

## **A Psycho-Evolutionary Theory of Outdoor Education**

*James Neill*  
*Graham Ellis-Smith*  
*Kaushal Desai*  
*Ricardo Sierra*  
*Dr Tonia Gray*

In recent history the living environment for human beings has been massively transformed through the industrial revolution and the information age. Nevertheless, the modern human being remains genetically well designed for indigenous living. In fact, many of modern human's woes and ailments may well stem from over-domestication. This article proposes that outdoor education can be understood as a cultural adaptation to the rapid shift away from indigenous life styles. Research findings and case examples are used to illustrate the potential utility of a psycho-educational theory of outdoor education. In North America, for example, there are many programs based on native American Indian philosophies and practices. In Australia, there is an increasingly variety and depth of Australian Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices being incorporated into outdoor education. Research findings from varied fields, such as psychology, palaeontology, permaculture and nature tourism are used to support the argument that a psycho-evolutionary theory could catalyse new connections within outdoor education (e.g., between academics and practitioners) and to related fields (e.g., between aboriginal studies and outdoor education).

### ***About the authors***

James Neill, University of Canberra, Australia  
*Email: [james@wilderdom.com](mailto:james@wilderdom.com)*

Graham Ellis-Smith, Kadjinny Enterprises, Australia  
*Email: [kadjininy@wanet.com.au](mailto:kadjininy@wanet.com.au)*

Kaushal Desai, Adventure India, India  
*Email: [adventureindia@vsnl.net](mailto:adventureindia@vsnl.net)*

Ricardo Sierra, Hawk Circle Wilderness Programs, USA  
*Email: [ricardo@hawkcircle.com](mailto:ricardo@hawkcircle.com)*

Dr Tonia Gray, University of Wollongong, Australia  
*Email: [toniag@uow.edu.au](mailto:toniag@uow.edu.au)*