



PROJECT ASCENT

ADVENTURE. SCIENCE. COMMUNITY. EDUCATION. NATURE. TEAMWORK.

Quarterly
Newsletter

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CONNECTING. PEOPLE. AND NATURE.

Words from our fearless leader

I get the question all the time, "What is Project ASCENT?" I'm so passionate about what we have created and do, yet, every time I'm asked, I still find this question hard to answer. It seems I consistently leave the conversation kicking myself for forgetting something or feeling like my answer was inadequate in some way or another. It finally dawned on me that maybe I was being unnecessarily hard on myself. I mean, it's a very vague question to begin with, the answer to which actually depends on what the questioner already knows about our world. Prerequisite knowledge, if you will. For instance, to understand completely what PA is, one must first know that over the past few generations, childhood has moved predominantly indoors. Couple this with the fact that on average, today's youth spend up to 44 hours per week in front of a screen, and less than 10 minutes a day playing outdoors. Why is this important? Well, my friendly questioner, did you know increasing evidence suggests that access to nature provides children with a myriad of cognitive, emotional, and physical benefits, such as increased ability to concentrate, improved academic performance, reduced stress and aggression levels, and reduced risk of obesity? How about the fact that for too many kids, regular and safe access to nature is determined by race, income, identity, ability, and postal code? I guess the truth is, Project ASCENT is not a question, then, but the answer to all of this. It is a glimmer of hope. It's a chance of lighting that one spark in that one soul that truly needs it.

-ROB CHRISTENSEN

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We're hiring!

Each year, Project ASCENT hires up to 7 young adults as Junior Field Instructors and Junior Watershed Conservationists, and up to 5 adult Field Instructors. Check out the [Work With Us](#) section on our website to download an application and join our team!

WHY CHOSE A PROJECT ASCENT CAMP?

BY JOHN DOWD, BOARD MEMBER & FIELD INSTRUCTOR

Almost everyone remembers their first camping experience, or at least the numerous emotions connected with it. Growing up with a parent or guardian showing the ropes, a scout trip learning to tie knots or even a weekend trip to the closest state or national park. Time in the woods is a boon to the soul, and in today's world that opportunity is disappearing. Future generations are not only finding access more restrictive, but the mere chance to spend time in the great outdoors now seems attached to a much bigger barrier to entry. For a youth whose family doesn't spend time outdoors, there is almost no chance for them to do so, while at the same time prices on gas to get there and equipment to use are so much higher than ever before. All these things culminate into a perfect storm that hurts youth. **Enter Project ASCENT.**



For me, the outdoors was integral to who I am today. I was afforded the opportunity to find myself in the outdoors through programs a lot like Project ASCENT (PA). I continued a small career working with those organizations that aided youth exploration of the outdoors, but never found a group quite like PA. The approach they take is so unique. Yes, they host summer camps, but PA does so much more during and outside of camps. The culture Project ASCENT has created is open and honest, hardworking, caring, humble and driven. The people that participate in it are the kind of people that push themselves, and others around them, to do not only their best, but to find ways to push that limit further. These are the people that can be relied upon to do everything to the best of their ability, and they pick each other up the entire way. With such positivity, I found that I had to become a part of it. I wish I had had such an opportunity when I was young.

For youth, PA approaches the wilderness with an open mind. Exploration is the object, and many youth that participate in the camps learn so much about not only the wilderness, but their position within it. Participants, at a surprisingly young age, learn to become leaders, conservationists, surveyors of the land and protectors of it. The word is “stewards.” More than this, though, participants come out of their shells and experience the outdoors on equal footing with other people their age that come from a variety of different backgrounds. They do this, however, on the same playing field. **It is genuinely equalizing, humbling and empowering.**

This is the way experiencing the outdoors should be. Aside from the personal and emotional growth, PA camps are genuinely a lot of fun. The things kids get to do are beyond what many camps can offer.



Repelling, kayaking, climbing, backpacking, fishing and so much more. These are things other camps boast, but can only do one, or a few, of each within a single camp. PA camps do nearly all of this, and so much more. And for free, providing gear and guidance.

Never have I ever met a more capable and trained staff of experts in the field, who are so good with kids of all ages. Again, I can only wish that I had this opportunity when I was young.

There is no barrier to entry with PA camps, except the limited funding and seats within each allotted camp. These are both issues at the forefront of the minds of the incredible board members that make PA tick. They are always looking for new and innovative strategies to raise funds, staff camps and get more kids outside. Being on a board like this is so much work, but I could never imagine a group I would want to do so with more. I know we all (the board) feel that way. And any person, youth or otherwise, who deals with Project ASCENT or comes to a camp, without fail, feels the same way.

It reminds me of when I started camping. I remember the feelings of an open highway of opportunity, unlimited fun and hope through the outdoors. This is what Project ASCENT truly gifts to kids.

Adventure

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH US



SIGN UPS ARE NOW OPEN!

