



Residential experiences and the John Muir Award, an Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre case study

Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (OEC) is a charity that supports over 2,400 young people and teaching staff each year to experience the outdoors around Lochgoilhead in the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. For the last 20+ years the Centre has supported schools, youth and adult groups to take part in the John Muir Award.

Ardroy OEC integrates the John Muir Award with the Centre's diverse activities to give a stronger environmental context and focus. It's also used as a way of 'book-ending' the experience, engaging schools both before and after their residential programmes at the Centre. Presently 40% of Primary school children attending Ardroy participate in the John Muir Award, and both the centre and visiting schools have noticed benefits.



Benefits to Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

"The John Muir Award encourages hands on connection with the outdoors", says Phil Thompson, Ardroy's Development Manager. "It compels our learners to get outside, off site and make connections with nature. Using the John Muir Award adds an extra layer and value to the experiences, which become more varied and memorable."

Many schools using the John Muir Award at Ardroy continue with follow up activities within school and their local area, an approach that Phil strongly endorses: "It can really help schools integrate their residential experiences into the curriculum, as well as encouraging more outdoor learning back at school. Residentials shouldn't be a week in isolation – we strive to embed them in the curriculum and to be an integrated part of every child's learning." Ardroy encourages schools to focus on the **Discover** a sense of place and **Explore** how they can experience, enjoy and learn about wild places while at Ardroy, then work on their **Conserve** challenge back in school, thus making a difference to their local community.



Benefits to visiting schools and pupils

Donibristle & Carnegie Primary School return to Ardroy OEC each year because of its high quality outdoor residential programme and its links with the John Muir Award and Curriculum for Excellence. Working in close partnership with Ardroy, school staff have developed a two year cross-curricular model taking part in both the John Muir Discovery Award (in P6) and Explorer Award (P7) as two progressive levels of involvement. In addition to the activities at Ardroy OEC, the school carry out pre and post residential activities in the school grounds and surrounding environment as part of their Award experience. All schools attending Ardroy are encouraged to use the Award as a bridge between school and residential learning experiences.

Karen Hart, Depute Head Teacher (DHT) at Donibristle Primary school said, "Our relationship with Ardroy has allowed us to deliver deeper, more meaningful outdoor experiences. These are perfect for developing young people who have a connection to our environments and a genuine sense of responsibility for protecting them".



Laura Inglis, DHT at Carnegie PS commented on the impacts of the residential experience for individuals:

"One of the biggest and most notable benefits of residential visits can be seen in those pupils who find learning in the classroom particularly challenging. Ardroy provides a brilliant opportunity for our most vulnerable pupils to achieve success and a sense of self belief that cannot be matched."

"We've seen that pupils who participate in the John Muir Award become more confident in their self-belief, more articulate in their communication skills and more resilient when facing challenges. These are key areas that indicate future success, and we are so fortunate that our pupils can access this opportunity".

Karen Hart, Depute Head Teacher, Donibristle Primary School

Benefits to the local area

Having hundreds of pupils complete their John Muir Award each year has had benefits for the local environment in Lochgoilhead. As well as learning about responsible behaviour outdoors, participants are given the opportunity to put something back. In just one year, Award participants at Ardroy removed over 300m² of invasive rhododendron from the local Atlantic oak woodland.

A collaborative approach has helped Ardroy to develop links with local conservation groups like the [Cormonachan Woodlands Association](#) as well as wider partnerships with Forestry Land Scotland and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

The John Muir Trust is redesigning the John Muir Award with an aim to expand our reach to a greater number of people and communities across the UK to help build awareness, experience and understanding of the many and varied benefits a connection to wild places can bring.

A redesigned Award is anticipated to launch in summer 2024. We wish to ensure that the John Muir Award has a bright future in a rapidly changing world. Visit our website for more, including how you can get involved.



"It's fantastic that Ardroy OEC has helped so many young people connect with and take positive action for nature such as invasive species removal through the John Muir Award. It's had a really positive impact for wildlife in the area and helps achieve some key actions for Future Nature - the National Park Authority's plan to reverse the decline of, and restore, nature in the National Park."

Ali Cush, Education and Inclusion Adviser, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

Find out more about Future Nature and the John Muir Award in the LLTNP [here](#)