



WINTER 2019
3RD EDITION

OUTDOOR LEARNING NEWS



**LOOKING BACK AT EVENTS
AND ACHIEVEMENTS OVER
THE LAST YEAR.**

WELCOME

A warm welcome from the Outdoor Learning Team to the Winter edition of Outdoor Learning News.

With autumn colours fading away, crisp frosty mornings and darkness falling almost immediately at the end of the school day, it feels like winter has definitely arrived.

2019 has been a busy year with many exciting things happening in Outdoor Learning across the City and further afield; in this issue we share some of the events and achievements of the past year.

For the next issue our intention is to make affordable outdoor learning a key focus; if you have activities or news that you would like to share through this newsletter or you would like advice or support to develop or embed Outdoor Learning in your setting, please contact us - we would love to hear from you.

Explore our website www.experienceoutdoors.org.uk to meet **the team** or learn more **about us**.

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HOLYROOD PARK

*Andrew Bagnall. Outdoor Learning Development Officer
(Schools & Communities)*

On 18 & 19 September, Holyrood Park welcomed around 2400 Primary 6 pupils from 49 of our Primary and Special schools for the Outdoor Learning Challenge. Organised by CEC's Outdoor Learning Team in partnership with Dynamic Earth and Historic Environment Scotland, each pupil experienced a selection of activities ranging from mountain bike skills, skiing, orienteering and handling sailing dinghies to fire lighting, craft making, knot tying and bridge building. In total 38 separate organisations ran 60 different activity stations over the two days.

A new feature this year was a twilight event for teachers and other educators. Around 200 people toured the providers and had a go at many of the activities on offer. From the Twilight we have produced '**The Outdoor Learning Challenge 2019 Directory of Providers**', we hope you find it a useful resource.

On the following pages, Fiona McDonnell and Barbara Middleton describe the challenge from a teacher's and a provider's perspective.



THE OUTDOOR LEARNING CHALLENGE

A TEACHER'S VIEWPOINT

Fiona McDonnell. St. Mary's Primary, Leith

Wednesday 18th September was a day filled with time spent outdoors in Holyrood Park by thousands of Primary 6 pupils and hundreds of teachers from Edinburgh.

I was fortunate enough to be teaching Primary 6 that day and so attended Edinburgh Council's Outdoor Learning Challenge with my class. Although the weather was grey and cool, our spirits were warmed immediately when my group were off fire-lighting with experienced staff members on hand to guide us through the process safely. We enjoyed a mug of hot chocolate and traditional folk tales around the fire - what a brilliant start! "The hot chocolate was delicious! We learned some old folk tales around the fire - it was great," said one pupil.

After that, we headed across Holyrood Park (past the sheep from Beecraigs Country Park!) to our next activity which was run by Scottish Orienteering. Pupils were greeted with a maze of plastic tape and map cards - they had to get around the course in the correct order as quickly as possible.

This event was made even better when the electronic timing chips were introduced and the competition was fierce! It was brilliant to see how quickly and eagerly the children picked up the skill of orientating their map correctly and they were desperate to have another go to beat their previous time.

One of our pupils said, "I loved the orienteering because it was energetic and it was fun. We had a competition and I won!"

Our final activity was run by history PGDE students from Moray House, focussing on Scottish historical artefacts like the Stone of Destiny, Robert Burns' poetry book and a petri dish from Alexander Fleming.



This event absolutely catered for everyone with other activities that included poetry writing, weather forecasting, historical re-enactment, mountain biking and team work / communication skills. Another great review from a pupil who said,

“I really liked the science activity because we learned about different types of clouds, the temperature and the wind speed. It was really interesting.”

After the pupils were away home, I returned to Holyrood Park for the twilight CPD session. The 38 providers remained on site so that colleagues from across the city could find out about what opportunities were available for Outdoor Learning activities run by providers from across the city.



