

Extra-Curricular

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is composed of 5 sections: Expedition, Physical, Skills, Volunteering and Residential. In school we oversee the Expedition section and participants meet on Friday afternoons to be taught expedition skills such as: camp craft, cooking, first aid, map and compass skills. Pupils are entered directly into Gold level in school.

Practices

M. Miskelly

Our first practice (consisting of 2 days and 1 night) was held in March, on St Patrick's weekend. We started at Spelga Dam car park in wet, cold and misty conditions. All the groups coped well in the cold conditions and made it into camp in good spirits and ready for a hot meal. Day 2 brought the groups over the Brandy pad to finish at Donard Car park. Some of the more adventurous groups followed the Mourne wall from Hare's Gap and over Slieve Commedagh, where there were still traces of snow.

Our second practice was during the last weekend of the Easter break and we enjoyed glorious weather all weekend. Our route started at Gamekeeper's lodge Car park and took us over Carn Mountain before meeting the Trassey track, which then took us to our camp at Tollymore campsite. As we were to return to Tollymore for a second night, we left the tents up and set some more challenging routes for day 2 as the groups had less to carry. After another successful day and a good night's sleep, the group finished

with a walk along the Brandy pad to Bloody Bridge car park. They were all glad to see their parents and have the opportunity to grab an ice cream from a stall at the car park.

The weather was kind to us again for our final practice, as we headed to Carricklittle from our starting point at Gamekeeper's lodge. This route brought the groups over the Dam wall at Ben Crom reservoir giving us some spectacular views. Our second camp was at Meelmore lodge; most groups made their way from Hare's castle to the Brandy pad and then to Meelmore lodge in plenty of time to pick a good spot to camp. We had an interesting night at the camp, making this an experience the groups and I will remember for many years to come. With a weather warning issued for thunderstorms and heavy rain, we decided to cut the last day's walk short. The groups all finished at Hen Car Park following an easy walk along the Mourne way.





Wicklow 2023

For our qualifying expedition we went to Wicklow at the end of June; our first time since 2019. We stayed the first night in Glendalough YH and enjoyed food from a local takeaway that was very happy to receive such a large order. We met each group that evening to look at the routes for the next day and gave the pupils some advice about the route. Spirits were high on the first night; this would be the last time the pupils would have access to a bed, shower and most importantly Wi-Fi, for a while.

Day 1

Following a good night's sleep and filling up at breakfast the pupils were ready for the off. Several of the groups were doing the 'Spinc walk' at Glendalough, which is popular with tourists due to its wonderful views of the Lake. The other groups headed over Scar Mountain, following the Wicklow Way as they spotted lots of wildlife, including Red Kites and the occasional American tourist. Our first camp was at Lough Dan, which was used in the filming of the series 'Vikings'. An encounter with an axe wielding Viking might have been preferred, to an evening battling the midges. After a long day and having to cope with midges, everyone was happy to get into their tents for a well-earned rest.

Day 2

When the staff arrived to see the groups in the morning, they needed a bit of a push to get moving as some were still eating breakfast! When the groups eventually got moving, they were walking in lovely conditions with great visibility. It was quite windy however and those groups on the higher ground felt the full force of the wind. All the groups were headed to a campsite in Laragh, a shorter walk than the previous day. It was another hot afternoon,

but the groups coped well with some taking advantage of the toilets and ice cream available at Glendalough. All groups made the campsite in good time and in good spirits. The campsite was located by a river, where many took the opportunity to cool off by dipping their feet in the river or having a swim.

Day 3

All groups were ready to leave on time and we walked towards Glenmalure Valley, which has a lot of military history. Today was a 'dreich' day to start (as they say in Scotland) and the winds were still strong, but conditions improved later in the day. The route took the groups through the forest and onto the Wicklow way via 'Derrybawn' and 'Mullacor'. Once over the high ground, the groups descended to the Glenmalure Valley floor via the 'Tunnel of Love'. With the 'Tunnel of Love' successfully negotiated, it was a short flat walk to the campsite at Glenamlure YH. This hostel is very basic and remote with no running water or electricity but this didn't deter several pupils from asking the warden for the Wi-Fi password. With Day 3 complete the mood at camp was buoyant and some of the pupils even decided to take a dip in the river to cool down after they had set up camp.

Day 4

The end was almost in sight! It was another great day, but a lot of the route passing through the forest provided some shade from the heat. All the groups were determined to finish early; they managed to arrive at the finish at Glenamlure Lodge in good time and were able to enjoy a cold drink, sausages, chicken nuggets and chips. On the journey up the road to Banbridge, it was very quiet and smelly on the bus and we were all glad to finally arrive back safely.

