



50TH ANNIVERSARY

OF

ADVENTURE

(1975 to 2025)



Solar Outdoors
Solaroutdoors.org

SOLAR AT 50

by Peg Campbell, a founding member

In 1974, like many who discover SOLAR, I was looking for a little adventure which I found through a circuitous route. A newspaper article led me to the Washtenaw County MSU Extension Office that was recruiting 4H leaders. (4H was historically an agricultural program with exhibits or competitions at county fairs but they were branching out.) Yes, working with kids could be fun.

Soon I was on their steering committee planning county programs. We adopted the new Challenge Program to train kids in outdoor skills through the MSU Extension service. It still thrives nationwide today as Outdoor Adventure Challenge and similar to 1974, their mission is to *use the biggest classroom available — the outdoors — to lead young people in activities that teach how to communicate with other group members to plan, organize, and conduct their own activities outdoors. Participants learn backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing, map and compass orienteering, winter camping and first aid, and then work with 4H Challenge your groups.*

I'd never camped or done anything outdoorsy but felt it might be doable through their 16-week leadership-training course. The first session (rock-climbing), it seemed odd that others enrolled in the program were not 4-H leaders like me but had seen Doug Maddox (the Challenge training leader) rappelling off roof of the Wayne post office. When they asked him questions, he invited them to the program. After the practical at Grand Ledge, we were amazed and awed with our accomplishment and were eager to learn backpacking and winter survival skills.

When the program started, Doug met Bill Halvangis, fresh from Outward Bound, and recruited him as a co-leader. Doug got media exposure for the workshops and persuaded Jerry Chipetta from Michigan Outdoors (a local TV program) to do a show on our survival practical. That weekend Doug suggested we start a club to continue our adventures since we finished the program and could assist with the upcoming classes. The School for Outdoor Leadership, Adventure and Recreation (SOLAR) was born and we were glued together in our newfound adventure.

Doug and Bill revamped the 16-week training format into four-week modules with us as assistant leaders and built a sizable alumni group. Many late-night meetings put the organizational structure in place that remains today. At the same time the 4-H program realized that a lot of people were trained but no one was taking out kids groups so they gave us the boot. Luckily the SOLAR club was in place and became our focus.

Livonia Parks and Recreation agreed to sponsor us and advertise our classes through their catalog and give us classroom and meeting space. For our insurance, we hooked up with American Youth Hostels (AYH). We met monthly at Jackson Center and after the meeting we went to the Stables Bar on Five Mile and Middle Belt. That was where the real inspiration for many trips started (after a couple beers). Our link with Livonia Parks and Recreation was discontinued after a few years because of budget cuts.

In 1981, SOLAR became a non-profit organization. Bill Halvangis and Bob Westbrook discovered Aries Colony Hall, where we met until 2015 when Bob found St. Paul. In 2020, the name changed to Solar Outdoors to better reflect our mission. We've come a long way from our humble beginnings of sleeping in bunks in one big cabin for \$2 a night at Wilderness State Park to traveling the world and experiencing new cultures with other SOLARites. Still, we maintain the SOLAR mentality of watching out for one another and respecting the environment.

I am delighted that the club has continued all these years. Like so many others in SOLAR, it changed my life and led me to Ron, my husband, as well as lasting friendships near and far. And club members Moe and Dave DeFrance recruited us (and several other SOLARites) to move to Arizona where we call ourselves SOLAR West. Come on down to visit when the Michigan snow flies.

Workshops over the years

Fifty years ago, the workshops that SOLAR members led were vastly different from what they are now. In the early years, workshops such as Nature Study, Fishing, Bicycling, High Ropes, Rock Climbing and Sail boarding (or windsurfing).

The only workshop that has stood the test of time is Beginning Backpacking, which has been taught pretty much every year since SOLAR began.

Other workshops, such as Wilderness First Aid, Survival, Kayaking, and Cross-Country Skiing were workshops in the 1980s, then discontinued, and then restarted again at a later date.

New workshops have been added over the years to accommodate new members and new interests. Some of these workshops include Intermediate Backpacking, Search and Rescue, Basic and Advanced Land Navigation, Mountaineering, Kayaking, Adventure Racing, Women in the Woods, Car Camping, Lightweight Backpacking, Food Dehydrating, and Scuba diving.

Instructors have changed over the years too:

The anchor workshop, Beginning Backpacking, was taught once a year in the fall by Bob Westbrook from 1979 to 1988. Carol McCririe taught the workshop with Bob in 1989, and then Carol took over the beginning workshop in 1990, with assistance from Leslie Cordova beginning in 1993. Carol, along with Leslie and many others, taught the workshop for 25 years before passing the baton to Krisanne Schmidt. Beginning in 1998, a 2nd Beginning Backpacking workshop was added in the spring of 1998, was taught by Michael Banks, and later Glenn Schultz.