This was a brilliant idea and a really enjoyable end to a brilliant day. I was able to speak to providers that I hadn't visited earlier in the day, was treated to a cup of elderberry tea, shown some excellent games and activities that I could easily run with my class and pick up some all important leaflets and freebies to make it all worthwhile!

Many thanks to all the organisers and providers for their organisation, support and enthusiasm throughout the day - this was a fantastic event that I hope runs for many years to come.





THE OUTDOOR LEARNING CHALLENGE

A PROVIDER'S VIEWPOINT

*Barbara Middleton. Chair, Edinburgh EOWL Group
(Edinburgh Outdoor & Woodland Learning)*

Edinburgh Outdoor Woodland Learning (EOWL) and I were delighted to be a partner provider in the 2019 Outdoor Learning Challenge, welcoming 106 children, their teachers and parent helpers over six sessions over the two-day event as well running a twilight CPD for Teachers and School staff.

My arts and science workshop, 'Alchemy, Creativity and Outdoors' invited all participants to recognise and identify natural materials from local woodlands and discover - through simple, chemical processes - the abundance of colours that are all around us for painting with plants and colouring with nature.

The feedback was really positive from all age groups with comments from staff

"Gorgeous activity combining science, art and nature - engaging and inspiring for the group"

(Cramond Primary School)

"We had such an amazing time and learnt lots about colour, nature and exploration"

(Primary 6 Royal High School)



“We love how nature produces beautiful colours – thank you so much”

(Craigour Primary School)

“Fab, well structured, practical demonstration and wonderful CPD opportunities discussed – I will look out for the Friday sessions!”

“It was fun in the colourful outdoors. It was really creative and it’s cool that we got to go and use berries for paint.”

“I think that it was great fun and really creative and interesting. I really enjoyed it and hope that I can do it again”.

(Sciennes Primary School)

My observation of the whole two-day event was that it was an engaging, inspiring and educational opportunity to share the dynamics of outdoor learning with all ages.

It emphasised my beliefs that to have the time to be immersed in the outdoors and to nurture a love of our natural environment can develop the skills of inquiry, critical thinking, creativity and reflection and contributes to positive, mental well-being.

I’m already looking forward to taking part next year!



THE OUTDOOR LEARNING MAP IS COMING!

As we wrote about briefly in our Spring issue, with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage, we are currently developing an interactive Outdoor Learning Map. Castleview Primary School teacher Kirsten Mack joined the Outdoor Learning Team in August on a day-a-week secondment to support the introduction and embedding of the map. Here she gives a summary of some of our work so far:

The interactive map is taking shape nicely and will be officially launched next year so watch this space!

Andrew and I have been working in schools supporting teachers to take learning out into their local green space and introducing the test map to fellow practitioners. Over the past few months we have worked with Niddrie Mill, Castleview, Canal View and Gracemont. It has been brilliant to see the enthusiasm for outdoor learning across the city and some of the excellent work that is taking place. The interactive map will help support this work and will showcase lessons, activities and achievements across our cities amazing green spaces.

Niddrie Mill, Primary 5 students enjoyed exploring the winter magic of Bawsinch, a wildlife reserve a short walk along the innocent railway from their school. Nestling beside Duddingston loch this unique habitat is home to a wealth of creatures big and small and is looked after by Scottish Wildlife Trust. We were fortunate enough to have a tour of the site by Ken Knowles (chairperson) who talked to us about the biodiversity and fielded questions from our learners.

On the other side of the city Canal View students went on aquatic adventures with support from Bridge8, one of our many approved providers for adventurous activities. Canoeing from the school along the Union Canal to Hailes Quarry Park, discovering the biodiversity of this waterway with a pond dip and cooking bread over an open fire, were just some of the fun activities experienced by Primary 7 pupils. Our approved providers will be listed on the Interactive Map and, along with many other partner organisations, will be supporting the development of resources, ideas and help to engage learners in the outdoors.

Check out www.experienceoutdoors.org.uk for the latest updates on Official Map Launch.



