

# From the Mountains to the Sea

## A Week of Learning and Challenge

The week for the selected Gifted and Talented students was attended by twenty eight youngsters aged between year 6 and year 9. These twenty eight had been selected from 113 applicants, a very difficult task. Various criteria were used, eg. age, ability, previous attendance of a summer school and perhaps most importantly, the school report which came with each application. Fifty per cent of the group was made up of year six students, this being due to year six being a target group and the fact it was seen as a means to aid transition from primary to secondary.

The group departed from Beaumanor Hall on the Monday morning, waving parents and siblings off as they began the one hundred and seventy mile westward journey to Eryri and Aberglaslyn Hall.

The journey ended at about two o'clock and the course began with crucial life skills, ie. making a bed and unpacking! A short walk, a taste of the local ice cream and handing out of kit soon saw the arrival of the evening meal. Prior to this all students were given a pre-course reminder of what the week was all about, our expectations were clearly laid out. Whilst it was sincerely hoped that all students would have a thoroughly enjoyable week, it was pointed out that work and challenge were at the core of the week.

The students were divided into three groups (nine, nine and ten). In doing this the main criteria were having a mixture of ages in each group. Each group was assigned a leader, who would remain with that group for the whole week offering support and encouragement.

Each group followed a rolling programme of study. This entailed a day studying each of the following:

*Mountain Walk and Study (leader Martin Chesmer):-* Looking at the mountain environment and how altitude affects the weather and climate. Measurements were taken and reports including graphs and diagrams were produced. This offered both academic challenge and the physical challenge of getting to the top of Cnicht – 690 metres.

*Sand Dune Study (leader Adam Haynes):-* Based in the dunes at Morfa Harlech, this study involved transect and profile work and was primarily concerned with succession of plants as we progressed back into the dunes. Again a report was written and graphs produced. As with the mountain day a heavy emphasis was placed on the use of IT equipment to write the report and take measurements.

*Gorge Day (leader Pilar Near):-* Based in Dolgarrog Gorge in the Conwy Valley, this day was used as a means of inspiration to produce a piece of writing, be it poetry or prose.

*Final Day:-* The Friday was given over to completing and handing in all the work. However, all the students were given the opportunity to go on the low ropes course in the afternoon. Here the students had both the individual challenge of getting round the course but also each group competed in the 'flying bucket'. This entailed working as a group, carrying a bucket of water around the course. After this it was the handing in of kit, a meal and ultimately a departure at five o'clock to begin the eastward journey home.

The work produced was of a consistently high standard and the expectations of all staff on the course ensured the students were challenged in all aspects, be it physically or academically. In many cases the work produced was not simply good, but outstanding, whilst a number of students expressed surprise that they had been able to cope with the day's work and produce the work expected of them at the beginning of the day. Equally rewarding was the manner in which the older students supported and helped the younger students where needed. Much IT equipment was available, the table tennis room was converted into a computer bank, digital cameras were available to all groups, whilst electronic wind gauges, altimeters and thermometers were employed on the mountain study. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the week was the superb motivation of the students who regularly got up at early hours of the morning to carry on their work, which they had only reluctantly retired from due to the prompting of staff the previous evening.

Despite some initial homesickness, all students successfully completed the course. A post course evaluation was conducted – this was very positive and was the basis for many of the comments in this report. Most of the comments were thoughtful and considered, containing a number of ideas which will be utilised in the future.

The week was intended to be both demanding and enjoyable. The group were a real pleasure to work with and were one of the most motivated and mature groups that have attended these courses.

No course can run without the staff that work on it and in this respect we were blessed with three outstanding student mentors whose understanding and empathy for the students and their needs was exemplary. The teaching staff ran study days which were demanding and enjoyable and working well into each evening helped produce a learning environment that encouraged success and achievement.

Finally, good luck to all the students who attended and I sincerely hope the week was of help to you all and that many new friends were made.

*'Diolch yn fawr am eich amser'  
Thank you very much.*

Alan Jacobs  
Course Director

## OUR AIMS:

- To challenge both physically and intellectually the capabilities of more able students from Leicestershire schools.
- To enrich youngsters educational experience through the medium of outdoor education.
- To encourage pupils to enjoy, investigate and appreciate the environment in its many forms.
- For pupils to develop a spirit of adventure and relate with confidence to a variety of environments.
- To encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- To develop an awareness for the need and principles of sustainable development.
- To contribute to the development of thoughtful, socially aware and fully committed citizens.
- To help build students motivation, self esteem and confidence.
- To help students move seamlessly from the primary to the secondary sector.
- Provide a happy, memorable and enjoyable week.