

## ‘VODCA’ ON THE ROCKS

MEMBERS OF THE ORIGINAL  
‘LITERATURE AND THE LAND’  
COURSE GATHER AT MOUNT  
MOOSILAUKE FOR A  
26TH REUNION

PETER GREER



In 1981, I taught an experimental course that combined the athletic option Outdoor Challenge with an English Senior Elective built around naturalist literature. The 10 students who signed up for the course provided me with as willing and able and effective a group as I could have hoped for. They dubbed themselves “VODCA,” which stood for Varsity Outdoor Challenge A (there was a group B, but their program did not include the English elective).

For the semester, we studied in the classroom, and in the spring we added the physical education component. During the months of April and May, thereby, we spent some 12 hours a week together. In addition, we took some overnight trips, following the standard formula for Outdoor Challenge.

To say that the experience was a rich one for all of us is to understate the matter. While I never again taught the combination course, I built on the classroom experience that I had had with the VODCA group and created the course that came to be known as “Literature and the Land,” which I taught almost every spring until my retirement in June.

At the end of July, I joined eight of the original members of VODCA at the Ravine Lodge on the flank of Mount Moosilauke for a reunion. For two days, we walked, hiked, canoed, climbed, and, most important of all, talked, and talked, and talked. And we wrote a bit as well. These brief excerpts say more than

I could ever say, about a reunion that proved to be as wonderful a retirement gift as I could have received.

—Peter Greer '58; '81 (Hon.)  
Instructor in English Emeritus

### OVER THE TOP

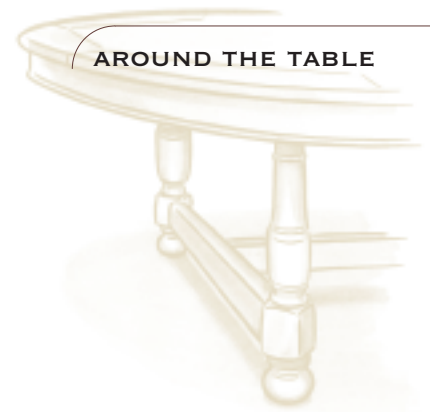
In a land of opportunity, Exeter is an over-the-top opportunity: dedicated faculty, unrivaled facilities and financial resources, inquisitive, intelligent students from around the globe.

Within this already extravagant setting, VODCA was an over-the-top experience. The 11 people involved were challenged mentally, physically and emotionally. We jumped off balconies into swimming pools and fell into each other's waiting arms. We read and discussed. We sat alone in the woods and huddled under a cold, wet tarp.

For a group that went on to such diverse careers as teachers and writers, scientists and engineers, lawyers and an environmentalist, this was a highlight within a highlight.

And even for this group, a 26<sup>th</sup> reunion was an over-the-top experience. Nine of 11 managed to return to remember and reconnect and relive that over-the-top experience. And to admire the over-the-mountain-top experience that we could not quite achieve those many years ago.

—Tim Folkerts '81, P'08



*Eight members of the original “Varsity Outdoor Challenge A”—an experimental course that combined Outdoor Challenge with a Senior English elective in naturalist literature—gathered in July to mark the 26th anniversary of their course and to honor their instructor, Peter Greer ’58, following his retirement from the Exeter faculty. They also managed to recreate the original VODCA team photo*

*taken in 1981: (front row, left to right) Rob Behre, Renee Bergland, Suzanne Martin, Jan Mueller; (back row) Mike Scott, Scott McMillen, David Ward, Tim Folkerts. Not able to attend were Chris Saunders and Lisa Battan.*

#### VODCA IN VERSE

Could this be the long-lost VODCAidian?  
SPAM?  
I’ve been GOOGLED into community.

Was it me or someone else?  
VODCA is a movie I watched  
a long time ago.  
I remember the sense, but I’ve  
forgotten most of the plot.  
I remember the feeling I had when  
I watched it.  
Today I had breakfast with the cast.

Memories. Still. Cold  
Awakened by the collective breath  
of new old friends  
Resurrection.

—David Ward ’81

#### STEADY ON

Perhaps I still believe in the infinite possibility of things. The red sedge grass in the blue-gray fog, the sour sweetness of an unfamiliar fruit, the sudden arm, thrust out to steady a companion.

It would probably be wrong to call this friendship, since time and distance have separated us so thor-

oughly. But it would not be wrong to call it love, a half-forgotten, wholly solid thing.

—Renee Bergland ’81

#### LESSONS THAT LAST

I reckon most Exeter alums “know” (*wissen*) that their time at the Academy shaped their lives in some way; but I’m not convinced that most of them “know” (*kennen*) how.

More than any other alumni/ae encounter in the last 26 years, this all-too-brief VODCA reunion affirmed for me that intelligence, character and passion still matter in an age when reason is on the run. Exeter was the soil where my commitment to a life based on such “things” first germinated; and VODCA was a culmination of all that Exeter gave me. Even more, it planted in me a “knowing” of (and a faith in) the power and wisdom of a group and the essentiality of having fun as one pursues a purpose—be it reaching the top of a mountain or anything else. To me, all these “things” are now inseparable.

—Jan Mueller ’81