Chose your Adventure 



Climbing is the Source

BY BOB THORNHILL, FIELD INSTRUCTOR AND ROPES EXPERT

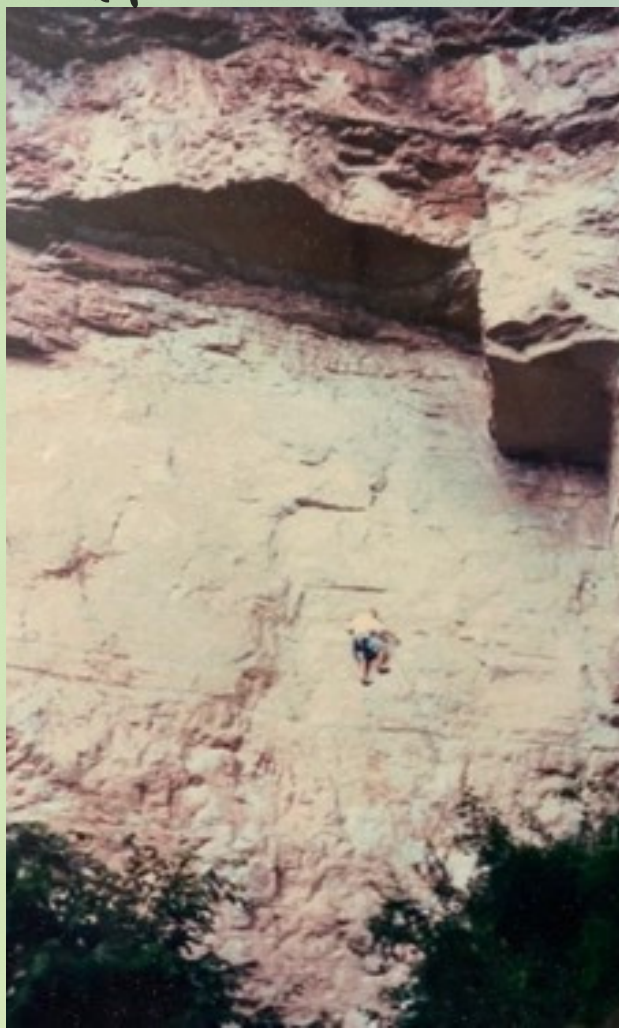


Photo of Bob climbing a Rock Crag in Italy

I don't really know when I started climbing. I do recall my mother telling people stories of me crawling out of my crib as an infant. So, I would guess sometime before that. Anyhow, I was pretty lucky as a child to have a Dad that loved camping. Every chance he could we would load up the old 1960 something Dodge pickup and head to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. We would camp anywhere free. Campgrounds were not in the price range that we could afford in those days. As soon as we set up camp, I was gone, looking for the river, stream, lake and the biggest rocks to climb and jump into the refreshing water.

As I got older, 9 or 10, I noticed that I could challenge my much older brothers to climbing contests of the best rocks we could find. I remember my brothers backing down from some of my challenges and stating that "I climbed like a monkey." This just encouraged me to push harder to sketchier climbs.

When I got into High School, I joined the Sierra Club. It was a Backpacking Club that went for adventures in the woods on weekends to hike, camp, swim, rappel and climb. This was my first real experience climbing with harness, rope and equipment. I recall backpacking into some of the most beautiful waterfalls, setting up camp, climbing shear rock faces, jumping into wonderful refreshing streams and finishing the day sitting around a campfire eating trail mix and discussing the day.

I am reminded of these precious memories each evening when we wind down from an adventure with Project ASCENT.

I initially joined the Army for College money like many people enticed by the opportunity to get scholarships for education. When I got there, I found a brotherhood that led to my twenty-six-year military career. Anyhow, climbing was one of the many training requirements soldiers in my unit had to be efficient at. Saying that, it allowed me to travel around the world and climb in some world-famous climbing areas. And not so famous as well. Several of us loved it more than others. As my wife would say, "He obsesses in something he wants to be good at."

Climbing was my outlet. Every opportunity I had, you could find us on some adventure from Alpine Climbing Volcanoes like Mount Rainier to Lead and Aid Climbing at Smith Rock. It was more than an obsession it was the source that fed my soul. The people you meet and the stories they tell are irreplaceable.



Climbing is the Source

BY BOB THORNHILL, FIELD INSTRUCTOR AND ROPES EXPERT

I remember my family taking a vacation drive down Highway 101 where I would have to stop at every decent climbing area to rope up and climb their local crag. My wife and kids became pretty good climbers themselves. Everywhere we went I had to bring a bag full of climbing gear and my beat up copy of (Rock & Road) Rock Climbing Areas of North America.

Essential in every climber's library.

Today, I find myself wondering through the Cabinets enjoying the beautiful surroundings and passing my knowledge onto members of our local Search and Rescue and most importantly the kids that take advantage of the opportunity to adventure with Project ASCENT. Every camper deserves the opportunity to push themselves beyond their personal known limits. The confidence and self-esteem one can gain from these outings are more than words can say. **I hope they find the one thing that becomes their source.**



Check out this section each quarter for some climbing, belaying, and rappelling tips from our amazing experts here at Project ASCENT.

We've got something **EXCITING** coming...



We're teaming up with some local supporters to bring a brand new experience to our fundraiser fans, and a great new way to help fund our summer Adventures! Check out our July newsletter for more information and a peek into how to gain exclusive access!

