Hike, Bike, Skate, Surf, Ski - Geographies of Adventure

Online Class:

- Course learning materials and assignments on canvas. Self-guided field trips.

Instructor:
Dr. Nicholas Kohler (nicholas@uoregon.edu)

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 emergence and contemporary significance of outdoor adventure sports. Exploring the cultural artifacts surrounding these activities produced over the past 150 or so years, students develop individual collections of primary materials. These ‘crowdsourced’ collections of materials - ranging from advertisements and architecture to movies, novels, and social media video feeds - are the basis for further discussion, analysis, and presentation.

Using tools for mapping, classification, and visualization common in geography and the digital humanities, students trace the increasingly international spread of surfing, skate style, ski resorts, etc., and 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 4 thematic units and an overall capstone project. Each unit traces the origins, evolution, and contemporary landscapes of related active outdoor pursuits, introducing and exploring a group of geographic ideas, cultural questions and social issues. During the term, self-guided and virtual field trips, online discussions, and online projects encourage students to explore the places, landscapes, cultures and activities associated with outdoor adventure sports throughout the world.

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

1. Background materials (videos, readings, etc.) on unit topics, and introductions to the related archives and specific analysis and interpretation methods.
2. Online discussions and exercises based on the materials.
3. Online archival research and identification of source materials for class discussion and examination (advertising, songs, newspaper articles, short videos, etc.), and the inclusion of these materials into an online collection via tagging and classification.
4. Interpretation of the materials with short essays (around 2 pages), online exhibits, or online 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.*

Learning Outcomes

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

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.

Text / materials

Weekly readings and other 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”
- 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.

Estimated workload distribution over the term

- Module readings, audio, video and other materials: 10 hours x 4 = 40 hours
- Module surveys, conversations, and online assignments: 10 hours x 4 = 40 hours
- Module projects: 4 hours x 4 = 16 hours
- Final project surveys and preparatory assignments: 4 hours
- Final project write-up or exhibit: 10 hours
- Self-Guided Field Trips/Workshops/Events: 10 hours

--------------------------------------------------------------------

Total 120 hours (average)
Grading

- 50% - Lecture assignments, online surveys and discussions
- 40% - Unit write-ups/digital projects (4 total)
- 10% - Final summary paper or digital project

Image Credits:
Photo - Nick Kohler; Kayak Model with Hunter - Metropolitan Museum of Art; Skateboarder, Addis Ababa - BBC; Billboard, Colorado; World's Fair Advertisement, Chicago; Wild Movie Advertisement; Photo - Nick Kohler