Cindy Harrison-Felix and Carol McCririe started an Advanced Backpacking workshop that was taught in 1996 and 1997. Mike Banks took this workshop a little further and created Advanced Backpacking and Leadership, which began in 1999 and continued for several years. What used to be the workshop taught by Cindy and Carol was resurrected in 2001 as Backpacking 201 and has been taught almost every other year by Leslie and Dave Warnecke as the Intermediate Backpacking workshop.

Other workshops that SOLAR members formed include Lightweight Backpacking taught by Dick Ebenhoe and Dave Sweeton, and Car Camping taught by Mark and Susan Speece.

Rock climbing was taught in the early days of SOLAR with a variety of instructors. To encourage enrollment in the workshop, there was always a Free Climb at Grand Ledge where you could try climbing before signing up for the workshop. Over the years, this workshop was taught by Kim Alger, Al Fylak, Bruce Rogers, Sharon Stanek, Jim Young, Laura Albin, and Pete Lamb. In 1985 Al Fylak taught an Advanced Rock Climbing workshop. These workshops are no longer offered because we no longer have experienced instructors and the cost of maintaining climbing gear.

Enjoying Michigan Winters, or how to backpack on cross country skis or snowshoes and not wipe out, was taught for many years. Instructors in the past were Kim Alger, Al Smith, Bob Westbrook, Dave Jones, Doug Lanyk, Tom Oloffo, Allen Duncan and Bruce Coppola. This is a workshop that we hope to bring back in the near future.

A Survival workshop was also taught for many years. Past instructors include Alf Cederquist, who taught the workshop from the beginning of time until 1990 when Bob Westbrook stepped up in 1998, followed by Doug Lanyk.

For a brief moment in time (1996), SOLAR there was a summer Survival workshop led by Mike Felix.

One workshop that has become a mainstay of the SOLAR calendar is Basic Land Navigation, which is a variation on the Orienteering Workshop that was taught at various times during the 1980s. Since 1997, the workshop has been taught by many individuals – Lester Mok, Karl Overheul, Dave Sweeton, and Brian Andrews to name a few. The workshop was in such demand that it was taught twice a year until 2012. The most recent years, beginning in 2011, the workshop has been taught by Jeff McWilliams and Ati Tislerics. The workshop has been updated to include more practicals for hands-on learning. An Advanced Land Navigation workshop was added and is taught by Jeff McWilliams. Jeff and Ati have also taught an Orienteering workshop in recent years.

Newer workshops started because one person decided to step up and try something new. In recent years, SOLAR members added a Mountaineering workshop taught by Lou Szakal, a Search and Rescue workshop taught by Tom Hayes, Wildlife Gardening taught by Laura James and Kayaking workshops taught by Matt Dalton. A two-part tree identification workshop was taught by Mary Costello – the first part in the early spring, when the trees were just budding, and the other in the summer when the trees had leaves.

In addition to workshops, SOLAR members have led many seminars and clinics on many different topics – knots and lashing, waxing, ice climbing, Morel mushrooming, Polar expeditions, leadership, outdoor cooking, skating, photography, and fishing to name a few.

Any recap about workshops would have to include a mention of Lester Mok, a.k.a. Yoda, who spent hours trying to come up with new ideas for new workshops. Lester was the master mind behind land navigation, basic tracking workshop, wilderness leadership seminar, primitive skills workshop, outdoor and winter safety seminars, plant identification workshop, and Earth living workshop, just to name a few. Some of Lester's work can still be found in materials used by the Basic Land Navigation workshop and also the Southern Michigan Orienteering Club (SMOC.)

For those of you who have taken workshops run through SOLAR, you know that it is not only the lead instructor, but all of the instructors that make the workshop a success. There are too many to name, but you all know who they are. These workshops would not be what they are without the volunteers who generously share their time and knowledge.

Activities over the years

SOLAR members' interests have changed over the years and so have the trips and activities that they lead....

In the old days, SOLAR members participated in an annual free climb and monthly Rattlesnake outings, downhill skiing trips, and annual visits to Point Pelee for bird watching.

Leslie Cordova is the Queen of planning trips, currently with 92 trips to her credit! She has been a member since 1992 and has been planning and organizing trips most of that time. Her first planned event was the Bald Mountain Haunted Halloween weekend followed by trips to North Manitou, South Manitou, Red River Gorge, the Carter Caves Crawlathon, Wyandotte Caves, Marengo Caves, Pictured Rocks, Tobermory, Cuyahoga Valley, John Bryon, Caesar Creek, Grand Island, Wilderness State Park, as well as many more local activities like the Toledo Zoo lights display, Kensington Hayride, Mackinaw and Pelee Island biking, and Chinese New Year dinners.