Looking Behind

Let's review our 1st quarter!

Another successful Winter Carnival!

The 2023 Winter Carnival was meant to be a success, and it truly felt as if the stars aligned for this day. The Winter Carnival is what the Project ASCENT team deems a mission driven event, with the goal of getting families and children outside and active during a time of year where options for community engagement and activities are slim. If we're being honest, this event makes the Project ASCENT team sweat a little each year. An event of this caliber requires a lot of generosity from a lot of people. Year after year, though, the people of this community pull through and their generosity shines. This year was no exception!

The Winter Carnival had 19 generous sponsors from throughout the community. You can see them listed below! Sponsorships are \$100, but some, like Thompson River Lumber, and Riverfront Motel and Cabins, choose to donate more. We also received a few anonymous donations this year and would like to extend our heartfelt thank you to them, we hope you see this and feel our gratitude!

With those sponsorships we are able to maintain our games and purchase new equipment as necessary, restock what have been deemed as "sweet, sweet prizes", and purchase food and drinks for our happy participants. That's right, all participants get a free meal with a full game card! Thanks to our sponsors we were able to offer six different big-ticket items in our prize booth including Color Zone and Discovery kits for the creative and curious minds of our community. (cont.)



As Project ASCENT does all things, there are embedded benefits in many of the elements of this event. One of those benefits, and probably the most obvious: it's something for families to do together, and a reason to get outside. It's an incredibly social event, and with fun being the focus, it's great for everyone in those dreary months when going outside is a novelty. We had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with one of this year's participating families. Nikki Ericksen of Plains and her family had a particularly special day,

"The winter carnival was exactly what my family needed. My chronically ill son just so happened to be feeling energetic that day. The kids had so much fun, my husband and I got a much-needed rest and infusion of community support. It was heartwarming to see all the businesses giving back. I'm so glad to have learned about ASCENT and all that they do. Thank you!"

Another benefit is the connection, that is, connecting volunteers and participants. We had over 51 amazing community members who showed up bundled and ready to dish out tickets and a happy welcome to all! Over 392 volunteer hours were logged during the planning and execution of this amazing day! What's even better than a crew of this size all working for a common cause? They are ready for next year! One of our more dedicated family of volunteers make a trek all the way from Great Falls each year to help with this event, and when asked why, Misty Davison explained, "Because we love Project ASCENT, the team, and all this program does for kids. The Winter Carnival is a fun way to see the local community enjoy their time outdoors. We always have fun and feel energized, full of warmth, and excitement after watching families enjoy their time. It feels so good to give back!"

Trivia Night Fundraiser @ Limberlost is a hit!



As most of you have probably figured out by now, Project ASCENT does things a little differently. One of our more recent adventures has been adding a new community connection fundraiser to our docket. Thanks to Zach and Kate at Limberlost Brewery, we have hosted three Trivia Night Fundraisers! They have all been wildly successful, we've seen a crowd ranging from 15-30 people each time, bringing in between \$100 and \$400 per night. The categories vary, but each night our participants can expect to see at least one subject deemed "Neature", with various nature-themed questions, a nod to our mission. We are taking a short break from these monthly fundraisers for our upcoming busy season, but as these have been so popular, we don't think this will be the last of this fun adventure!

Looking Ahead

Check out our up and coming events, funding status, and Adventures!

We have funded 3 Summer Adventures!

5th Cornhole Festival Fundraiser

The 2023 annual fundraiser is set for June 24th. It's a day filled with fun, friends, and lots of opportunities to help Project ASCENT raise funds crucial to the success of their mission! This event funds a third of our camp costs, and the majority of our operating costs. We are looking for sponsors for this event, and donations for our accompanying silent auction! If you'd like to become a sponsor or contribute to the Silent Auction, contact our event planner at Andrea@projectascent.org



Tickets go on sale online May 1st!

WE'D LIKE TO THANK ALL OF OUR RECENT DONORS, THEIR GENEROSITY IS



WHAT FUELS OUR MISSION! GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING A DONATION,



ITS ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

- Brita Olson
- Thompson River Lumber
- Eickert Realty, LLC
- Sanders County Feed
- Elliott Realty
- Montana Dakota Services
- Gambles Hardware
- The Pilgeram Ranch
- The Bean Bug
- Mountain West Clothing
- Howard Services
- The Riverfront Hotel and Cabins
- Specialized Cleaning Services
- Rocks and Minerals
- Clark Fork Valley Hospital
- Roy Scott for Sherriff Campaign
- Catherine and Robert Hummel
- DA Davison
- Penny Beckman
- Sarah Fairbank
- Ruth Cheney

Do you want to see your name in the next issue? Help us provide a once-in-a-lifetime Adventure! Follow the link below to donate!



TALK TO US

Questions, comments, concerns, congratulations? We would love to hear from you! Visit our website, shoot us a text or email, call us, write us, or follow us on Facebook for more information and updates!

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"Restore balance. Most kids have technology, school and extracurricular activities covered. It's time to add a pinch of adventure, a sprinkle of sunshine and a big handful of outdoor play."

~ Penny Whitehouse