

# The Outdoor Partnership NEWSLETTER



## Club Focus – Llandysul Paddlers

Llandysul Paddlers is a paddling club founded in West Wales in 1984, and since then has provided thousands of paddling opportunities for people in the area and beyond. The fantastic location of the club means they can offer different activities; Slalom, Freestyle, Surf and Canadian Canoeing on both a lake and river and indoor pool. In 1997, the club expanded significantly by developing a clubhouse that has been an invaluable asset.

The community club holds 2 open sessions per week, catering for both adults and juniors, and, in conjunction with Canoe Wales, provides additional slalom specific sessions on 3 other evenings a week. An indoor pool session every Sunday throughout the winter and a monthly river trip to other locations across Wales, makes it a busy club with something for everyone!

Their location on the running river means the club is ideally placed for experienced paddlers and adrenaline junkies. However, those new to the sport or those of a quieter disposition, may find the flowing water a bit of a challenge. To this end, the club were keen for some of their regular volunteers to train as raft guides, so that newer members could experience the white water in a safe and controlled manner initially. The Outdoor Partnership were able to support these volunteers to complete the course, alongside the WWSR course. This has meant the club has been able to expand their offering safely, and many more paddlers are able to get a taste of the white water at the end of their regular session and work to develop their own skills sufficiently to go it alone.

The future looks even more exciting for the females of the club and the area. Following an initial programme of female only taster sessions run in conjunction by the club and The Outdoor Partnership as part of This Girls Adventure, such was the appetite for more, that the club has developed a programme of female only sessions to begin soon. Following research, questionnaires and discussion amongst the club committee and volunteers, they found that over 70 females are keen to participate in women only sessions, and so from January 2024 Llandysul Paddlers Club will dedicate 5.30–7.00 every Monday night to female only sessions.

It is fantastic to see a club doing so well, and still keen to develop and provide further opportunities to their members and community! Thanks for all your hard work!

<https://llandysul-paddlers.org.uk>



## News from our Regions

### General News

First of all, we'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a wonderful New Year. It's been a great 2023 for us, and we can't wait for 2024!

We'd also like to take this opportunity to bid a fond farewell to 2 members of our team who are moving on to pastures new – Bethan Davies and Caoimhe Connor! Bethan is emigrating to Australia and Caoimhe is taking up a new position with another organisation in Northern Ireland – thank you both for your hard work, and best of luck from us all in future!



### Central South Wales

We start with the Amser Young Carers' funding programme which has kicked into action! We had a busy half term holiday with 3 activities provided for the YMCA Cardiff and the Vale Young Carers at Cardiff International White Water Centre. They got to try a variety of watersports activities and the wild autumnal storm didn't put them off. They took part in raft-building and a variety of paddlesports. They were all enthusiastically jumping off upturned rafts into the water, making it look like a hot summer's day. In addition, Bridgend WREC young carers had a special halloween bushcraft session in the woods, where they enjoyed lunch and toasted marshmallows around a fire, followed by archery and den building, with even the sun put its hat on and everyone had huge smiles across their faces. It's great to have these special adventures to thank our young carers and to help them have a little respite. Here are a few quotes from the group, "I really enjoyed it, especially when we jumped off the boat into the water", "Never done it before, excited to have a go" and "Had the chance to do something I really like doing".

We also kicked off the Amser Young Carers' funding with a big bang family bonanza at Pedal Power, with some Inclusive Cycling action in Cardiff. We had over 30 folks come and join us to have a cycle around Sophia Gardens. Pedal Power have a whole range of specially adapted trikes and bikes designed for children and adults with impairments. What's more, they have regular bikes that friends, family and care workers can use, so that cycling can be a social activity too. At lunch they all returned back to the café for a healthy meal. As it was October, the soup and bread was served up, there's really nothing better after a lovely autumnal family cycle! Such a memory making event!



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## Coventry

Coventry held its first family orienteering scavenger hunt last month. It was a partnership event involving the Coventry Outdoor Partnership, Coventry School Games organisers, Longford Park Primary School and Little Heath Primary School.

The mapping for the event was funded by British Orienteering and carried out by the Octavian Droobers Orienteering Club. Although Storm Babet did its best to put a dampener on things, the families that braved the elements and took part reported having a great time – one family even took to the conditions like ducks to water and had a good old splash through the floods!

Longford Park Primary School were our generous hosts, providing snacks and drinks for everyone, and there was even a covered area outside for the medal presentation. A perfect example of Coventry people coming together and carrying on, whatever the weather.

The Coventry Peace Orchard at Coundon Hall Park hosted Apple Fest in October. The event, organised by the daughter of the Peace Orchard's creator, saw community groups come together to offer a range of activities, food, and live music. Fresh fruit and veg, chutney, doll making, Halloween costume making and children's games were all on offer, as well as TOP Coventry's nature discovery trail, where families followed a map around the woodland discovering facts about the plants and animals that are found in and around the Peace Orchard.

The main event, of course, involved apples. Hundreds of apples were donated to the event from a wide variety of local businesses, community groups and generous individuals, as well as a big apple crusher and press. Lots of delicious apple juice was shared among the attendees, and the consensus was that it was delicious! It's certainly hard to get apple juice that is any fresher.