ECO-SCHOOLS – GREEN FLAGS FLYING HIGH

Fraser Robertson. Outdoor Learning Development Officer (Awards & Achievement)

In 2019, the Eco-Schools programme entered its 25th year of engaging young people in taking positive actions that transform them for life.

Within Edinburgh the programme continues to grow with nearly 50% of Primary Schools either having their Green Flag or are working towards their Green Flag. We would like to pass on congratulations to St Mary's RC Primary School, Granton Primary School, Ratho Primary School, Kirkliston Primary School, St Cuthbert's Primary School and St Crispin's School who all achieved or renewed their Green Flags this summer.

The Green Flag Award - a visible indication of your school's commitment to learning for sustainability, and an internationally recognised accreditation for excellence in sustainable development education. The Green Flag Award is renewed every two years following the same Seven Elements, which are at the core of the Eco-Schools programme in every participating country.

If you'd like to find out more about the Eco-Schools programme please have a look at the Keep Scotland Beautiful website where you can find out about the process to start your schools journey towards the Green Flag Award.



QUEENSFERRY MAKE THEIR OWN 50 WAYS

Earlier this school year we received the following from Karen MacGregor, Head Teacher at Queensferry Primary School.

“Good Morning from sunny Queensferry

I thought you both might like to see the Queensferry Top 10 Sites which was inspired by your department’s poster which we shared with all families in the summer term.

Families sent in their 3 best places and children from our Pupil Council compiled this list and then designed this poster. We love it (we love our town!).”

What a fantastic resource for the community. And in case you needed convincing – it’s now official that tasting ice-cream is outdoor learning (see number 3)! If you haven’t seen ‘50 Ways to Experience Outdoors in Edinburgh’, a resource created by City of Edinburgh teachers, find it at https://www.experienceoutdoors.org.uk/images/Download/50-ways-to-experience-outdoors_edinburgh.pdf

Top 10 sites in South Queensferry

1. Walk along the sea front and view our iconic bridges.
2. Cycle around the Vat Run and enjoy the woodland scenery.
3. Visit the Little Parlour and try a unique flavour of ice cream.
4. Visit Port Edgar and test your bravery by trying a new water sport.
5. Take a train over the rail bridge and gaze at the other 2 bridges.
6. Walk along the Ferry Glen and take a look at the high street below.
7. Cycle over the road bridge and watch the boats sail under.
8. Walk to Dalmeny to see the wildlife.
9. Get the ferry to Inchcolm Island and go bird watching.
10. Go to the Binks and count rabbits.



*Ideas from the children and families
of Queensferry Primary School.*

Compiled by Isla and Roisin.



*Drawings by
Mabel and
Georgina*

TRINITY PRIMARY PUPILS SCALE THE

7 HILLS

Aimi Armstrong. Trinity Primary School

The Primary Sevens at Trinity Primary set themselves a challenge of climbing 7 hills in 7 days in order to raise money for their end of term activities.

They began with Blackford Hill before working their way up Corstorphine Hill, Calton Hill, Castlehill, The Braids, Arthur Seat and then Craiglockhart hill.

The pupils all participated in this event and managed to battle the outdoor weather conditions in order to complete the challenge.

The pupils found climbing Arthur's Seat most challenging but they all enjoyed the opportunity to get outdoors and explore the city. This event will also help them prepare for their upcoming Benmore event!

OXGANGS' P7s GO EXPLORING



As part of a pilot project between P7 class teachers at Oxgangs Primary School and Outdoor Learning Team staff, P7 classes planned and executed their own expeditions at the end of the summer term last year.

Class teachers Heather, Amy & Dom introduced the theme of exploration to their classes and discussed reasons for expeditions and what's involved with planning an expedition. In groups, pupils then planned and pitched an idea for an expedition, including purpose, route and 'added value' activities, that could be carried out in the nearby Pentland Hills.

OL Team members discussed the pitches with each class and guided direction to a final expedition. The class then took ownership of planning each aspect of their expedition, from route cards and timings, to what to wear and take, and any public transport required.

