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## Oregon Trails - Why Can't a Library Be More Like a Fitness Center?

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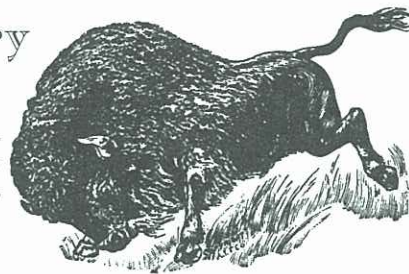
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# Oregon Trails — Why Can't a Library Be More Like a Fitness Center?

by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Oregon Institute of Technology) <leonhart@oit.edu>



A few years ago in an *Against the Grain* "Profile Encouraged," and in answer to the question, "What do you want to be doing five years from now," I answered, "Breathing on my own." I was trying to be funny but I was not joking. To plan one's life in terms of years stopped making sense (if it ever did) when I turned 50. But the desire to live on grew along with a keener awareness of my own mortality, gray hair and middle age paunch notwithstanding.

There are no guarantees when it comes to life — all aspects. Riding high in April shot down in May. Still, it is only human to want to hedge our bets. Exercise may not extend your life, but it won't kill you either — ha! But it is true that when I finally paid for a year's membership in my college's fitness center, it was not with Methuselah in mind, but Kohelet (AKA. Ecclesiastes or Solomon). It was Kohelet who first told us that "All is vanity." And Vanity it was who led me by the hand to the fitness center. The last time I changed clothes in a public room, I was a PFC in the United States Army, but back then I had no choice, and I was in good shape. So — I just sucked it in and imagined that it was 1963. That was the easy part.

Our fitness center has a weight room, a basketball court, rowing machines, stair machines, stationary bicycles (upright and reclining), treadmills, and a super circuit. The super circuit appealed to me because I wanted to distance myself from The Blob and I wanted to be able to open a jar of dill pickles without turning as red as a beet. The stationary bicycles also appealed to me, even though I would rather run than ride a bicycle. The reason? I noticed that those riding the bicycles were reading while they exercised — men's sana in corpore sano.

Some libraries, intimidated or inspired by Barnes & Noble et alia, have begun installing coffee bars so that their patrons will come back to the library to read. Everyone doesn't like coffee, especially health nuts. Why not cater to them, too, with a library fitness center? Each stationary bicycle and treadmill — rowing machines, etc. are out because you wouldn't be able to read, much less turn the page — would be fitted with a magazine/book holder. The one in my center is portable and only holds magazines. Books must be held in one's hands, the old fashioned way.

What a great thing, exercise the body and the mind at one time and not waste time. What a great concept. Why do one thing when you can do two? For those privileged enough to commute long distances to work, how many people do you see every day applying make-up, shaving, drinking coffee, talking on the cell phone, brushing one's teeth and washing one's hands of the sticky bun — all done while driving to work and listening to the radio?

The next day I brought a book with me and climbed aboard a stationary bicycle. It was a non-fiction work, the kind of book that I often bypassed for a work of fiction at the end of the day when I needed a diversion. I don't know what it was, the perspiration running down my forehead, my back, my armpits? The distractions of VH1 turned up so Generation X could hear it? The comings and goings of my vain companions? Whatever it was, I couldn't get past the first page.

The next day I brought a book of short stories and actually finished one but I was having to work too hard at it. Even a book holder would not have helped. It just wasn't fun. I would rather be on the treadmill, simulating running and letting my mind wander, writing wonderful pieces of prose or letters that would

never make it to paper, but never mind.

Then it occurred to me that the other exercisers who were reading were reading magazines. Some held them, others placed them in the magazine holders. Now I was on to something. So on day three I went to the magazine rack, the kind you might find in a public library, and looked for something to read. Hmm? *People*, *Us*, *Fitness*, a *Victoria's Secret catalog*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Esquire*. Of course I chose *Esquire* and dutifully climbed up on the exercise bicycle.

Reading that issue of *Esquire* I discovered a couple of things. First, *Esquire* ain't what it used to be. I was actually able to concentrate on the articles in it, but I wasn't very interested in the content. I also discovered that while I had been reading and exercising, I wasn't doing justice to either activity. I surmised that the reading matter, if reading is really the right word in this context, must be low level with lots of pictures and advertisements, if it is to have any chance at all of blending into the exercise regimen. Second, I found that any reading matter that truly exercised the mind must have a place of its own — like a library — and that such reading was incompatible with vigorous physical exercise.

There were more practical reasons why libraries, spiritual and intellectual fitness centers, would not want to install physical fitness centers. There's the question of changing rooms, showers, the whirl of the machines, and the grunts and groans of those of us who are fighting gravity and inertia as much as time, and for whom one strenuous activity at a time is enough, thank you. 🐾

## From the Other Side of the Street from page 64

of publishers, partly on the reputation of the publisher. This led to an interesting discussion of the role of university presses in producing the midlist scholarly titles formerly published by small niche publishers recently subsumed by large conglomerates. Interestingly enough, while these titles appear to be a new area of expansion for the university presses, some members of the press expressed reservations about jumping into this arena without careful forethought. For the press, the primary concern is one of identity and status. The primary selling point for university presses is their reputation for quality in scholarly works. If they move into a new type of publication, they will, of course, maintain the quality. However,

what will be the impact of a different audience that may either not know about or be intimidated by the publisher's scholarly reputation?

The discussion of publishers' reputations flowed easily into a report by **John Rutledge**, West European Bibliographer, at UNC-CH. He reported on research he and two colleagues are conducting into the value of book reviews. Their preliminary findings indicate that book reviews serve mainly as an announcement of publication as most of them are positive. However, as he pointed out, the same is true for most products, except television shows and movies. To illustrate his point, he used a review of Volvo in which he substituted "UNC Press." In both cases, the bottom line was quality with some variations in the features available. John remained skeptical regarding the role of reviews in the actual purchasing deci-

sions. However, his creative substitution of one producer for another was witty and provided another lens with which to view the press!

The nature of these meetings has been informal with active participation by the audience and many questions as new ideas arise. One example at this meeting was the following question: Would UNC Press go head to head with Norton (or some other publisher) to gain the option to publish an autobiography of **Dean Smith**, the renowned basketball coach at UNC-CH? **Kate Torrey** was quite focused in her response when she indicated that the primary consideration for the press would be its mission. This rejoinder was a good reminder for all participants to keep their primary missions in mind and not be distracted from them by the changing contents, economics, organization, or technology. 🐾