

Days on the river lead to gold

Canoeing expeditions are on the increase, but few have the chance to complete such a range of canoeing expeditions and East Anglia is the ideal venue for these.

For the last seven years The Ashley School Award Unit has been running canoeing expeditions across Suffolk and Norfolk. This year there has been an exciting development as we have run our first gold expedition using the River Severn for practice and the River Wye for qualifying.

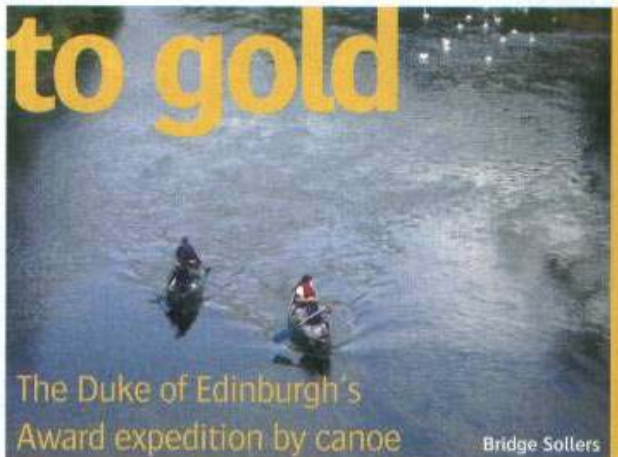
Over the years any of the local rivers and broads have been used for expeditions, but we now have a pattern in place to enable consistent progression through the awards different levels.

At bronze we used the River Waveney from Gillingham to Oulton Broad. At silver we used the Waveney from Scole Bridge to Shotford for practice and the River Stour from Sudbury to smallbridge downstream of Bures for qualifying. We have also used the rivers Ant and Bure from Irstead to Buxton.

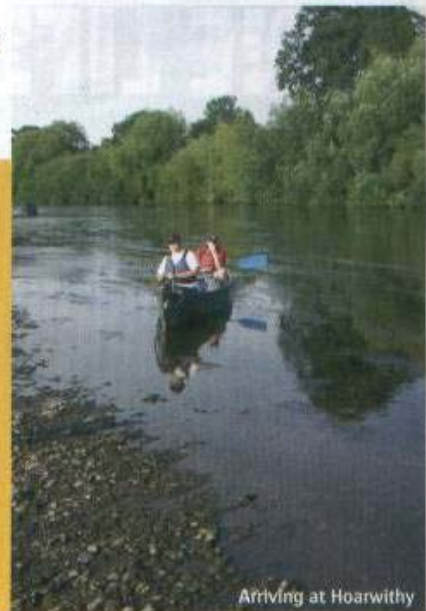
This year we ran a gold practice on the Severn from Glanhafen upstream of Welshpool to Cressage downstream of Shrewsbury and a recent gold qualifying expedition on the Wye from Byecross above Hereford to Monmouth.

The award unit is mainly for pupils from the Ashley School, a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils attending the school have a statement of special educational needs. Within this, pupils have a myriad of special needs ranging from those on the autistic spectrum to those with a low IQ and many from poor homes. Other members of the unit include pupils at one of the local mainstream schools; these youngsters also have statements of special educational needs.

Using canoeing as a mode of travel is ideal for our youngsters. The navigation is not as tough by canoe as there is less route choice. Food and weight considerations are also easier as the youngsters are not carrying the load on their backs. However, canoeing requires considerable training for youngsters to reach the correct level for the expedition. This work is mainly completed after school on Oulton Broad. Youngsters count this work as their physical recreation, another section of the award scheme. Open canoes are mainly used as these are excellent for loading with equipment and require team work to paddle successfully, some two person kayaks are also used.



Bridge Sollers



Arriving at Hoarwithy



Hampton Bishop



Lorraine at Lower Lydbrook

This mode of travel is also very versatile for the Award and youngsters. Last year an 18 stone youngster completed the bronze award expedition when the group paddled two rafted together. This year the same youngster had grown so much in confidence and skill level that he was able to complete his silver award expedition in a canoe paddled by one of his peers and himself. He displayed very good leadership skills and contributed well to the overall success of the expedition by the whole group.

On the recent gold expedition, the independent assessors from the wild country panel praised the skill level, team work and overall ability as exemplary.

Day one saw the group paddle from Byecross to Hereford. They easily shot the small rapid at Monnington Falls and progressed well to camp at Hereford Rowing Club.

Day Two was the hardest day as this was one of the longest days and it was also very hot. They finished their nine hour paddle in soaring heat at Hoarwithy.

Day Three started early as we were expecting more sun, but instead it rained for most of the day. The group visited Ross-on-Wye and went to the top of Goodrich Castle, before camping at Lower Lydbrook.

The final day saw a welcome return to sunshine as the group paddled through Symonds Yat on their way to Monmouth. Needless to say they all slept on the way home.

One of the group commented "I would do it all over again if I had the choice I loved all of it". This from a youngster who found the expedition really hard. Just goes to show how much they all got from the experience.

This work is an integral part of the school's Outdoor Education programme which includes three half days of outdoor education during curriculum time, a week in Wales at the excellent CMC centre, a week in Thetford as the lead partner with three local high schools and Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme run at lunchtimes and after school. Since Easter we have facilitated 204 pupil nights out either at camp or a residential centre and over 1,000 nights over the last five years. Through this work we aim to develop self confidence, team working and independence skills. ●

Lawrence Chapman

FACTS :

To find out more about the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme visit www.theaward.org

To find out more about The Ashley School, visit www.ashley.suffolk.sch.uk

Special thanks to: Local land owners and Scouts who offer their support by allowing camping on their land. If you are a land owner next to a river please consider allowing small expeditions to camp. All the Volunteers who help to run the Award Unit in their own time. The Broads Authority Sustainable Development fund. The Local Network Fund