

# A Timeline: Stroll through 50 Years of AEOE History

## Defining Moments in AEOE History A Detailed "Trail Guide"

*Prepared for the AEOE 50th Anniversary by Janice Smith, AEOE Historian*

**1925.** The roots of Residential Outdoor Education, as we know it today, date back to the early days of school camping.

On this date, the first program of this type in California was experimental in nature and was jointly established by the Los Angeles City Public Schools and the U.S. Forest Service. On this date, children from Los Angeles Public Schools traveled up to Clear Creek in the Angeles National Forest to take part in a conservation project to plant trees after a forest fire. The project was started by Howard Bell.

**1940.** The W.K. Kellogg Foundation inaugurated a community school camp near Battle Creek, Michigan called Clear Lake Camp. It was considered to be very successful.

**1942.** The State Department of Education hosted a National conference due to the success of Clear Lake Camp in Michigan.

The purpose was to spread the word about putting children back in touch with nature in a school-out- of-school environment. Representatives from San Diego City and County attended this conference. As a result, they gained knowledge and inspiration in planning an outdoor education program for San Diego County.

**1946.** On March 17, the California Pilot Project was organized in San Diego and marked the first organized outdoor school effort in California.

The first group of San Diego sixth graders journeyed with their classroom teachers to Camp Cuyamaca. The experience of

spending five days and four nights in the mountains as part of a sixth grader's science and social studies lessons was unusual at the time, only being done in a few other places throughout the United States.

**1948.** More Outdoor Schools opened in California due to the success of San Diego's program.

The concept was a good one: Provide first hand experiences with nature and environmental sciences while, at the same time, exposing children to social situations requiring the application of democratic principals and individual responsibility. The idea caught on and new schools camps were opened.

\* Long Beach School Camping Program at Camp Hi-Hill, April 19, 1948 \* Los Angeles School Camping Program at Clear Creek, 1949 \* Culver City School Camping Program at Camp Josepho \* Garvey School District Camping Program at Camp Paivika \* Along with Coalinga, Huron, El Segundo, Carmel, Santa Clara County and San Mateo County.

**1949.** People began to hold periodic informal meetings at various outdoor school sites.

Due to this, Howard Bell formed the Los Angeles County Camping and Outdoor Education Advisory Committee. This committee provided leadership and acted as a professional catalyst for early workers in Outdoor Education. It operated until 1954.

**1950.** On October 14-15, the first conference of Southern California School Camping Staffs and Teacher Training Schools Personnel was held at Camp Hi-Hill.

**1951.** Early Outdoor Education Legislation

On September 22, the LA Co. Camping and Outdoor Education Advisory Committee took the initiative to prepare legislation on Assembly Bill No. 3389, authorizing city school districts to conduct classes in Outdoor Education. This early law labeled the program "Outdoor Science Education and Conservation Education."

**1954.** On May 15, The National Association for Outdoor

Education (A.O.E.) was founded.

At a conference for outdoor teachers at Camp Hi-Hill, a dozen or so visionary and dedicated men discussed the financial challenges at starting a professional organization for outdoor educators. Realizing it would take a lot of money; each man reached into his wallet and placed a dollar bill on an old stump. This action was the start of AEOE, as we know it today.

A volunteer steering committee of 19 members was formed and a tentative calendar was established for a series of three Outdoor Education Conferences to be conducted during the school year.

• Camp Paivika, Crestline, October 30-31, 1954 • Camp Colby, January 15-16, 1955 • Camp Cuyamaca, San Diego, May 15, 1955

**1955.** At this conference on May 15, the AOE constitution and bylaws were presented to the association members.

**1955.** AOE Southern Section officially established.

**1957.** AOE Northern Section officially established.

**1957.** With the success of Sputnik (Russian spacecraft) in the space race, a perceived educational crisis arose across the nation.

In the name of "national defense," the U.S. government increased funding to public education in support of more programs that emphasized science, mathematics and foreign language. The nations schools responded by moving more to the conservative end of the philosophical spectrum and, in doing so, also changed many of the school camps to more school-like programs; in general, less recreation, more focused learning. With this came the term "outdoor School," or "School in the Woods" or "Environmental Outdoor Education Center." The term Resident Outdoor Education eventually predominated with the realization that outdoor experiences can be both fun and educational. (George and Louise Donaldson, "Whatever Happened to School Camping?" Camping Magazine/Feb. 1982.) (*wow, deja vu...*)

**1950's and 60's** pushed for new outdoor school programs, improved teaching skills, greater curriculum definition and increased training to benefit the preparation for outdoor educators.

**1961.** Howard Bell passed away.

Howard Bell was influential in bringing about the incorporation of A.O.E and served on the executive board for many years. He is considered the founding father of the association. In his memory the association established the "Howard Bell Award" to pay tribute to individuals who are considered to be outstanding contributors to the field of environmental and outdoor education.

A piece of the original stump that our founding fathers each placed a dollar bill on the day AOE was founded, was added to the award at some point in our history. It is not really known exactly when the stump became a part of the award, just that it still exists that way today and probably will for a long time to come.