The 3 day-long expeditions took place in the summer term, supported by OL Team staff.

Describing the outcomes of the project, Heather stated that there had been an improvement in map reading skills (knowledge of symbols, reading of terrain, using grid references), improved awareness of the need to consider the physical impairments or abilities of others when planning an expedition and increased awareness of the extent and range of the Pentlands and access to it from the city centre.

She added 'seeing the children enjoying being outdoors and exploring and playing together in the burn at lunchtime was a great end to our year. Planning an accessible expedition that our classmate from Braidburn was able to participate in was a challenge, but so worthwhile. I also feel that there is plenty of scope to develop and improve the project when we run it next year.'

Class teacher Dom reflected on the project;

"The children loved the idea of working towards an expedition of their own making. They were highly motivated by the freedom they had and the range of countryside into which they could 'go exploring'.

During the walk into the Pentland Hills, the children positively interacted with their environment and were very aware of how precious it is. With almost 30 years of teaching experience, this was one of the most rewarding projects a class of mine has worked upon and they will reap the benefits of their 'expedition' for years to come".

Describing her class' engagement with the project, Amy said "this is by far one of the best things I have been involved in during my teaching career. The children loved every minute and the organisational skills that they learned were second to none. Our expedition surpassed my expectations and the children loved it. Long lasting memories were made by all!"

Comments from pupils during the project included "This has been the best thing we have done in P7" and "I love being outside and learning about maps and things."



LEAD TEACHER IN OUTDOOR LEARNING

The re-launched course 'Lead Teacher in Outdoor Learning for Primary Teachers' ran over 5 sessions from November 2018 to May 2019. Annabel Ross describes her experience of the course.

For me, the idea of honing my skills in outdoor learning over the course of seven months, meeting and working with a wide range of highly dedicated and interested like-minded practitioners AND having the opportunity to spend a whole weekend at Lagganlia, sounded like a dream come true. So when this course was offered, I jumped at the chance.

Our first meeting was on a cold, wet day in November, at Bonaly Scout Centre, the 15 strong team quickly bonded over the desire for a hot drink, so a happy hour of match-free fire lighting, kindling chopping, and storm kettle boiling had us making friends in no time. The rest of the day passed quickly with a wide range of activities, from poetry and soundscapes to trail marking, followed by more fire lighting to cook lunch, pizza, soup and chocolate bananas, delicious! The rest of the afternoon was spent in discussion with each other and the sharing of ideas, joint reflection on the experiences we had had; good, bad and ugly, of outdoor learning and what it meant to us as individuals and practitioners. The direction of the remaining sessions was left for us to decide, we all had at least some experience in outdoor learning, and the idea was to give us the extra experience and knowledge to take outdoor learning in our setting to the next level.

Also to encourage and inspire other practitioners to take children out and about with confidence and the knowledge that outdoor learning doesn't have to be a big deal, simple ideas are often the best and getting out of the classroom can be easy and inspiring for all.

Making outdoor learning fun and inclusive

The next Friday afternoon session was set for January, and we met at Oaklands School, a mixture of hard and soft landscaping, wild woods and concrete. Here we were able to see outdoor learning in practice in a setting where the traditional and outdated ideas of outdoor learning as only strenuous, physical activity can be put to the test. Music, art, STEM, imagination, teamwork and good old fashion boisterous play were all evident among some of the city's most physically challenged youngsters. For our last Friday afternoon, we met at Towerbank Primary and spent an enormously rewarding afternoon on the beach learning how to spark imagination and excite learning in STEM with little more than sand and what washes up onto it. As it turns out there is plenty you can do, treasure hunts, surveying, graphs, charts, sorting, biology, ecology, environmental impact, and we all took away more ideas than we will possibly ever have the time to use.



