

A New Perspective – a Staff Team John Muir Award in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

The Visitor Policy and Engagement team at Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority has been working towards a John Muir Discovery Award over the past 18 months. The colleagues used their staff team development days to get out of the office and experience parts of the National Park they hadn't visited before, as well as getting to know each other better. Using the John Muir Award as a framework for this allowed the team to link their visits in a more meaningful way. It also helped the staff learn more about the Award and how it works as a key engagement tool to meet aspects of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Getting out of the office

The group visited places that many had not been to before, with each day in a different wild place in the National Park. They ambled in Glen Amble, walked in Puck's Glen in Argyll, cycled through Glen Ogle in the Trossachs and participated in invasive species removal at Stronachlachar and the RSPB Reserve in Gartocharn. By choosing accessible areas and activities that suited the group's abilities the whole team took part in every day, ensuring everyone was included.



"Fab day, regardless of auld hips and sair bums! Great weather too!" Babs Robertson



Getting to know the National Park

Whilst each staff member took different things from the experience, all staff commented that they had greatly enjoyed taking part in the John Muir Award and that it had increased their knowledge of places and habitats throughout the Park.

"It sparked an interest in what's out there, and reminded me of why visitors are coming and the experiences they have when they are here." Graeme Archibald

While most of the wild places were new to the team, others commented that visiting them without a specific work focus allowed the group to experience them in an entirely new way.

Bringing the team together

The group noticed that all parts of the experience – the planning, trips, weather, food, midges, etc. – got them to work closely with their colleagues in ways that they don't normally get the chance to. Many noted that it was the most difficult tasks that brought them closest, such as walking through knee high mud, or helping with practical conservation tasks.

“You would have thought that the head high nettles might have got a few people grumbling, but it only seemed to make us laugh more (and sing louder!) whilst we searched for the Himalayan Balsam plants.” Bethan Haston

As well as bringing the team together, staff also commented that the experiences had improved their relationships with some of their partner organisations, enhancing their working links.

“I really believe that a team who get on well and support each other can achieve so much more in the workplace – and the Award has helped us with this 100%.” Charlotte Wallace

Reconnecting with nature and values

The days spent outside provided a place for the staff members to slow down, and re-connect with the natural environment.

“We sat in the sun talking about how beautiful it was, and remembered the reasons that originally inspired us to work for the National Park. We also talked about Muir and the purpose of National Parks, just the kind of stuff that never really comes up in the office.” Alison Cush



Wider connections

The team has shared their experiences with colleagues throughout the National Park Authority as well as more widely online. They've been motivated to inspire others to get involved and find out first-hand what makes Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park a special place to visit. For some this has included return visits with friends and family.

“I think if I've got nothing else from this it's that when my sister came up, instead of going to spas and going shopping, we were going outside and up Conic Hill.” Avril Nicolson

Reflecting on their experiences also allowed the team to consider the value they place on engaging with nature, both through their work and in their daily lives.

“The day walking through the water, being stung by nettles, getting wet and dirty provided an opportunity for me to think about how much I have become disconnected with, and miss the earth... I have always known that spending time outside offers an undefinable benefit to our being, but I had lost the understanding of how true this really is. The day has allowed me to refocus on what is really important both personally and professionally and reawakened an enthusiasm and energy I will endeavour to weave into every part of my life again.”
Graeme Archibald