**1968.** Washington State Section of AOE was formed.

**1970.** The First Earth Day, April 22.

On this day an estimated 20 million people participated in a national environmental teach-in, more commonly known today as Earth Day. It was truly an astonishing grassroots explosion. This event sparked new interest in the environment and ignited a sense of urgency to deal with environmental problems.

**1971.** Environmental Education focus:

In the 1970's, words like "ecology," "energy resource conservation" and "quality of life" became familiar terms. Education focused on the extended classroom approach. The idea was to break down the "four walls" of the traditional classroom and extend learning out into the community to encompass the "total environment." To keep up with these changes and the new emphasis on "Environmental Education," A.O.E. was changed to A.E.O.E., The Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education."

**1972.** Alaska Section of AEOE was formed.

This section was added to AEOE when Larry Squire accepted a position with the Alaska Department of Education as their specialist in Environmental Education. The AEOE executive board voted to accept a new section formed by Larry in Alaska.

**1975.** Alaska Section closed due to financial and other difficulties.

**1980's.** This era brought economic pain to both public education and private programs.

Some outdoor education programs were the first to go and last to be restored. Others developed new alternatives to resident programs with explorations into day experiences and adventure programs.

**1981.** Washington State Section closed.

**1981.** The word "National" was dropped from the Association (AEOE).

AEOE was to be known thereafter as the "California" Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education with sections in Northern and Southern California. The main reason to change from national to state status was due to the inability of the Washington State Section to exist as they had in the past. It was also believed that a state organization would be more effective in improving environmental and outdoor education in California where the organization resides. (Bernie Lemm, AEOE Newsletter, 1981).

**1982.** [COSA \(California Outdoor School Administrators\)](#) was formed.

COSA is an educational organization with members representing all counties choosing to participate. Each county or district operated outdoor science school program is allowed one representative vote at COSA meetings. Since 1978 California outdoor school administrators have met on a regular basis to discuss and take action on a wide variety of outdoor education related issues. COSA provides certification in conjunction with the

California State Department of Education to Residential Outdoor Science Schools throughout California. The ROSS (Residential Outdoor School) guide was created as a professional standards program to provide an evaluation process for certification. The guide provides guidelines for the outdoor school staff and the certification team to complete the evaluation process.

**1985.** AEOE continued to carry on although membership and participation was low.

In the fall edition of the Northern California Section, Pat Crocker, the Northern Chair, wrote an article on the front page explaining the difficulties the board has been experiencing for the past four years. She calls on all members to get more involved and support outdoor education or the Northern Section would have to fold. They had 42 paying members at the time. Southern Section membership was a bit higher than the Northern Section, but they had more participation from members at conferences and could rely more on volunteers.

**1986.** The Northern Board commits to hang on and try to keep the Northern Section in existence.

Lots of discussion and brainstorming on the part of the board to find creative ways to make things work in difficult times. They continued to hold annual conferences and work to increase interest and participation. The Northern Section pulled through.

**1990's.** AEOE Headquarters was moved from Hi-Hill Outdoor School to LA County's Wrightwood Outdoor School in Wrightwood, where it exists today.

Hi-Hill Outdoor School had been the permanent home there since the inception of AOE, but when Bernie Lemm retired after serving 10 years as the organization's State Coordinating Secretary, there was no one left to take on the job there.

Over time, membership slowly increased in both the Northern and Southern Sections, although membership hovered around a hundred or so for both. Participation and interest improved enough to have fun and informative conferences that commonly brought in 60 to 150 participants. Differences between the

Northern and Southern Sections made efforts to agree on issues and their degree of importance a stumbling block to move the organization forward. Recognizing their differences and agreeing to move beyond them, dedicated board members began to rebuild relationships and strive for common ground.

Working together, board members in both Northern and Southern Sections struggled to bring about whatever changes they thought necessary to increase membership and facilitate better communication between the two sections. Efforts were made at conferences to get members to fill out questionnaires and give feedback to the board as to what members wanted from their organization to inspire more participation at conferences and in the newsletters. A visionary statewide executive board meeting was held to discuss the direction that AEOE should take to increase membership and once again become a leading force in environmental and outdoor education. All agreed that more networking and some reorganization would be necessary.

**1997.** AEOE began investigating their 501c3 non-profit status.

Ever since AEOE started in 1954, it has functioned as a non-profit organization. Very dedicated volunteers have always run AEOE. There are no paid positions, only a few insignificant stipends.

During this time, the board members started seriously looking into the question of AEOE non-profit status. Unfortunately, there was not much about it in the history, nor did anyone really know much about the structure of non-profit 501c3 organizations. The quest to learn more began.

Debbie Carraway, the Statewide Coordinating Secretary at the time, took on the task of investigation and found that while AEOE has had state nonprofit status, AEOE has never had 501c3 non-profit status with the IRS. In the past, the organization's budget was too small to qualify for a legal non-profit, so this was not that significant. But with membership growing consistently, it was becoming more evident that a change in status was due. In order for AEOE to function effectively and legally, it had to get non-profit status.1998.