Jim Gilfix, like Lester Mok with workshops, constantly had new ideas for trips, many of them family oriented – Fossil Hunts, Trout Farm, Hocking Hills, Ohio Personal Challenge (ropes), Sanilac Petroglyphs State Park, Kensington Nature hikes, Maybury State Park mountain biking and Living Farm, Chain O'Lakes State Park in Indiana, and many organized ethnic dinners over the years, just to name a few.

Maureen and Dave DeFrance, before relocating out of state, held an annual canoe outing at their cabin in northern Michigan for 16 consecutive years. Another event hosted by the DeFrances was an annual Hoedown.

Another unique trip opportunity was led by Matt Dalton to Pigeon River State Forest for an Elk Antler Hunt.

Karen Bates discovered dog sledding in the 1990s and led many trips from 1993 to 2007. These trips varied from a weekend to an extended weeklong trip, all at Chocpaw Expeditions out of Algonquin Provincial Park.

Other additions to the long line of great trips that SOLAR members have lead – Adirondacks, Lake Ann, Ice Climbing, Luge, and Winter rafting.

Solar Outdoors is always looking for new activities and ideas that interest members. All it takes is one member to say, heh let's do this.

Steering Committee

SOLAR's success over the years is due in no small part to the people that volunteer their time to help run the club. In addition to the many workshop instructors and trip leaders that give freely (translated, they work for free) of their time, the Steering Committee (SC) is the group that gives direction and governs the club. SOLAR has had pretty much the same officers and Committee Chairs since its beginnings – President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Activities, Bylaws, Education, Membership, Public Relations and the SOLAR Ray Editor. When SOLAR began to accumulate a sizeable gear closet, the Equipment Chair position was created. In the past, membership meeting programs were handled by the President, but that role became the Program Chair position and was added to the Steering Committee in 1985. The position of Historian was added to the steering committee in 1989. With the advent of the internet, SOLAR added Webmaster to the steering committee and eliminated the Solar Ray Editor as we were no longer publishing and mailing a monthly newsletter. In 2025, Solar combined the historian and bylaws chair into one, as well as Communication and Public Relations.

Our past presidents (from the beginning):

1975-76	Ken Demski	1996-98	Michael Banks
1976-78	Lillian Vires	1998-2000	Doug Lanyk
1978-80	Tim Nowicki	2000-02	Leslie Cordova
1980-81	Jeff Smith	2002-04	Tom Oloffo
1981-12/82	Peg Alford (Campbell)	2004-06	Tom Hayes
1/83-6/84	Bill Halvangis	2006-08	Lou Szakal
1984-86	Bob Westbrook	2008-10	Cindy Taylor
1986-87	Maureen Peters (DeFrance)	2010-11	Allen Duncan
1987-88	Larry Martin	2011-13	Chuck Smith
1988-90	Debby Campbell	2013-15	Jennifer McWilliams
1990-92	Joan Hettinger (Ryan)	2015-17	Jennifer Tislerics
1992-93	Al Fylak	2017-19	Carol Rogers
1993-94	Joan Govan (Westbrook)	2019-22	Debbie Hendrickson
1994-95	Cindy Harrison-Felix	2022-24	Mike Hobig
1995-96	Steve Gardner	2024-25	Mary Winkler

In addition to all of the presidents listed, many others have contributed to SOLAR's governing body – too many to list them all. Many people have been on the Steering Committee, some on multiple occasions. If you care about the things that Solar Outdoors does, you get involved and one way to do that is to run for a position on the Steering Committee.

Meeting your match

While SOLAR has never held itself out to be nor does it advertise to be a singles group, it often happens that two outdoor lovers meet through SOLAR and they fall in love.

Over the years, SOLAR has seen a lot of members unite in marriage, including:

John and Amy (Barber) Fedyk
Ron and Peg (Alford) Campbell
Gene and Leslie (Cohen) Cordova
Mike and Cindy (Harrison) Felix
Jess and Jan (Piet) Harding
Bob and Joan (Govan) Westbrook
Gary and Marie (Carriere) Crimaldi
Al and Ellen (Kufchock) Fylak
Steve and Marie (Crow) Gardner
Mark and Kathy (Rymal) Cantrell
Jim and Allison (Huntoon) Martell
Dave and Maureen (Peters) DeFrance
Ken and Lisa (Hoover) McQuade
Jeff and Betsy (Broesamie) Telford
Alex and Clare Vanderhaar
Lou and Pam (Riehl) Szakal
Rob and Judy (Spitzer) Mair
Mike Mannebach and Karen Sinclair-Smith
Marco (deceased) and Linda (Horner) Scarpetta
Bill and Marie Stockdale
Tom and Nancy (dec'd) Reichard
Dave and Jill (Craig) McIntyre
Andy and June (Legarski) McColm
Eric and Mimi (Gendreau) Noyes
Huw and Pam (Clayton) Evans
Don and Pam (Bauerle) Harnack
Tom and Hope (Straub) Ponsart
Pete and Sharon (Smelter) Lamb (wedding officiated by our own Debbie Z)
Mike and Mary (Dean) Pniewski (wedding officiated by our own Lou Szakal)
Bob Conrad and Linda Hill
Don Wold and Mary Donahue

