

**ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AT THE  
OUTWARD BOUND TRUST:  
A FOCUS ON THE JOHN MUIR AWARD  
AND THE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED**



**THE  
OUTWARD  
BOUND TRUST**

## INTRODUCTION

We facilitate young people's personal development through enabling them to experience adventures that involve being immersed in the natural environment. Consequently, learning about the environment is a key element of all Outward Bound® courses. Through our partnership with the John Muir Trust, we are able to add value to our course delivery in this area; increasing the overall impact on the young people with whom we work.

In this paper, we explain how the John Muir Award contributes to our delivery of environmental learning; presenting an overview of the experiences young people have whilst participating in a course that includes this award. We also draw on our research findings to describe what young people learn about the natural environment during our courses, and the lasting impact this can have on their attitudes and behaviour when they return home and to school.

## OUR APPROACH TO LEARNING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

In the context of our courses, the term 'environmental learning' refers to **inspiring concern for** and **raising awareness of the natural environment**. Our instructors facilitate young people's learning in this area by guiding them through a series of steps (see Figure 1 below).

FIGURE 1: HOW WE DELIVER 'ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING'



### OUR DELIVERY OF THE JOHN MUIR AWARD

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages people to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. In 2013, approximately 12% (2,926) of the young people we worked with (through our education and individuals programmes) achieved the John Muir Award. To gain this nationally recognised award, participants need to meet four challenges; they must **discover**, **explore**, **conserve** and **share** their experiences of a wild place. Figure 2 overleaf provides a summary of the activities that course participants, across all our centres in 2013, completed in order to meet each of the four challenges<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a 'Four Challenge Review' conducted by the John Muir Trust at the end of 2013.

**FIGURE 2: EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES ON OUTWARD BOUND COURSES THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FOUR JOHN MUIR AWARD CHALLENGES**

Challenge	Experience/Activity
<b>Discover</b> a wild place	The locations course participants discovered included: valleys; woodlands; moorlands; coves; combes <sup>2</sup> ; rock faces; ridges; ghylls; becks; burns; rivers; tarns; lochs; lakes; mountains; the coast; islands and beaches; ruins; valleys; estuaries; waterfalls; glens; footpaths; canals; and our centre grounds.
<b>Explore</b> its wildness	<p>Course participants explored wild places through completing the following activities: orienteering; scrambling; climbing; journeys; hill walking; canoeing; wild camping; swimming; abseiling; gorge walking; mountain biking; unaccompanied expeditions; scavenger hunts; rock pooling; and sailing.</p> <p>Their learning involved: nature spotting; learning about local history/issues, geology, biodiversity, legends and place names; listening; solo time; reflection; quizzes; recording; and problem solving.</p> <p>They experienced: sunsets; thunderstorms; being blindfolded; quiet moments; wild tasting; and star gazing.</p>
<b>Conserve;</b> take responsibility	<p>The activities course participants completed included: litter picking/surveys; recycling; creating fences; maintaining footpaths; removing non-native plant species; making bird feeders; creating nest boxes; rescuing sheep; planting; and creating wildlife habitats.</p> <p>Their experience involved: adhering to Country Codes, Access Codes and the 'Leave No Trace' principles, and using carbon neutral modes of transportation.</p>
<b>Share</b> your experiences	Experiences were shared via: discussions; chats; debates; 1:1s; review sessions; learning journals; social media; poetry; posters; drawings; graffiti boards; recordings; collage; natural sculptures; photos; stories; painting; pictures; presentations; assemblies; talks; record books; games; and campaigning.

In order to meet the 'conserve' challenge, our course participants undertake a practical conservation activity, as well as applying 'minimum impact' approaches. In 2013, for all the courses we delivered that included the John Muir Award, we recorded information about these activities. The John Muir Trust analysed this data for us; conducting a 'Conserve Audit'. The results of this audit revealed the following:

- ▶ During 2013, more than **8,000 hours of conservation activity** were completed by young people during our courses.
- ▶ The **conserve activities** our course participants complete **take place in a wide range of wild places;** predominantly within coastal and mountainous areas, and woodland and national parks.
- ▶ During courses that embed the John Muir Award, participants make a **positive contribution to the natural environment through a diverse range of activities;** from litter picking to planting trees.

