



## Outdoor learning in the Lake District National Park

**Keswick School** is a successful secondary school in the Lake District National Park, with a role of around 1000. Their holistic approach to education helps pupils appreciate their surroundings, and develop skills and self-confidence through challenge. Simon Jackson, Head Teacher, strives “for every teacher to include some outdoor learning and for outdoor learning to become progressively more embedded”. The school decided to use the John Muir Award for the whole of Year 9 to support this approach.



Sue Penrice, Head of Geography, summarised their aims for the John Muir Award: “to nurture a passion for the local environment in Keswick School pupils. Many young people living in Cumbria take the landscape of the Lake District National Park for granted and we want pupils to develop an appreciation of it that will help to conserve it for generations to come.”

### What did they do?



Activities took place over a twelve month period to experience all seasons outdoors. Activities included regular biology and geography fieldwork, measuring footpath erosion and identifying species in the lakes, as well as a local walk around Derwent Water. Pupils were encouraged to review and record their experiences outdoors and made good use of their Record Books at the end of each session. Initially tasks were directed, but as the year progressed they were given more flexibility as they took ownership of the book - some preferred a storybook approach or a sketch to a written record.

Even though the Award was being delivered to a large number of pupils, involvement across the school, and buy-in from staff, ensured all pupils enjoyed high quality experiences. The main challenge for providing for a whole year group was setting up meaningful conserve challenges close to school. However, liaison with the Lake District National Park, the local National Trust and West Cumbria Rivers Trust enabled all pupils to make a significant contribution to their local river catchment. They were involved in tasks such as invasive species control, footpath maintenance and woodland management.

**“It’s wonderful to get school students involved with Himalayan Balsam control as they are the future guardians of our countryside. These youngsters will be able to raise awareness amongst others as to the damage that these terrible invasive non-native species can do.”**

Val Edmondson, LDNP Park Management Ranger (North)

All activities were close to school so that no transport was needed making it easier to involve whole class groups whilst also minimising time, cost and environmental impacts of the programme.

Sue Penrice describes the **key benefits for the pupils**:

- Our programme of outdoor learning develops independent learning. The outdoors challenges children to think for themselves and learn through team activities.
- Pupils often show a different side to their personalities when outdoors. For example those who are confident in the outdoors enjoy the chance to show their skills and help others, whilst many who rarely visit wild places are keen to learn and often ask more questions than when in a classroom.
- Pupils spent time with staff or volunteers from the Lake District National Park, local National Trust and Rivers Trust. They get a hands-on insight into how these organisations work to care for their surroundings, which develops a sense of responsibility and citizenship.

Sue also described **key benefits for the school**:

- Outdoor learning helps to form the good relationships that we have between staff and pupils.
- The John Muir Award provided a very flexible route to planning a programme of activities and achieving success. Its aims are compatible with the school ethos and it fits in with young peoples' interests. The very small amount of paperwork involved was refreshing!
- Award activities provided themes and topics across the curriculum. It allowed space for discussions of feelings, knowledge and opinions.
- Closer working relationships between the school and the National Park and other local agencies.
- Opportunities for departments to deliver specific topics in their curriculum and base them on real-life experiences. For example, the geography department's topic on National Parks and the biology department's GCSE work on animal and plant sampling techniques.
- The Biology A Level students were also completing the Ecology part of their course at the time, so they were involved in the teaching of this in the field, with clear reciprocal benefits.



Progression beyond the Discovery Award is being achieved by running an 'Explorer' club, made up of 15 Y10 pupils who have chosen to carry on with the award to achieve the Explorer level. They are doing a mixture of self-led activities and more complex conservation tasks, for example river revetment work, working alongside the LDNP's Apprentices. They will also help to lead groups of younger pupils on activities such as the Y7 Skiddaw ascent.

**“They started with different levels of awareness of the National Park but all of them became a lot more aware. The flexibility of the John Muir Award is fantastic. It allows us to run a really high quality Award without having to fit into a bureaucratic box!”** Liz Cooper, Head of Biology.