One of the more romantic stories is when Jim Martell asked Allison Huntoon to marry him at the August Rattlesnake weekend. He hid champagne at Nelson's Look Out, and asked Allison to go for a walk, where he proposed to a backdrop of fireworks.

Then comes the baby carriage

In addition to marriages, Solar has many new members born into the club because both of their parents are members:

Roger and Laura James – sons Roger and Andrew
Janice and Jess Harding – daughter Kendra
Gary and Marie Crimaldi – son Carl and daughter Julie
John and Amy Fedyk – daughter Eliza and sons Anthony and Theo
Jim and Allison Martell – son
Marco and Linda Scarpetta – daughter Julia
Al and Ellen Fylak – son Andrew
Ken and Lisa McQuade – son Gregory
Pam and Huw Evans – daughter Maila

The SOLAR Ray and the Web

Along with everything else “SOLAR,” we had a monthly newsletter has evolved over the years – the SOLAR Ray. This writer remembers the early days when the Ray was handwritten, and copies were mimeographed for distribution at the general meeting. Solar soon began producing the Solar Ray, having it commercially printed, brought to the Steering Committee meeting to be stamped and then mailed – hopefully to reach members before the general meeting. That evolved into giving members the option of receiving the Ray electronically or via the US mail. As of 2014 the only option was to download your copy from the website. Now, since everything is on our website, Solar no longer produces a newsletter. Technology has come a long way and so have we! Pretty much anything you need to know is available on the Website, the Solar google group, Facebook and Meetup.

Educational and Entertaining Programs

Over the years, at Solar’s monthly meetings, interesting and informative programs have been presented on member’s trips, volunteer opportunities, and other topics of interest to members for the outdoors. Solar has also hosted annual summer picnics, holiday parties, and an annual photo contest to show off pictures taken in the past year.

Achievements in the outdoors

SOLAR has sparked many people into doing things that they'd never dreamed of doing. While they were not necessarily trips run through SOLAR, members have traveled all over the world – like Mt. Everest, K2, and Mt. Rainier to name a few.

Cathy Susan, a member in the 1980s, was ranked 3rd in the world as a female cross country skier. She also won the 1986 VASA race.

Chris Weingartz was the winner overall of the Silver Creek Challenge 19 km race in 1988.

Hal Joerin was awarded the Silver Beaver in 1989 for his dedication in working with youth in the outdoors.

Cathy Girata (Dolland) hiked to base camp at K2 in 1993.

Dave and Maureen DeFrance, with Jim and Allison Martell, summited Kilimanjaro in 1994.

By the end of the 1994 summer climbing season, DeForest Eveland had reached the “Six Majors” (six highest volcanic mountains,), the “Ten-Niners” (ten highest non-volcanic peaks over 9000 feet), and the “Workshopic Eight” (eight “best” climbs in the Cascades.)

Harry and Mary Price were also awarded the Silver Beaver in 1996 for their leadership in scouting.

Pete Lamb, Julie Penrod, Kathryn Krueger, Clayton Lucy, and Chris ? hiked to base camp at Everest in 2001.

Leslie Cordova and Marie Edwards summited Kilimanjaro in 2001.

Michael Banks won the Michigan Recreation and Park Association's 2006 Community Service Award.

A group of SOLARites formed the SOLAR Stair Stars in the early 2000s and climbed the 70+ flights of stairs at the Renaissance Center in Detroit to support the American Lung Association. They are traditionally both the largest team and the top fundraisers of the event.

In 2016, several SOLAR members are participating in the North Country Trail 100 Mile Challenge, celebrating the 100th anniversary of our National Parks.

Leslie Cordova thru hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2022. She almost completed the trail, but unfortunately broke her foot at mile 1867, just a mere 327 miles from the finish. She has gone back and completed additional miles and as of today she only has 150 miles left to complete it. Leslie had a group of SOLAR friends who saw her off on her epic adventure and others that joined her throughout. These included Krisanne Schmidt, Carol McCrie, Sam and Gary Schafer, Charlene Machnak, Bob and Garrett Tacy, Debbie Ritter and Mark Dunford. Jeff Zabel hiked the first 850 miles with Leslie before returning home. And of course Leslie's husband Gene (who she met in SOLAR in 1992) saw her off and came out several times to support her.

