

Discover Shropshire Hills John Muir Award

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Project Report

Project Summary

This was a collaborative project delivered by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership. Funding to support the project came from: a donation to Shropshire Wildlife Trust in lieu of flowers; from The Millichope Foundation and from the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund 2015 -16.

The aim of the project was to provide an in-depth outdoor learning experience for KS2 children from the Shropshire Hills. With the help of trained leaders and local experts, the children explored and experienced different elements of their local landscape, wildlife and heritage. All project activity was designed to raise awareness amongst the young people of their chosen wild place, why it is important, what's special about it and how to access it.

The children also worked towards a John Muir Discovery Award. The John Muir Award is an environmental award that encourages people of all backgrounds to connect, enjoy and care for wild places through a structured yet adaptable scheme. Children used their experiences throughout the programme to produce their own interpretation of the landscape. They produced stories, poems, drama, artwork, photographs, video and factual reports that were shared with each other, friends and families during two celebration days at the end of the programme.

Project Delivery

The project ran from April 2015 to March 2016 and engaged with a total of 52 primary school children aged between 7 and 11. Two schools took part in the John Muir Award, Rushbury C of E Primary School and St Mary's Primary School, Bucknell. Both schools are small and have mixed age classes from Year 3 to Year 6. The wild places were Wenlock Edge (Rushbury School) and Brineddin Wood, Chapel Lawn (Bucknell School).

Wenlock Edge

Wenlock Edge is a narrow limestone escarpment that runs for 15 miles from Craven Arms to Ironbridge, the National Trust owns 8 miles of this stretch. There is a mix of rich flowering grasslands and ancient woodland along with internationally important sites for geology, making the area an important Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI). Evidence of its old industrial and agricultural use can be seen along Wenlock Edge in the form of old quarries and limestone workings.

Brineddin Wood

Brineddin Wood is an ancient deciduous wood containing extensive sessile oak. The wood is divided into Quillets (strips) owned by different families or organisations. For centuries Brineddin Wood has been of great economic importance to the local community: for hunting, to provide timber for building, as a source of firewood and materials for fencing. The children of Bucknell school were linked up with the Redlake Valley Community benefit Society (RVCBS) who own Quillet no 2879 on behalf of the local community.

Experts

During the John Muir Award sessions the children were joined by a number of local experts who provided knowledge, expertise or activities to enhance their learning and bring the history, wildlife, myths and legends of the wild places to life. This also provided the children with the opportunity to meet real people who work or volunteer within the AONB and find out more about what their jobs involve and how they got started in their particular industries.

Kate Price	Small mammal trapping, habitat piles and bird watching.	National Trust	Rushbury
Liam Bell	Estate Manager / Gamekeeper	Millichope Estate	Rushbury
Terri and Mike Green	Storytelling, living history workshop on Iron Age / Roman life.	Catuvellauni (Celtic / Roman re-enactors)	Rushbury
James Tipton	Dairy Farmer	Hotchkiss Farm	Rushbury
Mike Kelly	Water management and monitoring	Shropshire Hills AONB	Bucknell
Alan Reid	Wildlife Ranger	Forestry Commission	Bucknell
Jenny Stevens	Hawthorn food web role play	Beetles and Bees	Bucknell
Naomi Walmsley	Stone Age life and stone tool making	Outback to Basics	Bucknell

Each group had an initial half-day session in school to introduce them to John Muir, the Award and the wild place they would be visiting. They then took part in four visits to their wild place before coming up with their own methods of celebrating and sharing what they had learned. More detail of each visit can be found in the attached Case Studies.

Project Outcomes / Achievements

The main aim of the project was to help children understand and connect with their local landscape. We wanted to improve children's understanding of the special qualities of the AONB and help inspire their future support for conservation, by having a fantastic childhood experience. I feel that this aim was certainly achieved.

