



PROJECT ASCENT

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

Quarterly
Newsletter

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CONNECTING. PEOPLE. AND NATURE.

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Words from our fearless leader

It was at one of our amazing board meetings when it first occurred to me that in order to be truly transparent, to be ultra-communicative with those who mean so much to us and our programs, that a newsletter might just be the ticket. If you are reading this, you are one of those we hold so dear. Margaret Mead stated, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world."

These words ring so true when I think about our crew, our acquaintances, our community, and the lives we get to impact. I often say that if anyone out there could experience what our adventures do for a child, the impact they have, the positive growth and change they instill in just a few short days, they would forever believe in what we do. With a newsletter, my goal is to bring you closer to that, and to this: Who we are, what we do, how we do it, and what your support truly means and does for these kids and the future of our world.

Personally, I find myself focusing most on who we are, because without that, the what and how are obsolete. We have the most incredible crew, and I am so excited for you to get to know them in this issue and those to follow! In my years with Project ASCENT, I've witnessed that an idea is only as good as the people who believe in it.

Our board, volunteers, and workers truly believe. Where, then, do you fit in? Rest assured, it couldn't be done without support. Without people like you, who care about making a positive difference, like us. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world." she said, followed by, "**Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.**" Thank you for being on our team!

-ROB CHRISTENSEN



We'd like to give a special thank you to the

Finance of America CARES Foundation,

and the **Headwaters Foundation,**

who provided grants that will help fund our 2023 Adventures!

THE PROJECT ASCENT EXPERIENCE

BY JOHN DOWD, BOARD MEMBER & FIELD INSTRUCTOR



It must have been nearly midnight, and every camper and field instructor had gone to bed. Suddenly, the rush of thumping, galloping feet of something hurried through the brush just outside of camp. Not a half hour later, footsteps again, but of two things, tromped through the center of camp. A call from Rob Christensen, founder of the nonprofit Project ASCENT, sent the things running. One tripped over another field instructor's tent pole and the other vaulted nearly 15 feet vertically, up the hill defying gravity, and over a tent shared by two female campers. **The only sound that keyed them into the leap was the heels of the culprit snagging briefly on the top of the tent.** Soon after, again, all was silent in the alpine night air.

The things in question were members of a small family of mountain goats. The group of adventurers spent the next day watching these majestic animals scurry along the cliff face

across the crystal-clear high mountain lake from them. This is just one of the numerous incredible experiences Project ASCENT participants have witnessed over the years. The mission has always been to bring the highest level of safe adventure to those who participate in the camps. That is, to **start youth on lifelong adventures with the outdoors and help them make forever friends and return with stories that will change their views on life for the better.**

The Project ASCENT experience is a truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. One that the hard-working team provides youth every single year.

WE WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

BY ANDREA CHRISTENSEN, STAFF MEMBER

ARFF! No, not a loudly barking dog. ARFF stands for Achievement, Respect, Fun, and Freedom, the fundamentals of the human experience, according to Doug Padden, a long-standing board member of Project ASCENT. ARFF is one of the prefaces of a deep, introspective campfire discussion you can find during one of the Summer Adventures Project ASCENT offers. This comes up as part of a discussion with three Project ASCENT teammates: board members including **Doug Padden** and **Ron Hawkinson**, and Field Instructor **Bob Thornhill**. Doug grew up in Sanders County, and has navigated through logging, wildlife biology, smoke jumping, firefighting, ranching, and teaching. Ron comes from a small town called Cascade and has extensive military, ranching, hunting, and backpacking experience.



Bob grew up “poor and in a camper” in northern California, and has spent his years in the military, law enforcement, and is now in Search and Rescue. Despite their incredibly different backgrounds, when asked about their spark, the reason they continue to pour hours of hard work and spirit into Project ASCENT, they answer the same, **“For the kids.”**

“For me it’s all about the kids. I love to see the kids learn and know how to get out there and respect what they have. I have been all over the world, and I have seen so many landscapes ruined. I want to avoid that here, and this is how we do that.” Ron reflects on his experiences and how different forests are treated around the world. Bob adds that his spark, while still being about the kids is more about the connection, “You can take 10 kids that are total strangers, and they can build something they all have in common- the experiences they have.” Ron pipes in, “I am just amazed at how there are kids that leave [camp] just the best of friends after just four or five days.” This is a glimpse into another bit of magic resulting from a Project ASCENT Adventure, connection. **True. Honest. Genuine Connection.**

