Hike, Bike, Skate, Ski, Surf - Geographies of Adventure and Active Leisure

Hybrid Class: Course lectures and exercises online, in-person field trips and workshops scheduled during the term.
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Course Description
Hiking and running, kayaking and rafting, surfing, skateboarding, bike touring and mountain biking, etc. are all pursuits that have spawned large industries and captured vast amounts of people's time for having ‘fun’. In turn, landscapes and cultures have been fetishized, transformed, and fiercely contested.

The development of these leisure activities since the late 1800s coincided with changing ideas about nature, wilderness, and the utility of ‘play.’ Increasingly invasive technologies - sometimes adapted from indigenous practices, as in the case of the kayak and surfboard - provided unprecedented access to remote areas, formerly unexploited terrains, exotic locales, and urban spaces for recreation.

What has emerged are a variety of individualized pursuits and recreational sports that have transformed landscapes, have adopted or appropriated indigenous technologies and places, and have nurtured subcultures, styles and ways of communicating that have spread well beyond their origins.

Skiing, skateboarding, surfing, boating and bicycling have become common throughout affluent Western and Asian societies and increasingly popular around the globe. Easily trivialised or overlooked, these pursuits occupy large swaths of people’s attention and time, they reflect and amplify important cultural and economic transformations, and their styles have seeped into global popular culture.
**Course goals:**
This class takes a geographical and interdisciplinary approach to examine the historical emergence and contemporary significance of these pursuits. Students will use the trove of cultural artifacts surrounding these activities that have been produced over the past 150 or so years to develop digital collections of secondary and primary materials. These ‘crowdsourced’ collections of cultural artifacts - ranging from advertisements and architecture to movies, novels, and social media video feeds - are then used as the basis for discussion, analysis, and presentation.

For their analysis, students will use tools for mapping, classification, and visualization common in geography and the digital humanities to trace the increasingly international spread of surf music, skate style, ski resorts, etc., and to examine some important questions which arise from the development of active recreation over the past century. These questions range from the existential - *Is it okay to risk your life having fun? What is wilderness?* - to the social and cultural - *Are these sports for rich white men? At what point does style become cultural appropriation? How does tourism impact indigenous cultures and local economies?*

**Organization:**
The course is organized around 5 thematic units and an overall capstone project. Each unit traces the origins, evolution, and contemporary landscapes of related active outdoor pursuits in order to explore a group of geographic ideas, cultural questions and social issues. During the term, field trips and workshops will offer students a chance to experience the places, landscapes and activities associated with the class themes.

Each of the units will have a similar workflow, consisting of:

1. Background readings in unit topics, and introductions to the related archives and specific analysis and interpretation methods.
2. Archival research and identification of source materials for class discussion and examination (advertising, songs, newspaper articles, short videos, etc.).
3. Inclusion of the materials into the online Omeka course teaching archive via tagging and classification using digital surveys
4. Interpretation of the materials via a short essays (around 2 pages), online exhibits, or in-class presentations.
Capstone project:
The capstone project will be a longer paper or online project, developing upon one or more of the shorter unit projects. This project should integrate the class-developed online materials with additional readings and research.

Preliminary Schedule

**Weeks 1 - 2:** Nature, mechanization, and leisure: Hiking and Biking - *What is wilderness, and how does it relate to the self? How does mechanization and technology transform wilderness? How can women dress and transport themselves? How do social clubs and organization help promote lifestyles and activities?*

**Weeks 3 - 4:** Adopting the indigenous and transforming the urban: Surfing and Skating through Music, Fashion, and Graphic Arts - *What is 'cultural appropriation' and reappropriation? What are suitable uses for urban spaces? How does a lifestyle sell products?*  

**Weeks 5 - 6:** Encounters with Water: Kayaking, Canoeing and Rafting - *Environmentalism vs recreation vs development; Cultural adoption and heritage, social networks...*  

**Weeks 7 - 8:** Transforming and Iconizing Place: Skiing and Snowboarding - *The birth of vacations; Gentrification, employment and migration; Architecture and development of international style; Taste and the global elite.*  

**Weeks 9 - 10:** New geographies of fun: Extreme sports, entertainment, and the edge of death - *Death and injury while having fun. Encountering the exotic and the other.*

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should have the ability to use archival materials for analysis, exposure to methods of visual and textual interpretation used in geography and the humanities, and an understanding of the classification, metadata creation, and reduction that goes into creating databases and the analysis and visualization of information.

Equally important, the course provides an overview of the development of modern society and the transformation of ‘natural’ landscapes via the lens of active recreation and outdoor sports. As the class examines the evolving relationships between culture, recreation, and the environment, students will learn to:

- Understand the evolution of outdoor recreation over the past several centuries
- Identify pertinent artwork, cultural productions, user-generated content, and archival material
- Use methods of visual and textual interpretation used in geography and humanities to analyse this material - such as mapping and spatial analysis, social network analysis, close and distant reading, and digital text mining via ngrams and word-clouds.
- Create online collections via the identification and classification of content, tagging of locations, and management of metadata, using the Omeka digital archive platform.
- Visualize and analyze these databases, developing an understanding of the data selection and reduction that goes into the organization and presentation of information.
- Integrate materials ranging from advertising to scientific visualizations into presentations.
Text / materials

Content for the class is drawn from a wide-range of sources, much of this archival materials identified by students that explore the geographical concepts and social questions identified in lectures and introductory readings. Secondary sources (listed below) introduce key ideas and analysis methods, and students build upon these by finding primary source examples to examine these ideas and methods firsthand. These examples are drawn from online archival collections, newspaper and media articles, popular culture, etc. such as:

- Online archives of film, newspaper, art, advertising - [Mountaineers Film Collection](#); [Historic Oregon Newspapers](#); [American Periodicals](#); [Oregon Digital](#);
- Novel/memoir/travelogues - “Wild”; “Barbarian Days”; “Lands of Lost Borders”
- Magazines - [Outside](#), [Backpacker](#), [Thrasher](#), [Surfer](#), [Surfers Journal](#), [Bicycling](#), [Paddle World](#), [Powder](#), [Skateboarder](#), ...
- Social media feeds and contemporary new media - High Country News, Aspen Times,
- Film and Video
- Secondary Sources: Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing; Skiing into Modernity : A Cultural and Environmental History; The World in the Curl, ..

Student examples of primary and additional secondary materials will be collected into an online ‘crowdsourced’ course archive that is used for further analysis and the development of student projects, such as online exhibits using digital collection or mapping tools (Omeka, Scalar, ArcGIS Online, StoryMaps), short tours to local sites of course interest (hiking trails, bike paths, skate parks), or more traditional short papers.

Grading

- 30% - Lecture assignments, online surveys and discussions
- 50% - Short unit write-ups/digital projects (5 total)
- 20% - Final paper/digital project