The project directly engaged 52 young people with in-depth, educational and practical activities to help them learn about the AONB area and environment. The class teachers and teaching assistants involved all felt that the children had gained a tremendous amount from the whole experience. As a result of taking part in the John Muir Award the pupils stated that they would like to take part in similar visits again; would spend more time outdoors and felt more confident about visiting their local wild places in their own time. The children also told us that they have taken their families out to show them the new places they have discovered and share the lessons they learned resulting in a change to families' recreational habits (e.g. taking rubbish home with them, walking to sites instead of driving in a bus).

The activities they remembered the most were: small mammal trapping; coppicing; making stone age tools; visiting a local farm; the hawthorn role play; climbing a steep hill and lying down silently in a wildflower meadow (individual evaluation forms from teachers and pupils are available).

With both schools, the John Muir Award's Four Challenge Review was used with the children at the end of the project to gauge their understanding and find out what they remembered and enjoyed. Both schools held a celebratory, sharing event at the end of their John Muir Award to which other pupils, parents and members of the local community were invited. This took the form of a celebratory assembly where the children shared their John Muir Award experience and knowledge of the landscape with others, followed by the opportunity to see the work produced by the children themselves and take part in child led activities to give the other pupils and visiting adults a taste of what they had been up to.

Both schools are keen to continue running the John Muir Award in future years, the Head teacher from Rushbury Primary and the class teacher and one TA from St Mary's school, Bucknell have attended John Muir Leader training with the AONB Partnership and Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Sustainable Development

As a conservation charity, Shropshire Wildlife Trust constantly strives to work in a more sustainable way and to encourage our members and partners to do likewise.

Our ethos is to encourage and enable schools to use their local landscape as an educational resource, rather than travelling long distances to look and learn about special landscapes. Schools are encouraged to find sites within walking distance if possible and local bus companies are used if transport is needed. This was certainly the case with the children from both Rushbury and Bucknell schools who generally travelled less than 10 miles to reach their wild places.

The energy used during the delivery of this project was minimal as majority of activity took place outdoors. Activities used natural and found materials where possible and the equipment purchased with project funding can be re-used with other schools carrying out the John Muir Award in future.

A key part of the conservation element of the John Muir Award is to encourage the children to think about the way that they use environmental resources, sustainable living and ecosystem services.

Lessons learned from the project

Although the project as a whole was a great success there are several lessons that can be used to inform our planning of future John Muir activity.

The cost of transport for both schools combined was only £583, significantly less than the £1000 that was budgeted. This was owing to the short distances travelled and the use of local bus companies. This was great news for the schools and makes future visits to the sites much more affordable for them but is worth considering when planning future John Muir delivery. We also did not need the £500 budgeted for room hire as the Chapel Lawn Village

Hall allowed us to use their facilities for free. The additional funds available allowed us to bring in more experts to work with the children and to purchase outdoor film making equipment that we can use to capture the action of future John Muir Award's. Additional match funding came from in kind staff time from both Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership.

In similar future projects we will really try to ensure the sustainability of the project even after funding has finished. This will be achieved by continuing to use local sites in order to set up a lasting connection between the school, teachers and individual children with the wild space. We will also try to involve as many local experts as possible. This was particularly valued by the teachers who made connections that they can draw on in future and by the children who were given an insight into local employment and industry.

In future we would like to produce a short film of children taking part in the John Muir Award so that we can capture the sessions as they take place and how the children feel about the activity in their own words. Finally, we will ensure that an element of teacher training is included in future projects to empower the teachers to continue with outdoor learning, visits to their wild place and delivery of the John Muir Award if they wish.

Publicity

The project was publicised in a number of ways, not least by word of mouth from the children to their families and to the local community at the sharing events. Displays were produced at both schools and several articles were published in the Redlake Valley community newsletter and on the RVCBS website <https://rvCBS.wordpress.com/latest-news/>

Special conditions

Ellie Larkham from Shropshire Wildlife Trust attended a short presentation about the Shropshire Hills AONB where she had the opportunity to learn more about the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, meet and network with other project coordinators.

A case study has been produced for each school involved with the project. These are included with this project report, submitted to the John Muir Trust for use on their website if required and will be used by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership for training and promotion of similar projects.