While discussing backgrounds and life experiences, we soon discover that there are two things these characters have in common, jumping out of planes, and backpacking. Each has their own territory they can claim an intimate knowledge of, and each of them are transported to those places while discussing their experiences. Their smiles while reminiscing look like greetings to an old friend. It’s obvious these experiences are a big part of who they are, “Experiences are what keep [life] fresh and exciting.” Says Doug, while talking about each other’s first backpacking adventures. **“It’s so special that these kids are each getting those brand-new experiences that they will never forget.”** While our experiences may not be as organic as being dropped off on an arctic tundra without a return pick up for ten days, one of Ron’s once-in-a-lifetime adventures, the structure of our Adventures is minimal. “We’re just here to keep them safe while they find out what they are capable of.” Bob states. Bob is our resident rope expert and teaches knot tying and rappelling safety at the Adventures.



When asked what it’s like working on the Project ASCENT team, Doug responds, “No matter what group or job you are in, your pleasure [in that role] hinges on leadership. **I am very confident in this team and our leaders.** Their hearts are in the right place, and we attract the right kind of people.” Doug says while investing your time you must be mindful of what you commit to. **“I want to make a difference.”** And that’s exactly what these folks are doing, making a difference in our future, one kid at a time!

Looking Behind

Let's take a look back on our 2022 season!

In 2022, Project ASCENT hosted 3 Summer Adventures

THE FISHTRAP HYBRID ADVENTURE, BULL RIVER BASE CAMP ADVENTURE, AND A ROCK LAKE BACKPACKING ADVENTURE.

We also offered and filled FIVE summer jobs, including 2 BRAND NEW positions as Junior Watershed Conservationists who worked closely with the **Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group** to help restore the health of the Bull River!

AFTER EACH OF OUR ADVENTURES, EXPLORERS WERE ASKED TO FILL OUT A SHORT SURVEY. HERE'S SOME OF WHAT WE FOUND OUT!

I have...

Learned about and became interested in outdoor/wilderness job opportunities



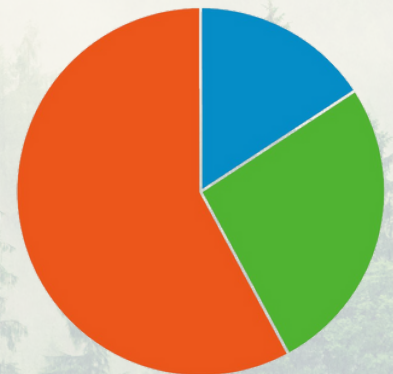
Not really at all: 5.26 % (1)
A little: 21.05 % (4)
Very much: 73.68 % (14)



Become more self-confident and feel better about who I am



Not really at all: 15.79 % (3)
A little: 26.32 % (5)
Very much: 57.89 % (11)



CLIMBER'S CORNER



Life: A series of Unnatural Leaps

BY ROB CHRISTENSEN, CEO & PROGRAM COORDINATOR



Rappelling has been a love of mine for some time now. I'm not quite sure if it's the feeling of victory following a tough ascent, or the nostalgia bringing me back to the **first time I ever backed off a cliff face in Billings, anchored to the axle of a '92 Chevy Suburban.**

Sketchy to say the least, but the trust I had in my college outdoor education instructor coupled with the prospect of earning extra credit by sucking it up and doing it helped me take that first unnatural leap. I remember telling myself there was no way this guy would risk his career and do something that wasn't safe with his class, and that helped. A little. I tell our adventurers all the time that it's ok to be scared. I was my first time. Terribly. Backing yourself off of a cliff is

not a natural thing for a human to do, and if you don't have some sense of fear doing it for the first time, then you might just need an amygdala check. It's what makes touching the ground for the first time afterwards so rewarding. Presented with a choice. **Take the leap or don't.**

