



The John Muir Award at Do it 4 Real Gradbach A tale of two experiences



Background

YHA Do it 4 Real summer camps aim to bring young people from different backgrounds together to share fun new experiences away from home. YHA has worked with the John Muir Award for four years to encourage the young people to enjoy, and care for the natural environments they discover on camp.

This story looks at the experiences of two participants at Do it 4 Real Gradbach in Derbyshire – one from an urban background, and one from a rural area - as told to their Team Leaders at camp.

Mackenzie's story



Mackenzie, 10, is from Plymouth. She first heard about Do it 4 Real through her aunty, and thought it sounded like lots of fun! After looking through the camps on the website she chose to come to Gradbach Mill.

Before coming to camp Mackenzie had never heard of the John Muir Award and the whole outdoor experience was new to her.

She was really keen to get stuck in!

John's story

John, 11, is from the Forest of Dean. This was his second Do it 4 Real camp - he enjoyed his first camp so much that he was keen to come back for more!

John had heard of the John Muir Award but wasn't sure what was involved before coming to camp. However, he had been involved in environmental projects and is part of an eco club at school, helping to clean out a pond and making birds' nests.



How did activities on the camp help them achieve their John Muir Award?

Do it 4 Real at Gradbach this year was a Survival Expedition camp. Campers ventured out to a range of interesting places nearby, from the exciting rock formations at 'The Roaches', to Tittesworth reservoir. They explored these places through a range of activities, including an overnight expedition, 'weaselling' amongst the rocks, canoeing, orienteering and a night hike. Campers picked litter and learnt about how to conserve the landscape along the way, whilst following the Countryside Code. Back at the hostel, everyone helped out on a conservation project in the hostel grounds to restore some watercress beds, which previous owners of the mill had farmed in the 1950's. Everyone got a chance to share their experiences through group reviews, and creating pictures and poems.

"The conservation challenge was the best activity as it was lots of fun but you also got to help the environment." Gradbach Mill Camper

The best thing about the John Muir Award was...

Both John and Mackenzie enjoyed learning about new plants, especially ones they could eat such as wood sorrel and bilberries. They told us how interesting it was to learn about John Muir himself, and how he helped the environment. If he were alive today Mackenzie said she'd like to ask him about why he decided to help the wildlife and how he thought it could be done.



Mackenzie has never really been to the countryside before so she found out lots of new things, such as how to follow the Countryside Code, what is special about the Peak District National Park and enjoyed creating her own mini National Park. For Mackenzie it was essential that her park included flowers, trees, a waterfall and people. She took a really proactive approach to the John Muir Award, helping others in her group to achieve it too.

Although John is used to the countryside he enjoyed getting out into a variety of new areas and exploring them in new ways, such as playing on the rocks (weaselling), and seeing the 'amazing' views at the Roaches. For John the best thing about doing the Award was that it offered him the flexibility to *"do what he wants, how he wants and the way he wants in helping the environment."*

Future impacts...

Mackenzie says that her John Muir Award experiences will have a positive impact in the future. It has helped her to consider her relationship with the environment - she plans to use less water and energy when she gets home, and to help her mum with the gardening. Doing the Award at camp made her want to explore more and do more exercise such as walking. She feels as though *"the Award is not just about looking after the environment but also looking after yourself, as getting out and exploring the landscape can make you healthier."*

For John, the Award has motivated him to boost the things he already does to help the environment. He plans to do more litter picking, and will try to encourage other people to do their bit. He's keen to spread the word and make sure others know about the Award and Do It 4 Real camps as well. John's ambition in life is to be a gamekeeper.

The Hostel Manager's perspective

Mark Wallis, the manager at Gardbach Mill, also commented on the impact of the Award; *"I was extremely pleased with how well the John Muir Award fitted into the programme this summer and I was impressed with the level of uptake of the Award. The work completed by the John Muir Award participants has been really beneficial to the hostel. The watercress beds can now be used as an educational resource for school groups, as well as an attraction for our regular guests. There will be chance to help maintain the beds and harvest the cress (which may be used in the hostels menu), as well as learn about all of the social history and environmental aspects of the watercress growing industry."*

