

# A Unique Parent and School Partnership

## John Muir Award: Biodiversity Story



### Exploring Woodlands - Cockburnspath Primary School, Scottish Borders

October 2010 saw pupils from Cockburnspath Primary School complete a John Muir Award by visiting their local woods every week from spring to summer.

Primary 7 pupils experienced nature through their senses and built up a personal connection to the woods. They identified and measured trees and studied the woodland floor to find out what species make up the woods. They tracked weekly changes and recorded what they found in a nature diary and through taking photographs.



"We walked silently and found evidence that there were animals living there. We found that things are connected in the woods and that we are connected too."

P7 Pupil

"We explored how it felt being in the woods and what it might be like to be a tree, flower or animal. We made dens and thought about what it would be like to live in the woods."

P7 Pupil

### Wild Woods week

As part of their Award the P7 class also got involved in the Wild Woods week which involved the whole school in a week of learning in the woods. This amazing experience saw the pupils take part in orienteering and fitness, creating music using drums and percussion sounds, producing environmental art including their own bird's nests, and learning how to make shelters. Pupils spent a day finding out what lives in the woods through a Biofest Survey and how species are connected through a variety of fun activities.

"Instead of getting hung up on Latin names for things. We encouraged pupils to really look at things by making up their own descriptive names for the things that they found."

Kirsty Essery, Parent Helper

### Taking responsibility

Pupils helped care for their wild place by carrying out practical conservation tasks such as regular litter picks, Rhododendron clearance to create more space for native species, creating habitat piles for wildlife, bird and bat boxes, and cutting back vegetation to open up access in the woodland. The class also supported environmental issues and helped minimise their personal impacts by learning about the importance of biodiversity and how to Leave No Trace. They put this into practice during every visit and by participating in National Carbon Footprint Day.



**“Sessions using storm kettles encouraged group sharing and introduced a responsible approach to using fire in woodlands.”**

Mandy Craig, Parent Helper

### **What worked well?**

Parent helper Mandy Craig reflected on what worked well. *“Weekly visits to the woods helped pupils build a relationship with the habitat and make a personal connection. Introducing the woodland floor as a ‘carpet’ and taking a weekly photo from the same spot helped pupil’s to really focus in on the changes”.*

The project helped inform learning back in the classroom. It met specific curricula subjects’ areas such as: English through a group poem around an old tree; Maths by estimating tree measurements and ages; and History relating tree ages to poignant dates (World War I and II). Visiting the John Muir Birthplace Trust Museum helped give a sense of John Muir’s life and reflections on nature.

**“In terms of personal development taking part in the John Muir Award has been great for building the confidence and self-esteem of pupils who don’t always feel that they shine or succeed particularly well within a classroom situation, yet who have come into their own in the outdoors environment, with the different challenges.”**

Ms Levi, P6/7 teacher

The project helped meet wider objectives of supporting P7 pupils in their transition to High School. It consolidated parent involvement as the project was initiated and run by parent helpers with support from the school. Outside support from the local Countryside Rangers and financial support from Action Earth Grant to help purchase equipment was also invaluable.

### **What was the benefit of doing the John Muir Award?**

Working towards a nationally recognised Award helped raise the project’s profile and create local interest. For individual pupils reflecting on the Four Challenges of the Award – Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share - helped them to see how much they had learnt. Encouraging the group to create their own presentation resulted in a lively and creative sharing session. But perhaps most important benefit as Mandy Craig highlighted, was *“having FUN, learning together and sharing feelings”*.