

## **OUTDOOR TEAM DEVELOPMENT – POWERFUL TRAINING OR WASTEFUL JOLLY?** by Rob Kelly

For many organisations, Outdoor Development Training came into their consciousness in the mid-1980s. It was found that things happened when you took a disparate group of managers into the unfamiliar outdoor environment. Given a series of 'risky' challenges, disparate became collective and a group became a team. Although it lacked sophistication it had impact. People returned to work behaving differently with a consequent effect on business performance. The effect however was rather general in nature.

Thankfully times have changed and Outdoor Development Training has moved on. No longer a blunt instrument, it is a powerful tool used by many leading organisations to enhance their existing organisation development strategies and leverage improved people performance.

Best practise in this field is an experiential learning approach which can add value to a number of initiatives and strategies in organisations. However, there is a danger with this type of intervention that it becomes a solution in search of a problem. Therefore it is essential to start with the outcomes required and from that decide if an experiential approach is appropriate and then what it would look like. The challenge is to make it relevant to the need of the organisation and the participants in the process. Otherwise people can have a wonderful experience which has little or no transfer to their workplace.

When it is properly focused, Outdoor Development can blend into a range of different development workshops. For example it can be a pivotal experience within teambuilding workshops for intact single site teams and increasingly for multi-site or virtual teams; for exploring issues of personal development; and as an arena for team leaders to hone and test their influence. In these applications tasks are carefully focussed to reflect the teams challenges and needs in moving toward the agreed outcomes. They provide a safe environment to explore team and individual behaviour and to accelerate the openness, trust and communication which underpins team performance.