

adventures close to home

Heather Tuffs takes us back to the Niddventure project with an adventure a little closer to home

Meet the author

Heather Tuffs worked at Bewerly Park Outdoor Education Centre for eight years before joining Nidderdale High School, where she has had the privilege of working with young people to assist in their long-term development. She also works to inspire a lifelong love of adventure and wild places in students and also teaches mountain skills at Glenmore Lodge.

At Nidderdale High School in North Yorkshire, the NiddVenture programme is more than just an extracurricular activity, it is a foundation of the school's educational philosophy. As such, NiddVenture was developed to address the needs of children whose developmental requirements were not met by the traditional education model, as well as to provide outdoor education opportunities to all students.

As detailed in our last contribution to Horizons magazine (Issue 109), our first winter mountaineering expedition to the Cairngorms was very successful. That trip was designed to support the development of seven students who had already displayed resilience, fitness and the ability to cope with challenges during our summer trip to the Inner Hebridean islands of Eigg and Rum. To build on the success of the winter trip, another adventure was planned - one that was designed to show the students what was possible locally, sustainably and without the need for adults or private vehicles.

The journey to 'going solo'

Our first aim was to open the eyes of the winter trip team to the many adventures that were available to them locally. This was accomplished on a weekend walking adventure where the students caught public transport into the heart of the Yorkshire Dales and spent two days walking back to school and camping along the way. This showed both students and staff that there was a wealth of adventure to be had right on our doorstep. For this adventure, the student team were responsible for the planning of the route and all trip logistics, while the staff team accompanied them on the walk itself. This responsibility developed their confidence, knowledge and teamwork.

The next step was going solo! The walking weekend had such a positive impact that the students were inspired to undertake their own solo adventure during the summer holidays. This adventure was planned and executed completely independently and followed a similar format to the initial walking weekend, featuring many of the same locations.

“This summer three of my friends and I embarked on a solo walking trip across the Yorkshire Dales, seeking both adventure and the scenery itself...we navigated public transport, winding trails and relied not just on the map, but on our confidence in each other. The experience didn't only strengthen our friendship, but also helped us gain resilience, confidence and appreciation of all we've learnt on our past trips.

(Eleanor - student)

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“ [for her, it was] a huge leap in confidence in her ability to navigate not only the outdoors, but life independently ”



The success of this second trip suggested that perhaps the most valuable outdoor experiences for young people are the ones that take place in local surroundings. While international trips (or distant national trips) are often perceived as exciting, in reality they are unattainable for most young people without adult support and significant financial input. They also have a higher environmental cost. The route choices made by the student team highlighted how the familiar surroundings provided a degree of certainty when embarking on their first solo adventure.

Student team member, Ellie, reflected: **'The solo adventure was truly amazing and proved to me that we can do it. Heather (staff team) taught us skills and then gradually stepped away - knowing she believed in us set us on our solo journey.'**

Student team member, Dulcie, reflected: **'I absolutely loved our solo walking trip, because it was the first time we've had an adventure on our own and showed all our enthusiasm for walking outdoors. It was challenging and wet at times, but worth all the preparations and has encouraged me to do more activities of my own. It was an amazing trip.'**

The personal growth that the students experienced over the last four years is testament to Nidderdale High School's long-term vision that sustained quality

outdoor education can have a significant influence on life skills and self-confidence. In this case, those developmental outcomes have occurred because of a commitment to investing quality time in a small group of students. The students returned that commitment in equal measure. Their enthusiasm for adventure and their desire to further their knowledge has increasingly been the driving force behind these trips.

The parents' view

The parents of this group of students have been extremely supportive of their children's adventures and encouraged them at every stage. For many, allowing their fifteen-year-olds to depart on a solo adventure was a step into the unknown. Parents had to balance care for their children with the essential giving of freedom, allowing their children to spread their wings, uninhibited by parental anxieties.

'Dulcie has flourished within the small group settings where she's learnt to push herself physically, get fit and strong and become confident in her decisions. We had faith in her ability to do it solo because of the progressive, incremental nature of NiddVenture. It felt like a natural progression...'

The positive outcomes of the parents' trust in both their children and the school are reflected in their comments:

'Ellie was so shy and reserved when she started high school. Being very quiet, she often got lost in larger groups. Having time to develop her skills and shine in a smaller group has meant her capabilities have shone through, along with a huge leap in confidence in her ability to navigate not only the outdoors, but life independently.'

Conclusion

These students have been truly inspired by their outdoor adventures at Nidderdale High and it is hoped that there will be one last adventure before they leave school this academic year. They have requested a first-time experience of wild camping and the Isle of Canna is our targeted destination.

It has been an absolute privilege to witness such enthusiasm, personal growth and development amongst these young people. I would like to thank every one of them for their commitment and ever-growing spirit of adventure. The last four years of journeying with you has been immensely enjoyable and there is nothing better than seeing you taking a leap of faith, trusting your abilities and spreading your wings on solo adventures. May there be many more happy trips in the great outdoors that inspire and sustain you throughout the beautiful journey of life! △

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