Followed by conquering something terrifying. Quite an important life lesson and achievement, no? There's nothing better than witnessing the excitement of a child running back up to the top of a cliff they just rocked to give it a second go. The edge taken off, literally and figuratively. The immediate change in thought and self. There's no better confidence booster, and the resulting self-esteem gain is epic. It's why we do what we do. Even though it's sometimes regarded by the outdoor education world as an insurance nightmare, rappelling is something we will never stop offering. We can't. It's crucial to the development of the young souls we get to shape during those few short days. Luckily, with the guidance of our Search and Rescue leader and military master-climber certified rope-ologist Bob Thornhill, highly skilled and trained climbing guru John Dowd, and my ropes and climbing instructor certified self, **jumping backwards off of a cliff becomes as safe as digging a hole.**

If you have the training, the correct equipment used properly, plan out your intended result thoroughly, double and triple check everything, you're good to go. Doesn't make it any less terrifying, I know. But that's good. Gives our adventurers something to conquer. This is how we generate positive intrinsic growth in such a short amount of time. What a gift we get to give. What an opportunity. I was given that gift. I'm forever grateful that I took that unnatural leap.

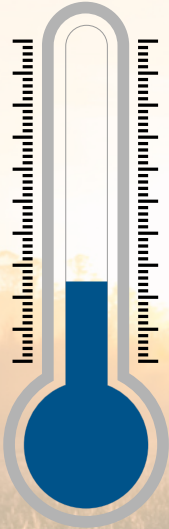
Check out this section each quarter for some climbing, belaying, and rappelling tips from our amazing experts here at Project ASCENT.

Looking Ahead

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

For the 2023 season...

We have funded 2 Summer Adventures!



Thanks to our generous donors and hard working team, we already have 2 summer Adventures funded! To help fund additional Adventures in the 2023 season and beyond, click the donate button below, or contact us today to find out how you can help!



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
- Debbie and Steve Gyger
- Karissa and Angie Lowe
- Misty and Scott Davison
- Elisabeth Diels
- Nate Horton,
- Debbie Wilson
- Kevin and Beth Cunningham
- Nancy Fields
- Crystal Rentfro
- Janice Fulcher
- Aaron Fulwiler
- Kelly Pulse
- Cindy Ranz
- Herb Meland
- Karen and John Thorson
- Ray Brown
- Bob and Karen Hodge
- Alan Johns
- Penny Beckman
- Lisa Mickelson
- Vanessa Pallister
- Barb Normandin
- Billie Parrottee
- Becky Beckman
- Raelynn Emborg Melber
- Tera Cunningham

Do you want to see your name in the next issue? Help us provide a once-in-a-lifetime Adventure by donating today! Follow the link below to visit our website!



HELLO EVERYONE,
LET'S PLAY SOME TRIVIA!

PROJECT ASCENT'S NEXT
FUNDRAISER

TRIVIA NIGHT

FUNDRAISER



TO BENEFIT PROJECT ASCENT'S
SUMMER ADVENTURES



WHERE?

**LIMBERLOST BREWERY
IN THOMPSON FALLS**

WHEN?

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 28TH
@ 5:30 PM**

GREAT PRIZES AND GIVEAWAYS!



\$5 per person | teams of up to 8 players

FOR RESERVATIONS CONTACT ANDREA
PROJECTASCENT@GMAIL.COM
OR
(406) 868 8775



PROJECT ASCENT PRESENTS

A Winter Carnival 2023

For the last four years, Project ASCENT has hosted a Winter Carnival. This is a day geared towards families with children in our area, offering free participation in over a dozen carnival style games, prizes, sled races, and free food and hot chocolate for participants! Last year we had over 250 participants from all over the county, and served up over 200 free meals!

The goal of the Winter Carnival is to offer a chance for families to get outside during a time of year that can be a struggle. A time for families to have fun together and stay connected to their community.



This year's Carnival will take place February 18th, 2023, on the practice football field at Thompson Falls High School. We are looking for sponsors that are interested in helping us to provide the community with a fun filled day, and volunteers to help set-up and run games! Contributors will receive recognition at the event, as well as on our Facebook page and website!

If you wish to become a sponsor or volunteer, please contact **Andrea Christensen** via email at projecascentmt@gmail.com, or call or text (406) 868-8775.

To be included on sponsorship signage payment must be received by February 1st.

Every sponsorship helps provide a wonder-filled day for families right here in our community!

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