Tribute

Alf Cederquist (1931-2005) joined SOLAR in the 1970s, where he participated in rock climbing, canoeing, skiing, and biking, as well as teaching the Survival workshop. He also enjoyed hiking and mountaineering both in the United States and Europe, as well as sailing.

Marilyn Larkin (1961-1988) joined SOLAR in 1987 and took the backpacking workshop, as well as windsurfing, morel mushrooming, and cross-country skiing. She was an avid bicyclist and lost her life while bike riding in Canada's Pinery Provincial Park with SOLAR friends.

Harsha Vardhan (1953-1988) was very involved in SOLAR activities. Coming to the US from India, he participated in the backpacking workshop (he took the workshop at the same time as Marilyn), rockclimbing, cross country and downhill skiing, as well as bicycling and lost his life in the same accident as Marilyn at the Pinery.

Ronda Shapiro (1954-2008) joined SOLAR in 1996 with a healthy appetite for the outdoors no matter the season. Cross country skiing, canoeing/kayaking, rock climbing, backpacking (fending off bugs!) and dogsledding (with dramatic rescues!) were some of her favorite pastimes with many of her SOLAR pals. Ronda's positive attitude and beautiful personality are greatly missed.

Norwood Catron (1972-2008) wasn't a SOLAR member for very long, but his passing touched many of us. Norwood was a gentle, kind man who enjoyed the outdoors.

Michael Malon (1959-2012) was a member of SOLAR for 18 years. With his background as a physician, he frequently assisted with the Wilderness First Aid workshop and taught CPR. He also participated in backpacking, skiing, mountain biking, kayaking and canoeing, rock climbing, rafting, and caving.

Marco Scarpetta (1965 -2014) joined SOLAR around 1988, was an avid cyclist and enjoyed cross country skiing, and hiking. He met his wife Linda Harner in SOLAR and they enjoyed traveling and doing outdoor activities wherever they went.

Lois Matthews (1942-2014) and her husband Bill joined SOLAR in 2010. She and Bill took the beginning backpacking and the Basic Land Navigation workshops in 2011. Lois really enjoyed cross-country skiing, canoeing, and day hiking with SOLAR friends on the weekends. She especially loved the curling event because she was always fascinated with the sport. The last backpacking adventure Lois and Bill shared was with her sister in Yosemite National Park, just a three day event in the Cathedral Mountains out of Tuolumne Meadows. Six months later she was diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer.

Thomas Dunn (1950-2015) joined SOLAR in 1992, participating in many workshops and activities, and helped to teach backpacking and wilderness canoeing workshops. As a teacher, he spent his summers traveling on his motorcycle all over the country and loved car camping. His final legacy was to send his friends Christmas cards in December 2015, although he'd passed the previous January.

Jim Gessner (1947-2019) constantly had new ideas for trips, many of them family oriented – Fossil Hunts, Trout Farm, Hocking Hills, Ohio Personal Challenge (ropes), Sanilac Petroglyphs State Park, Kensington Nature hikes, Maybury State Park Mountain biking and Living Farm,

Chain O'Lakes State Park in Indiana, and many organized ethnic dinners over the years, just to name a few.

Hal Joerin (1939-2019) joined SOLAR in 1976. He was a lifelong swimmer and served for many years with the Boy Scouts of America in a variety of leadership positions. Hal deeply loved the outdoors, and enjoyed hiking, camping, climbing, caving, and backpacking. He was always ready for a challenge, from teaching winter wilderness survival to rafting the Grand Canyon, to glacier climbing in Switzerland.

Michael Reamer (1944-2019) joined SOLAR in 1986 and became a lifetime member. He enjoyed the backpacking workshop as well as rock-climbing, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. When he was physically unable to do these activities any longer, he still attended meetings and participated in other activities.

William Morse (1958-2021) joined Solar in 2007 after discovering a passion for hiking. He participated in the American Lung Association's Fight for Air Stair Climb and led many local day hikes a 10-year period. Always a gentle spirit, he was known for his enthusiasm in organizing and leading these hikes. He would seek out people new to the group and welcome them with open arms.

Peggy DeVos (nee Medved) (1966-2021) joined Solar to take the backpacking workshop, followed by the intermediate workshop. She enjoyed backpacking and participating in Solar events until her marriage when she moved out of the area.

Harry Price (1948-2021) and his wife Mary joined Solar in 1994 after a scouting friend told us about the club, and how they could just join up and take part in all the fun and great trips SOLAR had to offer and not take on any leadership roles. That lasted about a year before Harry became the Education Chair and Mary took on Membership. He and Mary were very involved in Scouting. Harry was an Eagle Scout, Vigil Honor of the Order of the Arrow, and Silver Beaver recipient. He was involved with teaching Solar workshops to share his knowledge and experiences.

