



# Self-regulate or be regulated

STU ALLAN ✍️

In the 1970s and 80s, the Outdoor Pursuits Centre (OPC), Outward Bound, and Rotoiti Lodge offered a few pockets of professional opportunities for outdoor instructors. At OPC, we were strongly influenced by UK practices after Graeme Dingle, Marty Beare, Grant Davidson, and I had transforming stints in British centres, soaking up the professional approach, the rock climbing culture, and the beer. Just as important were the ex-Brits at OPC who tried to keep us in line – John Davidson, Ray Button, Jo Straker, John Watson, and Mick Hopkinson – plus various other key players who eventually retreated home.

By 1979, Graeme Dingle had moved on, entrusting us with his baby. It was an exciting time for a bunch of individuals on the margins who had discovered a niche where they could contribute. Some of our peers had slipped more easily into a society we had difficulty embracing, having professional jobs complete with the satisfaction and respect that came with those jobs. We weren't exactly dharma bums, but outdoor instructing didn't rate on society's food chain. Maybe we were concerned for our status, but we were altruistic and strongly motivated to lift our instruction standards. We had energy and we wanted to be good at our chosen profession, nurtured by our father figure Joe Hughes from the then Department of Education.

Given the lack of maturity of the sector, we had few opportunities for external training or validation of our practices. The New Zealand Mountain Guides programme was one option, but it was a poor match for our work. Nevertheless, staff regularly traipsed south enthusiastically, sometimes returning a little worked over. We always knew we could better shape our own destiny, devising systems such as learning goals, evaluation retreats, staff exchanges and, would you believe, an incident register – developments that seem rather obvious now. We were slow developing a professional association and associated qualifications, though.

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The impetus came suddenly in 1985. Pete Dale, who had been at Rotoiti Lodge and was now working for an early iteration of Sport New Zealand, gave us a stark message – *self-regulate or be regulated*. Pete germinated the latent seed of a professional qualification scheme.



Stu Allan c.1970  
Photo: Brin Williman.

Not everyone at OPC was keen at first, including some of the British contingent who were conflicted about reshaping their adopted home. We discussed the options a lot, not always being totally convinced that playing establishment games was consistent with our world picture, but we did play the game, and four OPC instructors of that period went on to chair NZOIA.

In 1986, Ali and I embraced a new baby and urban drift, leaving Grant Davidson to sell the developing idea that OPC had sponsored. It was a harder job than our internal sell, but that's his story, and the story of the instructors who supported him after we moved on.



*Neil Silverwood (NZOIA Instructor) Caving.*