<sup>2</sup> A combe is a steep, narrow valley, a small valley or large hollow on the side of a hill.

Some of the key results from the Conserve Audit are presented in Figures 3 and 4 below.

FIGURE 3: KEY 'CONSERVE ACTIVITY' DATA FROM COURSES  
DELIVERED BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2013

Conserve activity
<b>8,909m</b> of footpath maintained, improved or created
<b>568</b> litter bags filled
<b>339m</b> of fencing created
<b>1,000m<sup>2</sup></b> of meadow seeded
<b>17,594m<sup>2</sup></b> of invasive plant species cleared

FIGURE 4: KEY 'GROUP ENGAGEMENT' DATA FROM COURSES  
DELIVERED BETWEEN JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2013

Group engagement (as assessed by our instructors)
<b>98%</b> of groups followed the Country Code
<b>86%</b> of groups engaged in litter picking
<b>72%</b> of groups followed the 'Leave No Trace' principles
<b>58%</b> of groups engaged in recycling
<b>32%</b> of groups used environmentally friendly modes of transportation during their course

**+** AFTER A SUBSTANTIAL [NUMBER] OF VISITORS TO ULLSWATER OVER THE SCHOOL BREAK THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF LITTER LEFT. OUR GROUPS CONCENTRATED ON THIS AS A PROJECT. THEY MANAGED TO COLLECT, BETWEEN THE 9 GROUPS, 28 BAGS OF LITTER WHICH THEY THEN RECYCLED BACK AT THE [OUTWARD BOUND] CENTRE. THIS NOT ONLY HAD A BIG IMPACT ON OUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT, BUT THE STUDENTS DID NOT DROP LITTER AROUND THE CENTRE OR OUT ON ACTIVITIES AFTER THIS, WHICH WAS A PROBLEM WHEN THEY FIRST ARRIVED.

Outward Bound instructor, 2013



## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT DURING AN OUTWARD BOUND COURSE?

Research we have conducted across a range of our courses (not only those that involve the John Muir Award) indicates that, during their Outward Bound experience, young people:

- ▶ Learn specific facts about the environment; for example, how rock and lakes are formed, types of plants and flowers, and how littering impacts on the natural environment and wildlife.
- ▶ Discover what the natural environment has to offer and develop their appreciation for it.
- ▶ Become more aware of the impact of their behaviour on the environment and realise how important it is to respect and protect it<sup>3</sup>.

**+** [I LEARNT THAT THE ENVIRONMENT] PLAYS A BIG PART IN OUR LIFE THAT WE TOOK FOR GRANTED UNTIL NOW.

Participant, age 11, 2013 course



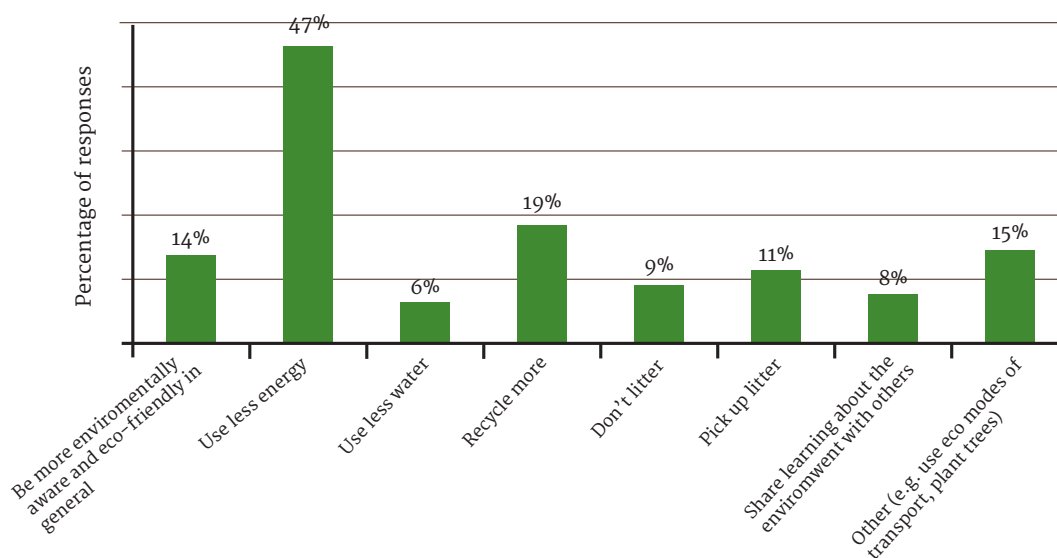
<sup>3</sup> Each year, we gather feedback from approximately 7,000 participants and visiting staff members at the end of their course. The key learning outcome areas were identified through an analysis of responses to qualitative questions related to environmental learning.