Margaret Martin (1957-2022) was a long-time member of Solar - backpacking, camping, and almost always having her guitar on hand for songs around the fire. She almost got us kicked out of Indiana Dunes State Park, playing her guitar into the evening when the ranger came to tell us to quiet down as it was after hours. I guess they didn't like Puff the Magic Dragon. Margaret was outgoing, always smiling, and loved everyone.

Philip Crookshank (1944-2024) joined Solar in 2005, and he was actively involved in Solar as well as the Sierra Club. He was on the Steering Committee for several years, taking great care of the club's equipment inventory. He was also active in volunteering for the River Rouge clean up and at Greenmead Historical Park.

Dennis Phillips (1938-2025) was a member of Solar for at least 40 years and actively participated in workshops and planned trips. He was an avid backpacker and traveled to Yosemite, Olympic National Park, White Mountains, Canadian Rockies (Yoho, Mt. Robson, Jasper, and Kootenay Provincial Parks), Smoky Mountains, Mount Ranier, Glacier, Red River Gorge, Isle Royale, Porcupine Mountains, and Pictured Rocks to follow his passion. His enthusiasm was contagious and he was always ready to help his fellow trail buddies.

Remember When ...

Larry Martin thought it would be a great idea to pack Baked Alaska (Cherries Jubilee) on dry ice and bring it into Algonquin for a special dessert around the campfire.

You hiked 15 miles up into the Canadian Rockies and thought that the Bear Pole you could see in the distance a mile away was the best thing you'd ever seen in your life.

The Boy Scouts you met in Red River Gorge taught you how to amuse yourself with bamboo in a campfire. Keep your thermarest repair skills up to date, Kevin!

The Taj Mahal (Bob Westbrook's tent) was the place for cards at many Pictured Rocks and other trips.

A beginning backpacking workshop student tried to lower a cooking pot into Lake Superior and actually believed that Superior would give it back.

The first Advanced Backpacking workshop in 1996 traveled to the Green Mountains and hiked the Long Trail to its terminus at the Canadian border. The workshop renamed the trail the "Wrong trail."

Coming off of a trail in Jasper Provincial Park, a woman warned some SOLAR hikers that up ahead on a bridge was a baby cougar. Turns out it was a house cat...

Some SOLAR hikers in the White Mountains witnessed a backpacker, assisted by her boyfriend, giving herself dialysis in a shelter, miles from the nearest road.

A ranger at Pictured Rocks swooped in to ticket some hikers for having a fire in a restricted area, only to find that they were cooking jiffy pop on a backpack stove and having a flashlight fire.

Several SOLARites traveled to Chocpaw to adopt retiring sled dogs. Karen Bates adopted Mandy, Chris Lezovich adopted Lingo, and Barbara Erickson adopted Dave and Sprite.

Bill Halvangis tried every year to come up with a creative recipe at Rattlesnake to win the August cookoff and even tried to bribe the judges.

You thought you were going to the annual DeFrance canoe outing for a nice relaxing weekend, and you ended up helping to replace the cabin roof.

Laura Albin got her car stuck in the mud at a shakedown trip for the Advanced Backpacking workshop, hitched a ride with Denny and Mike F. in the bed of a pickup truck, and then couldn't tell the tow truck driver where she left the car.

Dave Bombard won the Rattlesnake hill climb every year, making contestants breathe a sigh of relief when he stopped competing.

Cindy Taylor, on her 1st real backpacking trip after the beginning workshop, woke up her tent mates in the wee hours to rattle her bear bells, because she heard "*something*."

Solar hosted annual trips each January to the Carter Caves Crawlathon cavers' convention in Kentucky, until the event was cancelled in 2009 to protect endangered bats.

A beginning backpacking student hiked at Pictured Rocks from Little Beaver Lake to Chapel Beach and wanted to know who had the sleeping bag she was supposed to borrow.

You didn't know what a "Tech weenie" was until you met Larry Martin.

While driving through Point Pelee Park, Cindy Harrison slammed on the brakes and exclaimed "look, an indigo bunting." Oops, it was a piece of blue ribbon tied to a tree branch....

Don (no last names, please) was canoeing and asked a person standing on the bank a question. There was no answer. He repeated his question, with a bit of anger. Still no answer. His canoe partner broke out in hysterics when she realized who he was talking to --- a statue on the shore. He got new glasses shortly after.

In October 2011, several SOLAR members took a backpacking trip to the Otter Creek Wilderness hoping for a great color trip and woke Saturday morning to over 6 inches of snow.

