



# Outdoor Learning in Highland

‘The June air infected us with primitive hungers, grass-seed and thistle-down idled through the windows, we smelt the fields and were tormented by cuckoos, while every out-of-door sound that came drifting in was a sharp nudge in the solar plexus.....’ a scene from the early pages of *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee in which pupils are desperate to escape the confines of the classroom for the great outdoors.



I imagine many staff identify with that yearning to be outdoors and not just in the balmy days of summer. En-

couragement – if it was needed – to use the outdoors as a learning environment comes in [Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning](#) (provide link?), a document enthusiastically welcomed in Highland.

The Highland Outdoor Learning Group, a committed and energetic group led by Irene Carson, Head Teacher at Grantown Grammar School has recognised the very good outdoor learning already going on in many schools across Highland. However, the group is in the process of identifying a

number of key areas which need to be addressed if the recommendations contained in the in the CfE through OL document are met for all pupils across Highland. Their target date for reporting is June 2011.

By that time, of course, the grass-seed and thistle down will be wafting in the air and I for one plan to read the report outdoors. In the meantime, I commend the contents of this newsletter as clear evidence of the very good work in progress.

Calum MacSween  
Acting Head of Education

## Issue 1

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## Online Resources by Jill O'Reilly

Along with Glow there are many fantastic online resources to support outdoor learning with inspirational ideas and practical resources. Here Jill O'Reilly recommends a few of the best:

### Grounds for Learning

[www.ltl.org.uk/scotland](http://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland)

The site contains advice and sources of support for developing and using school grounds for learning. There are also CPD opportunities and case studies. Particularly useful is the resources section where you can search for curricular areas and stages. There are a good number of resources available to non members, but if your school becomes a

member of grounds for learning for about £60 per year then there are lots more available for free download. The resources are focused on school grounds. The quarterly newsletter which you can subscribe to on the website is useful and inspiring.

### SNH – Outdoor Learning Activities

[www.snh.org.uk/teachingspace/what\\_to\\_do.asp](http://www.snh.org.uk/teachingspace/what_to_do.asp)

A great online resource covering a wide range of outdoor environments, including: forests, seashore, freshwater etc. Each set of resources includes comprehensive background teachers notes and a super range

of activities to help pupils to explore the particular environment.



### I'm a Teacher Get Me Outside Here

[www.creativestarlearning.blogspot.com](http://www.creativestarlearning.blogspot.com)

This is a really practical blog with loads of great ideas. If you click on the "help blog index" tab you will see the blogs listed by curricular area. Brilliant numeracy, literacy, expressive arts and science ideas that can be used in school grounds or further afield. Down the side of the blog there is also a long list of other blogs with great ideas.

## In Brief.....

- "Evolve" - the new HC web based system for recording off-site excursions is now up and running. See your EVC for details or go to [www.evolve.edufocus.co.uk/evco4/evchome\\_public.asp?domain=highland-council-excursions.org.uk](http://www.evolve.edufocus.co.uk/evco4/evchome_public.asp?domain=highland-council-excursions.org.uk)
- The 2011 Outdoor Learning in the National Parks Annual Conference will take place at Glenmore Lodge on the 28th of October
- A Outdoor Learning in Highland event is being planned for the 30th Sept to 2nd Oct. A residential weekend, this is an opportunity to showcase Outdoor Learning Activities and provide CPD alongside fun family activities.
- Thursday May 12th at Glenmore Lodge –Reviewing in the Outdoors with Roger Greenway. More details from the John Muir Trust.

## Activity Risk Benefit Analysis - An approach to planning OL activities by Bob Telfer

Many teachers, outdoor instructors, and community workers feel that the risk assessment process we have all had to work with over the years has simply become more and more onerous, and in some cases is getting in the way of good things happening. Well if you haven't already heard, there's a new kid on the block called Risk-Benefit Analysis. This process aims to restore some balance to our thinking and practice, and deserves to be carefully considered as a positive forward step.

Risk-benefit analysis is a process through which both the advantages and the hazards associated with an activity can be assessed. In doing so the decisions to undertake, limit, extend or indeed withdraw an activity can be viewed by teachers, instructors, participants, parents, the courts and any other stakeholders in light of both the benefits and risks which underpin them. The aim is to find a position in which the benefits *balance* and therefore *justify* the risks, as managed by the provider.

If a balance cannot be achieved, for example in a situation in which significant risks are identified within an activity which provides very little benefit, then it would be difficult to argue that the activity was valid, regardless of any controls which may

have attempted to manage those risks.

Equally if an activity provides considerable benefits, then risk-benefit analysis could provide a way of justifying the delivery of the activity and therefore allowing young people to experience the considerable benefits the process has identified. In this way risk-benefit analysis could become a method of enabling activities to take place and not a reason, or excuse, for them not doing so. Not doing an activity because there is little benefit, educational, recreational, social or otherwise, seems sensible. Not taking on the challenge because it has an element of inherent risk is perhaps to miss the point of adventure activities.

Read a current risk assessment for your operation and the chances are it starts with lots of the things that could go wrong and how much they will hurt if they do. The real difference with risk-benefit analysis is the good news. In a risk-benefit analysis you also write down the reasons for doing the activity, the things that make taking those risks not just acceptable but down right desirable.



