

Outdoor learning in the Cairngorms National Park

In 2007, Scotland's two National Park authorities (Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs) and Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned research into the barriers that prevent schools and other groups from getting into our National Parks and National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and making the most of what they offer in terms of education.

With an emphasis on outdoor learning in the national Curriculum for Excellence, the National Park Authorities and SNH were keen that these key sites be used to deliver a variety of outdoor learning experiences, so in conjunction with Learning Teaching Scotland (now Education Scotland), ways were explored to do just that.

As a result, a 2-year Outdoor Learning Officer was employed to work with both Park Authorities to promote the Parks as ideal and unique sites for outdoor learning and ensure that using them was made easy and practical for educators.

As well as pupil and teacher residential visits to the Parks and NNRs, a range of information is now available online including www.cairngormslearningzone.co.uk, which is aimed at Higher students with an interest in the Cairngorms National Park and there is information on outdoor learning in National Parks on the Glow schools intranet for students and teachers.

Education and resource packs have also been produced featuring case studies to support field trips as well as information on the practicalities of organising a visit and assessing and managing risk.

Training for teachers, rangers and other outdoor educators focusing on the special qualities of National Parks is available through Continuing Professional Development and networks have been created so that teachers can share their experiences with colleagues.

Whether people are studying the National Parks from a distance or physically coming here for outdoor learning, there has never been so much support in terms of online resources or printed information available prior to a visit, making it much easier for all involved.

As a result of all of this work, there has been a significant uptake in schools, colleges and other groups looking to the Parks for educational experiences and outdoor learning, some using established programmes such the John Muir Award or the Duke of Edinburgh Award as a focus for their studies.

Others are simply following the school curriculum but are bringing it to life by taking students into the great outdoors whether it is for science, sport, history, geography or art, the National Parks and NNRs of Scotland are beautiful , inspirational places with an array of things to see, do and learn about.

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