## HOW DOES WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNT DURING THEIR COURSE AFFECT THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT WHEN THEY RETURN HOME AND TO SCHOOL?

Additional evidence of learning related to the environment is provided by our evaluation of a bespoke Outward Bound course that was funded by one of our corporate partners. This 5-day course was delivered in 2011 and 2012 and constitutes part of a wider programme the funder runs. The course had a strong focus on increasing the participants' knowledge of, and appreciation for, the environment; with the aim of helping them to implement projects that address environmental issues within their schools and communities.

We measured the young people's intentions to change their behaviour as a result of what they had learnt during their course<sup>4</sup>. **Eighty-six percent** of the young people **identified at least one way in which they intended to change their behaviour** in order to live their lives in a more environmentally conscious and responsible way<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 5 below for the categories into which their responses fell).

**FIGURE 5: THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTENTIONS TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR AT SCHOOL OR AT HOME AS A RESULT OF WHAT THEY HAD LEARNT ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**



Base: 156 participants on bespoke environmental programme

Note: Sum of the percentages totals more than 100% because many of the young people intended to change their behaviour in more than one way.

<sup>4</sup> On the end-of-course feedback form the young people completed we asked them, "You also learnt about climate change and the environment. What do you think you will do differently in your day-to-day life at school or at home because of what you have learnt?".

<sup>5</sup> 156 of the 182 participants in our sample identified at least one way in which they planned to change their behaviour.

## EVIDENCE OF LASTING CHANGE IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

Evidence of lasting change in young people's attitudes and behaviour towards the environment is provided by the results of our evaluation of a bespoke 5-day course that was delivered in 2010 and 2011. Helping the young people to understand the effects of climate change on the environment, and discover what they could do to live more 'sustainably', were key objectives for the course. To evaluate the lasting impact of what they had learnt, we asked the young people to complete a follow-up survey at the end of their academic year<sup>6</sup>. Their responses indicate that the course brought about lasting changes in their attitudes and behaviour:

- ▶ **97% of the young people reported that they turned off lights more often when they were not being used.**
- ▶ **90% reported that they used public transport more frequently.**
- ▶ **90% said that they turned off electrical appliances more often.**
- ▶ **38% said that they or their families had changed some of the things they buy because of what they had learnt about their carbon footprints.**

## SUMMARY

Environmental learning is a key part of all Outward Bound courses. The John Muir Award adds value to our course delivery in this area. In order to achieve this award, our course participants discover, explore, help to conserve, and share their experiences of, wild places. They complete a conservation activity and apply 'minimum impact' approaches; providing them with opportunities to take personal responsibility for protecting the natural environment. To help them transfer their learning, they are encouraged to consider this responsibility in both the context of the Outward Bound setting and their home environment.

Our research indicates that, during an Outward Bound course, young people learn specific facts about the environment; discover what the natural environment has to offer and develop their appreciation for it; and realise how important it is to respect and protect the environment. Our evaluation of bespoke courses that focused heavily on learning about the environment also provides evidence that our courses bring about lasting change in young people's attitudes and behaviour towards the environment when they return home and to school.

<sup>6</sup>Sixty-nine participants responded to the survey. They completed it 3 to 10 months after they had attended the Outward Bound course.

This document has been produced by The Outward Bound Trust's Evaluation team. We would like to thank the John Muir Trust for providing some of the data presented in this paper.

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