-founded and became the first headmaster of Schule Schloss Salem, a private boarding school in Germany in 1920. It was here that Hahn put his ideas into action. During this time, Adolf Hitler began his rise to power and Hahn began speaking out against the Nazi regime. His public criticism of Hitler resulted in his imprisonment for five days before he was released after an appeal by the British Prime Minister. Hahn was forced to leave Germany and settled in Scotland. While in Scotland, Hahn founded Gordonstoun, a boarding school, in 1934. He used the principles of his curriculum that placed equal emphasis on development of character, leadership, and a sense of service with intellectual studies.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, Lawrence Holt – a partner in a large merchant-shipping enterprise and father of a Gordonstoun graduate – insisted that faulty training was the cause of many seamen’s unnecessary deaths in the Battle of the Atlantic. Holt told Hahn that he was extremely disappointed in the quality of sailor he was getting. Hahn proposed starting a new kind of school in Aberdovey, Wales: a one-month course that would foster “physical fitness, enterprise, tenacity and compassion among British youth.” The pair agreed to name this school Outward Bound (a nautical term for sending out a ship from home). The school opened in 1941.

This new school promoted a philosophy that training through challenges produced better outcomes and greater impact than training for challenges because it created transferable character traits – “less training for the sea than through the sea.” This distinction – training through rather than for – is at the essence of the Outward Bound dynamic. The sea, mountains, and desert provide training that no



institute or university can offer. These landscapes, in tandem with Outward Bound principles, teach the hard, technical skills necessary for survival, but also teach the relevant skills necessary for life.

In addition to his other educational philosophies, Kurt Hahn implemented **five educational tenets** aimed at training leaders while working with Outward Bound:

Five Tenets				
Enterprising Curiosity	Indefatigable Spirit	Tenacity in Pursuit	Readiness for Sensible Self-Denial	Compassion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to new experiences, information, ideas, and people • Critical thinking • Love of learning • Resourcefulness • Creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience • Optimism • Zest • Enthusiasm • Playfulness • Sense of purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not giving up effort despite hardship • Resolve or grit • Courage to continue seeking a goal, even if you are not sure of success • Inner-strength • Excellence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving up, or doing something for a greater good • Giving up instant gratification for future accomplishments • Challenging yourself to see a different point of view • Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to value differences in people, opinion, cultures • Empathy • Forgiveness • Humility • Kindness • Generosity

Josh Miner encountered the Outward Bound concept after World War II while teaching at the Gordonstoun School. He taught at the school for about two years and in 1960, began working with a group of American educators (including Chuck Froelicher, Gilbert Burnett, and John Kemper) to open an Outward Bound School in Colorado. The group adopted Hahn’s philosophy and founded Outward Bound USA in Marble, Colorado. The school officially opened on June 16, 1962 and ran three courses that year.

The Colorado Outward Bound School still operates out of Marble, Colorado, with bases in Leadville, Colorado and Moab, Utah as well. COBS now runs an average of 100 courses each year and serves over 3,000 students. The Colorado Outward Bound School uses the educational principles described above throughout our courses to achieve our mission of changing lives through challenge and discovery.