

Extra-Curricular

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award comprises of 5 sections: Expedition, Physical, Skills, Volunteering and Residential and in school we oversee the Expedition section. We do direct entry into Gold in school and participants meet on Friday afternoons where the expedition skills such as: - camp craft, cooking, first aid, map and compass skills are taught.

Expedition Section- Mr Miskelly

Practices

Our first practice was in March, on St Patrick's weekend. We started at Spelga Dam car park in wet, cold and misty conditions. As the day progressed the conditions got worse- the rain started at 11 and didn't stop all day! Each teacher led groups to teach some navigation skills and with low cloud cover it was important to rely on our compass skills. Everyone made it safely to Tollymore, where we were due to camp. However, there was a river running off the road and onto the campsite. As we were all soaked to the skin and with a flooded camp field, we had to abandon the camp and meet again next morning when the weather was better. We did some more navigation work in and around Tollymore, to hone the skills needed for Wicklow.

Our second practice was during the Easter break. Unfortunately for this practice the Met Office had issued a yellow weather warning for high winds and rain that evening and the next day. Camping again had to be abandoned due to safety concerns. We managed a good day's walk, starting our route at Gamekeeper's Lodge Car park. The route

took us over Carn Mountain before meeting the Trassey track and then to Tollymore. Day 2 had to be abandoned due to the weather warning of high winds. We met again in Rostrevor the day after in lovely conditions- now that the storm had passed. The walk took us through Kilbroney, up heart attack hill towards Yellow water and eventually onto the Mourne way to Leitrim Lodge car park for collection.

Thankfully for our final practice, the weather was a bit kinder to us. It was wet but at least there was no weather warning. We headed to Carricklittle from our start 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 Tollymore; the groups made their way from Hare's Castle to the Brandy pad and then to Tollymore camp field which wasn't flooded on this occasion. Having walked through Tollymore again, a route now very familiar to us, we followed the Mourne way past Foffanny Dam finishing in the sunshine at Hen Car Park.

Wicklow 2024

For our qualifying expedition all 6 groups travelled to Wicklow. We stayed the first

night in Glendalough Youth Hostel, after a food stop in Applegreen on the way down. We met each group that evening to look at the routes for the next day and gave the pupils some advice about the route. This was the first time for many staying in a Youth Hostel. The first challenge was to make your own bed with the linen provided; there were not many hospital or military corners visible! Spirits were high on the first night.





Day 1

Following a good night's sleep and filling up at breakfast, the pupils were ready for the off. Unlike our practices the weather was great; with ideal walking conditions, everyone was in shorts. Several of the groups were doing the 'Spinck walk' at Glendalough, which is popular with tourists-giving wonderful views of the Lake. The other groups headed over Scar Mountain, following the Wicklow way. Our first camp was at Lough Dan. The shorts were replaced with long trousers as the horse flies and midges were out in force.

Day 2

The next morning the groups needed a bit of a push to get moving, with some still eating breakfast when it was time to leave! When the groups eventually got moving, they were walking in lovely conditions. 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, 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 were walking towards Glenmalur valley, which has a lot of military history. The weather was a scorcher and the route took the groups through the forest and onto the Wicklow way via 'Derrybawn' and 'Mullacor'. The groups were glad to see staff en route with water to top them up in such hot conditions. Once over the high ground, the groups descended to the Glenmalur valley floor, then a short flat walk to the campsite at Glenmalur YH. This proved difficult for some of the group as the hot weather had taken its toll and many were suffering with blisters. With Day 3 complete the mood at camp was buoyant, 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, though thankfully cooler than the previous day. Many of the groups started early with the intention of an earlier finish. The promise of chicken nuggets chips and ice cream was a great incentive. On the journey up the road to Banbridge it was both very quiet and smelly on the bus and we were all glad to arrive back safely.

Thanks to Mrs Spratt, Mr McGuinness, Mr Baxter, Mrs Baxter and Sammy for all of their help and expertise during the training, practices and qualifying expeditions. Hopefully the pupils enjoyed the experience and will be back in the mountains again.