Our final meeting took place in May at Lagganlia, located within the outstanding natural beauty of Cairngorms National Park. After a long drive and settling in on Friday night we had a lovely walk and dinner at the Loch Insh water sports and outdoor centre then back to the lodge for a slide show of the last six months or so of our outdoor learning achievements, of which there were many! Thankfully the fairly persistent rain did not dampen our spirits, and on Saturday all 13 members of our group lead a different short lesson.

The range and scope of activities were incredible; photography to drama, art to map making, team building and trust exercises.

After lunch, we had a behind the scenes tour and a talk on the history and vision of outdoor learning in Edinburgh and its two residential centres, Benmore and Lagganlia, from Nick March, Operations Manager at Lagganlia. Finally, time to reflect, evaluate, and receive certificates before a group photograph and a fond farewell.



I have grown enormously in confidence in my approach to outdoor learning and no longer feel that merely taking a reading group outdoors is a cop-out.

I have gained so many great ideas and have been given the key to a vast wealth of resources, books, blogs, websites, forums and organisations doing wonderful things in our beautiful environment. I now have the tools I need to deal with the practical issues around risk assessments and how to debunk the negative vibes from staff who "just say no". It would seem there is nothing in the curriculum that cannot only be done outdoors but enhanced by being outside the constraints of the classroom environment. This works for all children, but for those who find it hard to engage in a meaningful way with a traditional "bums on seats" approach, perhaps this could be the way forward.

NEW OUTREACH PROGRAMME FROM RSPB SCOTLAND

Laura Copely, RSPB Scotland

This year, RSPB Scotland has launched an exciting new school's outreach programme in Glasgow and the Lothians which is designed around the feedback of nearly 400 Scottish teachers.

The aim is to ensure that every child receives the curriculum and health benefits of outdoor topic-based interdisciplinary learning, but also that they are empowered to take action for nature by designing conservation actions and/or create a campaign to encourage other people in their communities to do more for wildlife.

Through our fun and interactive programme, pupils will become wild champions within their schools/nurseries and communities and become leaders and decision makers in the mission to save nature.

This will be achieved through a two-session programme delivered over one academic term which contributes toward pupils receiving their Bronze Wild Challenge Award.

For further information about the CfE curriculum links, plus how this programme links with Eco-schools, Learning for Sustainability and John Muir Awards, email laura.copely@rspb.org.uk or call **0131 317 4128**



EXPEDITION

CANAL VIEW

Eilidh Mears. P7 Teacher, Canal View Primary School

Over the last month Primary 7's from Canal View Primary School have embarked on an unforgettable adventure. They undertook their maiden voyage along the murky waters of the Union Canal in canoes. Initially the Primary 7's (and some of the staff) were a little apprehensive given that this was a first time experience for all. Luckily with the encouragement of the instructors from Bridge8 and their own determination they successfully made their way to Hailes Quarry Park.



Meanwhile at the park a few other challenges were taking place. The pupils had to set up their own camp bases to stay warm and dry in using only a small selection of materials.

We were impressed with the high levels of teamwork and problem solving evident during the task.

The pupils constantly had to discuss, evaluate and adapt their designs. These negotiating communication skills have now been transferred and used within the classroom setting. Alongside base building, pupils participated in team building challenges, camp-fire building and canal dipping. They were identifying and classifying canal creatures by analysing their features and characteristics.

The pupils gathered around the camp-fire for snacks. To their delight, every week there was a different treat to cook on the camp-fire. They made dough in school and enjoyed it toasted on the camp-fire along with toasted marshmallows. It was great to see all the pupils getting on so well.

Finally they embarked on their journey back to school. The canoeists were set challenges along the way, which is one of their greatest highlights. On arrival at school they had a debrief and had to evaluate the day. They enjoyed sharing their experiences and creating next steps for the following week.

“We would like to thank the Outdoor Learning team for all of their support and look forward to continuing our outdoor learning experiences in the future.”

The pupils used their experiences as a stimulus for writing. Below is an excerpt from Cheyenne’s description of her experience on and around the canal.

