

Exploring Northumberland National Park to raise achievement

Spotting kestrels, wild camping, making pine needle tea, planting trees, sampling a peat bog and trekking out on the moors – all part of a John Muir Award with LookwideUK!

LookwideUK is a development initiative of Northumberland Scouts. Their aim, to help disaffected and disengaged young people to realise their full potential, fits in well with the 'open to all' ethos and flexible learning structure of the John Muir Award. Working with four different schools in the North East, 40 pupils between the ages of 10-18 have enjoyed and cared for Northumberland National Park with LookwideUK as they've worked towards this national award.



Broadening horizons beyond the classroom

LookwideUK offers an alternative curriculum programme focussed on Learning Outside the Classroom. This enables those who struggle in formal settings the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge in an outdoor environment, whilst making a difference to wild places. Each project aims to achieve the following outcomes, which fit naturally with the John Muir Award's themes of connecting with and caring for wild places:

- Increase awareness of the world away from the inner city
- Highlight the existence and purpose of Northumberland National Park
- Increase understanding and appreciation of nature
- Recognise and practice a 'Leave no Trace' policy to help preserve the environment's natural beauty

Using the John Muir Award to engage with the outdoors

Groups took part in a programme of regular sessions over a 6 week period, including a short residential to help them get away from it all and gain new perspectives. A range of activities, locations and approaches were used to effectively engage the groups and meet the Four Challenges of the Award:

- Bushcraft to introduce Leave No Trace principles and the idea of living in harmony with the environment, as well as to learn about different plants and animals in more detail.
- Activities to slow down their normal pace of life and take more notice of their surroundings e.g. bird watching, a relaxed woodland breakfast, and a micro-hike to encourage them to look more closely at detail and identify things of interest.
- Conservation activities with a positive focus linked to giving something back (e.g. planting trees).
- Using the idea of 'challenge by choice' to encourage the young people to push themselves at a level appropriate for them and promote the idea that what they put in, they will get out.
- Evening campfires to encourage informal reflection and a sense of celebration.
- Climbing and long distance walking to see the world from a different perspective and to see across the county from a high point.
- Natural art to enable reflection on thoughts and feelings about the area.

A focus on Northumberland National Park

Most of the activities took place within Northumberland National Park. Despite being on their doorstep, many of the young people were completely unaware of it. It provided a natural connection with the young people's outdoor experiences and the John Muir Award. As a founder of the National Park movement over 100 years ago, John Muir himself was one of the first subjects of discussion before the pupils even left the classroom. They took part in John Muir games and quizzes to set a context for enjoying and caring for wild places in fun and varied ways.

Working with Northumberland National Park Authority staff offered supported and informative access to some of the most stunning wild places in the region. Many of the students experienced and enjoyed places they had never dreamed of visiting before. Park Rangers also supported the pupils to contribute to valuable conservation projects such as the Moorland Indicators of Climate Change Initiative (MICCI). They took water and pH samples of 3000 year old peat, contributing data that will help to improve wild places for the future.



Due to the success of the project the Lookwide UK team are now planning to include the John Muir Award in heritage skills building projects in the National Park during 2013.

“We look forward to building on our relationship with Northumberland National Park to offer vocational opportunities and help our young people to build skills for their future”

Nicky Sargent, CEO LookwideUK

Diverse learning outcomes

Before their John Muir Award the participants had no experience of connecting with the environment, having grown up in deprived urban areas. A rich variety of learning outcomes were achieved:

- Participants' interest, appreciation and knowledge of wildlife increased and they were introduced to the concept of biodiversity.
- They experienced wild places in a range of weather conditions and showed strong team spirit in rain and wind.
- During and after each programme many showed a change in their views; from finding a new enjoyment of camping or realising that walking isn't boring - everyone took something positive from their experience!
- Peat surveys in the field were followed by peer-led science lessons back in the classroom.
- One participant stood up in front of 20 other students for the first time in his life, overcoming a speech difficulty to deliver a fault free talk, significantly building self-esteem.
- ICT skills were developed through designing PowerPoint presentations shown to peers.



“Throughout the Award we have watched our children grow in confidence and maturity, we have seen their understanding deepen about their place within the world and how they can all take some responsibility to look after it.” Mrs Watson, Head teacher, Blaydon West Primary School