



## The John Muir Award on water at Do it 4 Real Derwentwater



### Background

YHA Do it 4 Real summer camps bring young people from different backgrounds together to share a week of new experiences away from home. YHA has worked with the John Muir Award for four years to encourage the young people to enjoy and care for the natural environments they discover on camp. The residential programme at YHA Derwentwater has a watersports theme, which provides an exciting focus for the Award. It was staffed by volunteers this year who helped 229 ten to sixteen year olds achieve their Award over the six weeks of the summer!

### How it works at camp

The John Muir Award fits naturally at Derwentwater Do it 4 Real. The varied activity programme enables the campers to explore the Borrowdale Valley both on and off the water. Canoeing and sailing on Derwentwater bring a sense of fun and adventure whilst learning new skills, and full 'immersion' in nature for some! Being on the lake is a chance to see the changes along the shore, from the river delta to the islands. Campers can also enjoy the views of the surrounding landscape, and learn about how humans have shaped it through felling and mining. A stop off at St Herbert's Island enables them to see first hand the effect of irresponsible camping and to help clear up some of the damage.



Back on dry land, activities such as climbing and abseiling provide a different physical challenge, and an insight into invasive species and erosion along the way. Ghyll scrambling at Stoneycroft Ghyll, is a chance to discover the rich plant life found there, and get wet all over again!

***"The John Muir Award brings a whole new dimension to camp."***

Rachel, Head Team Leader

### What the Award brings to the experience

Young people commonly gain a range of benefits from taking part in the John Muir Award at Do it 4 Real. It seems to help trigger a sense of wonder and enjoyment of nature, as well as an increased awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the environment around them, and a sense of responsibility for taking care of it.

Rachel Bayman, Head Team Leader at Derwentwater for the second year, is a firm supporter after seeing the effects first hand: *"The John Muir Award brings a whole new dimension to camp. At the end of the week the young people often realise how far they have come in their understanding of their surroundings and their impact on the environment. Camp without the Award would be easier to run in some ways but not as good. The Award provides a focus to channel the young people's energy positively, which could otherwise manifest as a negative behaviour."*

The young people on camp can choose how much they engage in the Award, and although occasionally they would rebel against it, the staff found that it actually helped calm down some of the campers with more challenging behaviour. 80% of participants saw it through and achieved their Award over the course of the summer.

## How they made a difference to the local area



As well as learning about conservation issues and how they could minimise their impact on the landscape, the young people did their bit to 'put something back.' Litter picking along the lakeshore took place daily alongside conversations about the negative impact litter has on nature. Rhododendrons were cleared from the area around the waterfall in the hostel grounds (Barrow Falls), which worked really well. Bracken bashing was another hit with the campers, both on site and at the base of Stoneycroft Ghyll.

***“Bracken and fern are similar because bracken comes from fern, but fern comes out like a hand and bracken doesn’t.”*** Precious (camper)

## Local links

The National Trust owns most of the land in the Borrowdale Valley and was keen to offer support. Their staff advised on potential Conserve activities, lent displays, and visited once a week to talk to the young people about what a special area they had come to and how they could help to keep it that way. They learnt about how the National Trust balances the needs of wildlife and visitors to the area, and that rare species and habitats can be found in the valley such as the Atlantic Oak woodlands, protected by European law for its moss and lichen communities.

## The challenges – the Head Team Leader’s perspective

*“I knew that running camp with volunteer Team Leaders would have its challenges, but with support from my Deputy Heads, and a couple of staff with previous experience (or an interest in nature) we got the Award working. The main challenge came with new volunteers, as it took them a couple of weeks to learn how to introduce and run the Award. I started to pair the new volunteers up with strong Team Leaders that had already been at camp to support that process.”*

## ...and the factors to success

Here are the things that made it work well:

- Supportive activity providers
- Fantastic location
- Amazing and varied activities
- Team Leaders with passion for the Award
- Willing young people



It’s worth highlighting the importance of supportive activity providers. Leaders ‘Glamalara’ and ‘Plattypus’ fully supported the Award by integrating the Four Challenges into their activities. They really helped to set the scene in a fun way, without overloading with dry information. Being able to ‘teach’ the young people without them being aware can have a strong impact.

Rachel again: *“We overcame the challenges and overall the Award was a really positive aspect of this camp. I think the John Muir Award is made for Derwentwater Do it 4 Real, the two just work together and run each other. If the view of Derwentwater, the cloud on Skiddaw and the ever changing colours of Cat Bells can’t get a young person to think about nature there isn’t much that will do.”*

***“I didn’t really care much for my surroundings and used to laugh when I heard people preach about the earth. Then I listened and engaged which opened my eyes to the fact that we are destroying the earth, the home which is ours and now I never drop litter and it turns my stomach when I see other people do it.”***

Jamie, Team Leader