The Sunday night of a 4-day Wabos Loppet weekend, a half dozen SOLARites skied out to the middle of Lake Superior's Batchwana Bay and watched a lunar eclipse over the cliffs to the east, a meteorite shower overhead and the Hale Bopp comet at the same time!

The Intermediate Backpacking workshop went to Red River Gorge for Halloween and Karen Haroutunian brought a witch's hat and treats for the students.

You forgot to tuck your pant legs in your socks in the Amazon and an ant crawled up your pant leg. It answered the question of boxers or briefs.

You realized that at -50F a toilet seat will crack in half if you sit on it.

Learning the hard way that bears in/near Yosemite really do know how to open an Ursack.

Soaking in natural hot springs along the John Muir Trail during a 2-week backpacking trip.

The ridiculous amount of Oreo cookies eaten during Enjoying Michigan Winters practicals.

Waking up inside a quiet, peaceful, warm quinzhee to discover it was 0 degrees outside with a 25mph wind and -25 degree windchill.

Glenn Schultz made peach cobbler at the campfire in a dutch oven for the EMW students and instructors.

Hiking or biking up any long, steep hill you'd hear a yell of excitement from Ati Tislerics, "MORE UP!"

Halloween parties at the "Kevorkian Cabin" in Bald Mountain Recreation Area.

Cross-country ski trips and New Years Eve parties at Glenview Cabins north of Sault Ste. Marie.

More memories and thoughts from SOLAR members:

My most memorable time was when I was on the Long Trail in Vermont when we stayed at a shelter called Shooting Star Shelter and watched hundreds of shooting stars that very night. - Dave Foerster

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Bonne Michalak and Maureen DeFrance met for the "first" time while at Caesar's State Park 3 years ago. As they were talking and getting to know one another, it came to light that they BOTH grew up in Royal Oak. As more discussion came about, it became clear they were no strangers. A squeal of delight ensued when they discovered they were childhood playmates that had both married and changed names. They hadn't seen one another in over 40 years! - Maureen DeFrance

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Hmmm! White Water Rafting in the Grand Canyon, backpacking with a 17 pound tent, raccoon raids on the Pine River, downhill skiing at Blue Mountain in a blizzard, Vasa cross country ski race; it hurt but I made it; moonlight canoeing, rock climbing workshop, Rattlesnake SOLAR potluck and bike riding up a hill, the Pinery, horseback riding at the Double JJ ranch, cave crawling in Olive Hill, Kentucky, Hocking Hills, ethnic dinners, Enjoying Michigan Winters in a quinzhee that we could see through, backpacking with Leslie on Isle Royale, a ski trip to Austria where I messed up my knee, a trip on the Inca trail, and the Amazon. – Jeff Zabel

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SOLAR holds so many memories for me since I joined the club in 1983 that it is hard to pick just one. Maybe it is all the Pictured Rocks backpack trips over the years, beginning with my time in the beginning workshop and continuing over my 25-year tenure as the lead instructor for the workshop. Or maybe it was the trip to the Canadian Rockies with SOLAR friends for 17 days of backpacking. Or it could be the Thanksgiving trip into the Grand Canyon, hiking out to Plateau Point with 2 stoves, dried turkey, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, gravy, and cranberry sauce, probably the best Thanksgiving dinner of my life – thank you Karen, Leslie, Sam, Dave and Moe. Most important, I think it is all the friends that I have met in my years with SOLAR that have become my lifelong friends. I cherish every moment I have been fortunate to enjoy with SOLAR and know that I will for a long time to come. – Carol McCririe

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My SOLAR memory is not quite a memory, more like a reflection: I consider SOLAR to be a very special club and I know that is true for many, many others. Almost all the friends I have today are ones that I first met because of SOLAR and most, if not all, of the most enjoyable things I do are because of the workshops and trips I've taken with other SOLAR members. I can't imagine my life without these people and experiences! - Cindy Taylor

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SOLAR taught me how to enjoy the outdoors – every season. From my very first workshop through all the others that followed, I've been impressed by how willing SOLAR members are to share their knowledge and experience (and there's a lot of both). I've learned things that I never knew I ever needed to know. Who knew you can camp in the snow (and like it) or what a quinzhee is, or that there is more than one north? Who knew about bear bags or that you can make dinner in plastic bag, or that ounces are so important? Who knew that having a daily change of underwear really isn't as important as your mother told you? But as important as all of that is, the most important thing SOLAR has taught me is how easy it is to make new friends. – Karen Haroutunian

