



The leaders of Women in the Wilderness trips and treks (back row) Colleen Gibbons, Laurie Deutsch, Judy Gilbert, Kathy DePaula (front row) Linda Devi, Annie Prutzman, China Galland, Margaret Pavel, Deborah Chamberlin-Taylor

Women in the wilderness

By Mara B. Altman

Few people understand the recreation and earthly challenges the wilderness can offer as well as China Galland, president of Women in the Wilderness and author of a book of the same name.

Women in the Wilderness, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1975, designs and organizes wilderness trips that are led by women, though men are often welcome to participate. Their programs are not your run-of-the-mill hikes; they vary from day hikes up Mount Tam to six-week pilgrimages through the Himalayas. Many of the trips combine international land and water experiences with workshops and discussions on such topics as mythology, passion and power, and women in management.

DURING AN INTERVIEW that appropriately took place outdoors in the Mill Valley hills near her

home, Galland explained how Women in the Wilderness came about. She first saw the need for such an organization during wilderness trips with her second husband, a Colorado Outward Bound instructor. She found it difficult to learn wilderness tactics while working with her (now former) husband because, she says, "It was easier to let him do it and he didn't always take the time to show me."

It was during Outward Bound trips with other instructors and their wives that Galland learned — from the wives — the techniques of rappelling down a mountain and rafting. Galland and other women involved in wilderness experiences could see the need for a course designed specifically for women.

"Our interests and what we wanted to do outdoors were sometimes quite different from what men wanted to do," says Galland. "Like not being as goal oriented — having time to look at the flowers. Also, in those days typical Outward Bound courses had more of a military survival-school emphasis that just didn't work for an adult women's course."

In 1974 Galland organized the first adult women's Outward Bound Course and in 1975, she says,

continued on page 14

Wilderness

continued from page 13

"Women in the Wilderness was born in San Francisco through a confluence of energies and talking with other women over a cup of coffee."

GALLAND, TWICE-MARRIED and the mother of three, might seem an unlikely candidate for such an unusual career. In fact she worked in a variety of jobs before discovering her passion for exploring the wilderness. Her positions have included Harvard researcher, Boston College English teacher and even assistant city manager of Dallas, Texas (she was the first woman to hold this position). And she considers writing to be an important part of her life. When asked if her adopted name of China has anything to do with the country, she explains that it emerged from her private writings.

"I began to use it as a way of affirming the part of me that wrote," she says. "At first the attention it drew made me uncomfortable and I almost gave it up, until I read an essay by Henry Miller on writing that says writers have to get to that place in themselves called 'China'; they have to learn to write in 'Chinese.' And I thought oh wow, what a great affirmation — I'm not nuts after all!"

Nine years after its inception, Women in the Wilderness boasts a nationwide membership. Galland makes it clear that they're not all feminists but says, "Experiences among women are extremely valuable because they offer support in a radical environment. Often women's only wilderness experiences have been with fathers, husbands and boyfriends and they only

did typical female chores like cook and clean at the campsite."

Galland stresses that she never saw Women in the Wilderness as a separatist group, which is why men are often welcome on their trips. "It's just as important that men give up unhealthy roles they've been taught," she says.

Participants in Women in the Wilderness range in age from 20 to 60 years old. The training required depends on the trips, but most treks are appropriate for beginners. Says Galland, "We try to design the trips so you have a wilderness experience as well as the time to reflect on it and integrate it with your day at the office or your children or lover or whatever, in realizing strength and skills and understanding how it relates to your life. It's a way of recharging and reconnecting yourself to the world around us that modern technology removes us from."

ONE OF GALLAND'S PROGRAMS, entitled "Demystifying Fear," is a day-long workshop on Mount Tam designed to break through the physical limits women set for themselves through fear. A similar workshop for women recovering from rape, incest, battering, and alcohol or drug abuse focuses on their special problems in regaining self-confidence. Other upcoming programs include rafting trips on the American River in June, a Grand Canyon rafting trip in July, backpacking in the Trinity Alps in July and August, canoeing in Minnesota in September, and a month-long trek to Nepal in late October. For information about these and other trips and about local workshops contact China Galland, 20 Sunnyside Avenue, Suite A, Mill Valley (388-1255). A subscription to the Women in the Wilderness newsletter is available for \$12.