“I love all the cool bugs in the Canal. I love feeding the cute ducks and the beautiful swans. My best memory is when I went canoeing on the Union Canal. I was really Scared at first but other than that it was really fun except when we crashed.

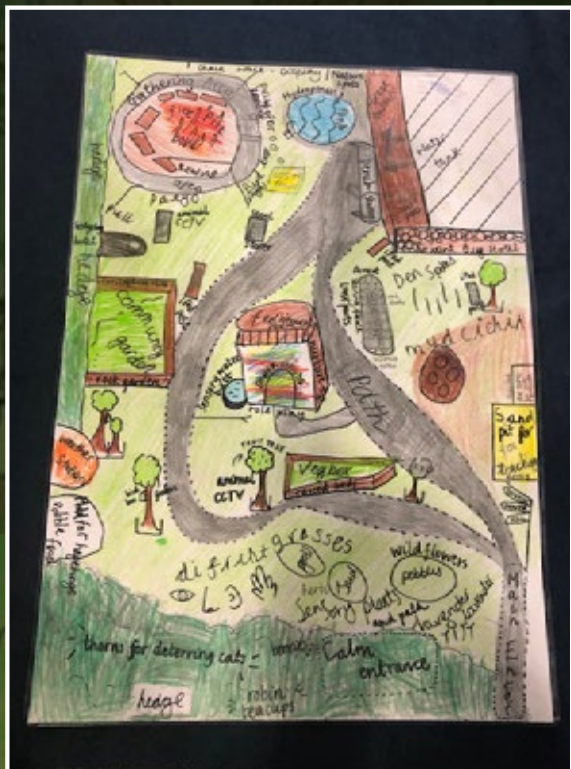
When we were getting on the canoe it was so scary because we had to jump in (not a proper jump in the air just a walk jump if you know what I’m saying). We got to stand up in the canoe. Me and my friend Lucy were almost crying when we got on the canoe it was so scary.

My other friends Emily and Dua didn’t care. They didn’t almost cry. They were really nice and made sure I didn’t cry. They helped Lucy too and she was kind of ok with it. It was really nice of them to do and because of them I’m ok and a didn’t have a heart attack!!! My heart was going super fast though!

Thank you for these memories.”



OUTDOOR LEARNING AT FUTURE SCHOOLS PROJECT



At the end of November, the 5 school finalists in the Future Schools project shared their ideas with The Deputy First Minister, John Swinney at a prestigious awards ceremony. Here, two of the Primary 7 pupils at Corstorphine Primary School share their experience:

Caitlin & Fynn. Primary 7, Corstorphine Primary School

At the end of November, the 5 school finalists in the Future Schools project shared their ideas with The Deputy First Minister, John Swinney at a prestigious awards ceremony. Here, two of the Primary 7 pupils at Corstorphine Primary School share their experience:

We are Corstorphine Primary School and 8 months ago, we entered the Future Schools competition and we were delighted to be awarded Highly Commended in the final on Wednesday 27th November.

We really wanted to promote Outdoor Learning as this is a priority for our school this session. Our idea was based around creating an innovative outdoor nature classroom as we wanted to create a learning area where 'the ceiling is the sky'. Here at Corstorphine Primary School, Outdoor Learning is really important to us as well as the relationship that humanity has with nature.

In our outdoor classroom we really wanted; a pond for biodiversity to thrive in and near, a mud kitchen for imaginative and messy play, alongside a rock garden in the shape of the Dovecot to celebrate our heritage and bring it into our learning.

A vegetable patch was really important to us because we wanted to encourage organic farming and contribute to the ingredients within our school dinners. Overall, we wanted a teaching space to learn about nature and our beautiful surroundings.

We were really happy when we received our Highly Commended award and received a beautiful handcrafted trophy which was very in keeping with our vision. With a little bit of money and a lot of support from our local and wider community, we are hoping to create something close to our vision and can't wait to see how we might make our plans become a reality!





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INVESTING IN OUTDOOR LEARNING

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