*Benefit vs Risk?*

The idea is that instead of producing a list of reasons for not doing an activity you produce a list of reasons to do it, balanced against the potential price to pay. The analysis bit then states how you are going to manage the risks without spoiling the benefits. If you end up with a long list of risks and no benefits then an accident which you can't defend the corner. If you end up with a long list of benefits and no risks you have probably missed something, nothing is risk free. Risk-benefit analysis is just a way of explaining why it's worth taking these risks.

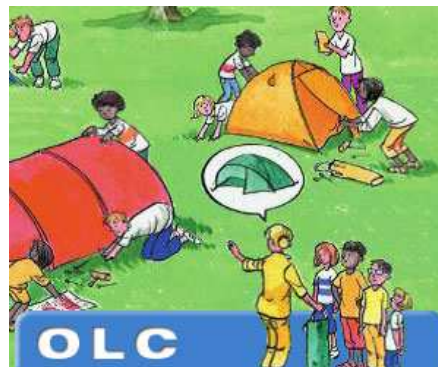
..... So, rather than take "Five Steps to Risk Assessment", try taking four steps to a positive new approach :-

1. Outline the activity proposed.
2. Identify the benefits for participants. (This could link to experiences and opportunities);
3. Identify the risks involved.
4. Analyse how the risks are to be managed.

## Outdoor Learning Cards by Bridget Thomas, Active Schools Coordinator

Professional partnerships were very much in evidence at the recent Outdoor Learning CPD session when 14 Primary Teachers and Active Schools Co-ordinators reviewed the new Outdoor Learning Cards, an educational resource developed by the Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel which aims to promote active learning across the curriculum, healthy lifestyles and positive attitudes to others through high quality outdoor learning experiences.

Bridget Thomas and Louise Nadin,



Active Schools Co-ordinators in Fort William and Brora respectively, led the group through the 4 main practical elements featured in the cards;

journeying, team building, bouldering and orienteering. During the course of the day the group samples several activities in each section, discussing the relative merits of each to their own curricular or extra curricular circumstances. There seemed to be general consensus, reflected in the feedback, that the orienteering and team building sections were the most useful to members of this particular group while the journeying element had some ideas that would transfer well to primary children but was essentially a first steps towards Duke of Edinburgh for younger secondary pupils. The



bouldering section was felt to be of great value where schools or ASC had

access to a bouldering or climbing wall, but that wasn't the case for the

majority.

The Outdoor Learning cards resource pack is much more than a set of activity cards, however, containing as it does a wealth of supporting material for links into the Curriculum for Excellence E's and O's that met with widespread approval from the teach-

ers present. In addition, reviewing techniques and a section on the environment are well backed up with good ideas, resources and lots of information on where to go next. Hopefully, after this CPD introduction, there are more professionals enthused by the possibilities of education in the great outdoors and even more children about to benefit from their experiences.

## Outdoor Learning in the National Parks by Alison Hammerton



The Outdoor Learning in the National Parks (NPs) is a two-year partnership project to support the development and embedding of outdoor learning in practice. The project aims to support the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, generate opportunities for networking and sharing of practice and resources, and promote the National Parks as unique and ideal destinations for outdoor learning. Active partners comprise Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA), Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and seven local authorities – Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray, Perth and Kinross, Stirling

and West Dunbartonshire. The development officer for this project, Alison Hammerton, is a member of the Highland Outdoor Learning Group.

The project ran a successful first annual conference at Carrochan, headquarters of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority on 28 October 2010. The conference was both over-subscribed and very well received. Many commented on the success of the day, with a very positive atmosphere and a wide variety of workshops being delivered by teachers and practitioners. Highlights included a thoroughly inspiring and entertaining keynote speech, 'My Journey through a Career in Outdoor Learning' by Alan Smith, Outdoor Learning Officer for Cairngorms National Park Authority. Morning workshops covered Access to Information, The Benefits of Risk, CPD and Developing Confidence, Practical Support, and Structured Educational Experiences. Afternoon workshops saw practitioners from the seven local authorities sharing their experiences and expertise, and local authorities discussed and made pledges to support the sustain-

ability of the project. These included a wide range of commitments from making regular use of school grounds and local areas with all classes, to providing CPD and resources for staff, to developing partnership working and involving pupils in the planning process.

Currently one of the exciting initiatives is a joint National Parks' Media Project, involving ten secondary



schools who will make a 12 minute video of 'Outdoor Learning through National Parks', with each school having a very different and creative approach. Some previous Cairngorms media project films can be seen at [www.cairngorms.co.uk/learning/schoolsvideoproject](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/learning/schoolsvideoproject).



## Highland Council Outdoor Learning Web Links

Outdoor Learning [www.highland.gov.uk/learninghere/communitylearning/outdoorlearning/](http://www.highland.gov.uk/learninghere/communitylearning/outdoorlearning/)

Off Site Excursions [www.highland.gov.uk/learninghere/communitylearning/outdoorlearning/offsiteexcursions/](http://www.highland.gov.uk/learninghere/communitylearning/outdoorlearning/offsiteexcursions/)

CfE through Outdoor Learning (HC's Glow page) <https://portal.glowscotland.org.uk/establishments/thehighlandcouncil/CfE%20-%20Through%20Outdoor%20Learn/default.aspx>

LTS CfE through Outdoor Learning [www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/)