

Hill Stories 2019 project report — Nick Fogg and Mike Smart

Achievements

We worked with the project partners, other artists, and local experts, to deliver Hill Stories 2019.

We worked with three groups of young people in 3 rural areas — Craven Arms, Clee Hill, and Clee St Margaret. We delivered sessions over 4 days in each location.

We were oversubscribed with bookings for all three groups, although unfortunately not everyone that had booked attended. We worked with 27 young people.

The young people had the opportunity to work with a variety of artists and a local expert, and with support from South Shropshire Youth Forum, to explore some of the landscapes, wildlife, and heritage of their local area, and to capture and share their discoveries and ideas using images, words, and sound.

They worked with a variety of digital equipment, including iPads, iPods, smart phones and cameras to capture still and moving images; and external microphones to record sound. They edited stills, audio, and video on the iPads, smart phones, and an iMac computer.

The Craven Arms group worked with local historian and author Keith Pybus as their local expert and Poet Jean Atkin as visiting artist. The Clee Hill group worked with Glynn Barratt from Titterstone Clee Heritage Trust and Printmaker Dulcie Fulton. The Clee St Margaret group worked with Cath Landles from Shropshire Hills AONB, and Caroline Dahn from Natural England who volunteered some time with us, and Wildlife and Landscape Photographer Ben Osborne.

The pieces created included:

- individual and collaborative poems, some handwritten onto images captured by the young people with some made into audio recordings to accompany digital stills of the images
- short video pieces capturing or retelling experiences of walks, work with artists, and/or the young people's ideas and inspiration
- linocut and wood-type printmaking, using photographs taken by the young people to inspire linocut images, with wood-type words to accompany the images. These were handprinted and used to create multiple variable editions of a spiral bound book
- diverse digital photographs from panoramic landscapes to macro images, both edited and unedited
- cyanotype prints of grasses, leaves, berries, flowers, sheeps wool etc collected on a walk
- word clouds
- audio recordings of natural sounds to echo some of the wood-type words and linocut images to accompany digitally captured versions of the prints
- behind the scenes photos of the groups exploring different spaces and working on their pieces

Much of the digital work created by the groups was shared on Instagram across more than 420 posts <https://www.instagram.com/pieceofstringmedia/>.

We also shared some of the young people's pieces and digital work at an exhibition event in Ludlow at the end of the project, which was attended by some of the participants, parents, artists, local experts, funders, and members of the public. Although attendance at the event wasn't as big as we'd hoped, the feedback was extremely positive and constructive.

Thirteen of the young people successfully completed their Arts Award Discover as part of the project.

Lessons learned

More time needed for planning, post-production, and event planning (see additional staff time in budget).

Feedback from the young people who took part, parents, artists, partners, and audience

"Nowadays people don't adventure as much, don't push out their comfort zone, this is a good way to fix that... and also, when you don't know much about somewhere, you get free range to imagine."

What have you enjoyed most? "Seeing the reaction of people who hadn't been there."

Participant age 13 who attended the exhibition event

"I think it's a fabulous project... It's really important for our children to be able to experience, enjoy and combine nature, arts and technology."

Parent of participant

What have you enjoyed most? "Working with a professional photographer."

What are you most proud of? "My photos."

Participant age 14

What will you take away from the project? "The knowledge and stories about the local area."

Participant age 15

What were the highlights of the sessions for you? "Seeing the young people's behaviour change and take a new form: from recalcitrant to cooperative, from troublesome to keen."

Partner

Why do you think projects like this are valuable? "Connecting young people to their landscape. Inspiring others. Making the natural heritage accessible."

Partner

What were the highlights of the session for you? "How engaged the kids were. They were really hooked in and interested. They grew in confidence, and enjoyed doing their own thing."

Local Expert

How would you like to see the project develop? "To be able to give this opportunity to other young people in different parts of the AONB and county-wide."

Funder

What will you take away from the project? "A desire to be involved with other well-managed projects of this nature; I found it hugely satisfying and stimulating."

Artist

Is there anything you think would have improved the project? "More of them! Increased publicity."

Parent of participant

Developing the project further

Responses to the pilot, both in terms of expressions of interest and bookings, and people's feedback, confirm the demand for, and value of, projects like this for young people in rural areas.

The response from participants, parents, partners, artists, and funders has been overwhelmingly positive. They've all expressed the hope that the project will develop further.

Participants' feedback showed that most felt they learned about their local area, and about working with different art forms, and that they in grew in confidence. Many said they were keen to explore more and/or show family places they'd been. And many said they wanted to develop their skills further and/or to explore other art forms and ways of working.

I'm delighted that Shropshire Hills AONB have asked us to deliver work with a Hill Stories group as part of the Our Common Cause project, subject to funding. This will be a invaluable partnership in developing the project.

We'd like to thank the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust for helping to fund the Hill Stories 2019 project and hope they'll help support its development.