At the Spring Statewide Conference at SCICON Outdoor School

the Executive Board voted to start a web site to be created by Dan Allison, the first webmaster. The web site was to be called [aeoe.org](http://aeoe.org).

**1998.** More Outreach began:

AEOE board members made more efforts to network with other environmental organizations and reach out beyond the traditional residential outdoor school programs to include more day programs, classroom teachers, parks and recreation interpretive programs, adventure, experiential and camping programs and community nature centers. As a result the membership began to grow rapidly.

**1999.** 400 people attended the statewide conference at Sly Park Environmental Education Center, "*Building Bridges to the New Millennium.*"

The Northern Section membership soared. The executive board was thrilled.

**1999.** AEOE became the California affiliate of NAAEE (North American Association of Environmental Educators).

Stephen "Hoppy" Hopkins and Dan Allison worked hard to make the relationship official.

Taken from the NAAEE Mission statement:

*NAAEE is a network of professionals, students, and volunteers working in the field of environmental education throughout North America and in over 55 countries around the world. Since 1971, the Association has promoted environmental education and supported the work of environmental educators.*

*NAAEE is made up of people who have thought seriously about how people become literate concerning environmental issues. NAAEE members believe education must go beyond consciousness-raising about these issues. It must prepare people to think together about the difficult decisions they have to make concerning environmental stewardship, and to work together to improve, and try to solve, environmental problems.*

*NAAEE recognizes the need for a coherent body of information about environmental issues. Its members also recognize that information and analysis are only part of an effective program. To be truly effective, this body of knowledge must be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum and into all types of educating institutions for the widest array of audiences.*

**2000.** 320 people attended the statewide conference at Thousand Pines Outdoor School in Crestline, "[Environmental Education: Teaching from the Heart.](#)"

The Southern Section membership doubled. It appeared as though the new millennium (along with a great deal of publicity effort) had brought with it a breath of fresh air to the organization.

**2000.** COSA (California Outdoor School Administrators) began coordinating their spring meeting in conjunction with AEOE spring conferences.

This opened doors to more effective one-on-one communication between administrators and naturalists and increased job networking for residential outdoor school programs.

**2000.** AEOE members voted out the old triangle logo in favor of a new oak tree logo.

The oak tree is synonymous with California and also represents strength and knowledge (as in, "the tree of knowledge"). [More about the Oak Logo here.](#)

**2000.** A new annual sectional award was established to recognize working naturalists in the field called "[The Environmental Educator of the Year.](#)"

The first Northern winner was [Stephen "Hoppy" Hopkins](#) from Sly Park Environmental Center, and first Southern winner was [Janice Smith](#) from Cuyamaca Outdoor School.

**2001.** AEOE continued to network with other environmental organizations to establish more professional relationships.

Each one has an AEOE representative that attends their meetings

to stay on top of what is going on with them. Our on-going relationships include [GSEEC](#) (Golden State Environmental Education Consortium), [AEE](#) (Association for Experiential Education), [OGN](#) (Orion Grassroots Network), [CSTA](#) (California Teachers Association), [ACA](#) (American Camp Association), [NAI](#) (National Association for Interpretation), [CREEC](#) (California Regional Environmental Education Community), and [ROEE](#) (Regional Outdoor Environmental Education).

**2001.** AEOE hired a lawyer to help in the quest to attain 501c3 non-profit status.

The lawyer selected was one who specialized in helping organizations like AEOE. In order to attain retroactive non-profit status for AEOE, some structural changes to the organizations had to be made. The [Articles of Incorporation](#) were rewritten and Dan Allison rewrote the [AEOE bylaws](#). Zyanne Gardner was made the Chief Financial Officer and began work on setting up a statewide treasury.

Consolidating the two treasuries (Northern & Southern sections) was a difficult task, since bookkeeping was done quite differently between the two sections, and over the years there has been some inconsistency as the treasurers have changed. Once all of the financial paperwork was done, it was sent in for approval.

**2002.** The California Plan for Environmental Education (CPEE) was published.

The final document, called *Education and the Environment: Strategic Initiatives for Enhancing Education in California*, was created thanks to an incredible effort by many different people, agencies and organizations throughout the state. AEOE and COSA were two organizations among many that had a significant influence on the final outcome of the plan.

**2004.** AEOE still awaits approval for 501c3 non-profit status.

This change in non-profit status will change the way the board can raise money for conferences and events. After approval, AEOE will qualify for many grants, and donations made to AEOE will be tax deductible. Many thanks to Debbie Carraway, Zyanne

Gardner and George Stratman for the incredible amount of work they have devoted to the cause.

**2004.** The Annual Statewide Spring Conference at Camp Hess Kramer, Malibu: "*Environmental Education: Teaching Outside the Lines*"

AEOE celebrated its 50 year anniversary as an organization. The AEOE board met in August to discuss formulation of a strategic plan and vision statement for AEOE for the next 50 years.

**2005** AEOE began surveys of members and "external stakeholders" to determine our strategic plan and help us define our mission and vision for the NEXT 50 years!