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I realized that somewhere in most of my favorite SOLAR memories there was something that made me a bit uncomfortable. In many situations, I have gone beyond my comfort zone, going out with folks I don't know, sleeping with them in close quarters, seeing and traveling where I never saw myself going, sleeping in the cold, hiking in the hot, hiding from the sun in the desert under a rock ledge, paddling further, bending my body into cramped caves and walking longer than ever anticipated. I find linked with all these uncomfortable bits and challenges that I have an equal or greater pleasure eating and sharing with more gusto with more good folks than I could have imagined. My memories flow over more than a ten year period and those memories enrich my life, on the wall of my house, pictures from SOLAR trips. – Mike Hobig

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Learning how to winter camp the hard way; my second event with SOLAR was winter camping or Enjoying MI Winters. After a long day of digging tunnels and kitchens in snow banks by the lake, making igloos and quinzhees at Wilderness State Park, I went to bed with damp, sweaty clothes. I froze all night long and a week later came down with Mono. – Dave DeFrance

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When I joined SOLAR, I was so excited to discover so many new interests. I wanted to join as I had heard you could learn rock-climbing. Rock-climbing was just the beginning of a litany of experiences. I met my husband, Dave through SOLAR...what better way to find a fellow lover of the outdoors! But most importantly, I think of SOLAR as family. These people are here for you through thick and thin, they've got your back. We have moved 2000 miles away, yet my SOLAR family is ready to include me in their next adventure...they're just a phone call away. – Moe DeFrance

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One of my all-time favorite memories backpacking EVER was when just Ronda and I went to North Manitou for a long weekend trip, and the wonderful sunsets and laughable amounts of bugs we endured together that weekend... (along with Trilliums, loons and swans on North Manitou!!!) – Julia (Gordon) Applegate

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I would say that finding a lost tourist on the trail while backpacking in the Smoky Mountains. Hiking her out with a broken leg to the nearest road for the rangers to pick her up easier. The backpack trip was with Margaret Martin, Carol Dunn, Pat Golden, Ron Quinn, Jonnie Johnson and Linda Rosa. I could think of more, but that one was pretty darn memorable. Hope to see you all soon! - Jonnie Johnson (Kostishak)

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I joined SOLAR as someone who had hiked and camped, but never at the same time. Backpacking has given me the opportunity to see amazing things that can only be reached on foot, to have grand adventures in the outdoors, to make great memories (Type 1 and Type 2!), to gain leadership skills and confidence, and to meet some wonderful like-minded people. SOLAR has helped shape me into who I am today. - Jennifer Tislerics

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My most memorable trips are a backpacking trip to Pictured Rocks in 2000 as the final practical for the beginning workshop. The weather turned with wind, rain, snow and crashing waves, resulting in one of the few times the practical was aborted. Most of the participants, leaders, and gear were soaked. The other was a 6-day, 50-mile backpacking trip in the Gila (HEE-la) Wilderness, NM in 2004. We spent three days hiking up the deep canyon of the West Fork of the Gila River (crossing the river 73 times in 17 miles) and then three days up and across the Mogollon (Mug-ee-yawn) Mountains. One of the high points for me was the late-night ruckus as Ted Kosik scrambled to get a scorpion out of his tent. – Dick Ebenjoe

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Mimi Gendreau and I met in our cycling club in 1994 and grew to know each other much more at SOLAR meetings and outings. In 1998 or 1999 we went on our first big mushing trip together with SOLAR and about 14 other members, to Chocpaw Expeditions in South Landing Ontario. We enjoyed the trip very much and we later arranged several annual mushing trips for the two of us with Chocpaw. Mimi and I married in 1997, and in 2019 after we both retired, we moved to Green Valley AZ, south of Tucson. Enjoy your big weekend! Eric Noyes

Acknowledgements

Information contained in this book was compiled through information from SOLAR Rays dating back to about 1983, right after Carol McCririe joined SOLAR. Many individuals sent in stories and memories of their time in SOLAR and helped fill in the gaps for things I couldn't remember even after 43 years of being a SOLAR member.

My apologies to anyone who got missed with regard to instructors, marriages, or children, or to anyone who verbally told me a story, and I didn't get it exactly right.

My thanks to Peg Campbell, one of the founding members, for her contribution of the SOLAR story for this book.

I found the following in May 1990 SOLAR Ray and thought that it conveys the sentiments of many of the SOLAR people I have met in my years in the club.

FROM A HAPPY CAMPER

Submitted by an anonymous member

Because of S.O.L.A.R., I now know:

*The wind on Mt. Washington,
The waves crashing against the cliffs of Pictured Rocks,
The rain showers of Killarney Provincial Park,
The "one way" portage,
The "trail head packing" technique,
How to "survive",
How to tell time "S.O.L.A.R. style",
The excuses for not finding the morels,
The many little tricks that make the outdoors fun,
The feeling of isolation at Sand Lake,
The thrill of viewing a winter full moon in the outdoors.*

Thanks from a happy camper.