The uncertain weather may have reduced the numbers of visitors a little, but thankfully the rain held off, and a festival atmosphere continued throughout a very pleasant afternoon in the autumn sunshine.

## Plymouth

The Incredible Edible Devonport walks, by Joanna Ruminska and Incredible Edible UK, is a project which encourages adults living in Devonport to actively access local green spaces. The walking activities included mindfulness, observing nature, elements of forest bathing, foraging and birdwatching.

The project brought together a diverse range of people from the Devonport area of Plymouth, allowing them to go for a walk together. When the project finished, the participants now have the knowledge of locations, accessibility, and ideas of themes, and continue with their adventures. They have found new friends to socialise with whilst spending time outdoors in their local parks, and this has resulted from the confidence this project has given them to go for a walk and a reason to go out and explore.

There were 12 sessions in all, with a total of 25 people taking part, with everyone taking part in at least 6 of the 12 sessions. We must thank Stuart whose role it was to support the grant bid from Active Devon which paid for this excellent project.

## News from our Regions

### Gwynedd

On the weekend of the 28th and 29th of October, CMC Adventure ran two days of activities for local children. It is the third time these activity weekends have been held and every time they are oversubscribed within a day of their announcement. This time, the activities on offer were kayaking, canoeing, wilderness skills, archery and climbing. We were also very fortunate that despite it being late autumn, the weather was settled and not too cold.

On the Saturday, the morning was spent canoeing and kayaking on Pensarn Harbour. An ebbing tide made progress upstream a decent challenge, one that everyone passed with ease. Once under the railway bridge the going was much easier and it offered us a chance to play a few paddle games before returning to the centre. After lunch and some hot chocolate, it was time for the dry activities. We were led by the instructors up to the other site, through woodlands that were showing their best autumn colours.

The wilderness group set about raising a tarp for shelter before heading off to collect and filter some water for more hot chocolate. Meanwhile, the archers were receiving their briefing and practicing before a competition. By now, the other group had lit their fires and had the water boiling. They huddled around the fire and enjoyed the fruits of their labour. It was a nice time to sit and talk and reflect on the day.

Once both groups had finished, and packed everything away, it was time to head back down the hill in time for pick up. Huge thanks to CMC Adventure for two fantastic days, and for continuing to support our work.

Work also continues through the winter. Although some projects are winding up for the winter, our work is continuing with successful grants being awarded totalling about £16,000.

This money has already been earmarked for new projects that will support the health and wellbeing of Gwynedd residents. Part of the funding will go towards The Gwynedd Wellness Walks Project, which was recently announced on social media. The response was very positive with the post being shared over 60 times in two days, and over 50 people asking for more information. The project will train volunteers to enable them to lead free walks in their local areas. The training is free to those who are selected and includes Lowland Leader Training and Award, 2 Day Emergency First Aid, Mental Health First Aid, Equipment for Leaders worth over £100, and support from the partner organisations. Progress on this project and others will be reported over the coming months so look out.

To hear about upcoming projects as early as possible, please follow By'w'n Iach and The Outdoor Partnership on Facebook.

### Coventry & Plymouth



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## Ayrshire

The Outdoor Partnership, Ayrshire is involved in an exciting new outdoor adventure project to create an Ayrshire Coastal Snorkel Trail. We are working with other groups and lead partner Adventure Centre for Education (ACE), who are eager to develop an Ayrshire Snorkel Trail. While there are several of these trails across the country, there are currently none in the southwest of Scotland. You can find more information about snorkel trails on the Scottish Wildlife Trust website: <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/thin.../snorkel-trails/>.

We believe that creating a snorkel trail in our area would provide a valuable educational and coastal marine activity for young people and adults of all ages, whilst also helping to monitor and protect our local waters. Additionally, it could serve as a great tourism attraction and activity for the region.



We have identified several potential Ayrshire sites for the trail, including at Lendalfoot, Whilk Point and Whilk Isle at Lendalfoot, Horse Rocks at Girvan, Turnberry Lighthouse Point, the Maidens Harbour area, Culzean, Dunure, and Ballast Bank, Troon. Initial meetings have been held with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and local partners to investigate the best and most suitable locations in Ayrshire and we now aim to start engaging with local communities.

We want local groups, Community Councils, wild swimmers, bathers, divers and beach users to be involved at this early stage of planning and to discuss with us your thoughts or concerns on this proposal. If you wish to get involved or find out more information, please contact [Vincent.mcwhirter@outdoorpartnership.co.uk](mailto:Vincent.mcwhirter@outdoorpartnership.co.uk)

For the past two years a group of volunteers and pupils from local Ayrshire schools have been building two coastal rowing skiffs in an old chicken shed as part of the Ayrshire Boat Building Project. Finally, with many hours of building, sanding and painting, they have finished and they will be launched sometime soon. One boat has been named Selkirk Grace to celebrate our Robert Burns heritage in Ayrshire. The other boat has yet to be named.

As one project finishes another one starts, with the next boat building project starting in Dalmellington, linked to Doon Academy. Local volunteers and pupils are building a boat for a future Loch Doon Rowing Club. This project will run for over a year in a local shed, constructing a St Ayles skiff, creating the first inland St Ayles Skiff in Ayrshire. Please get in touch for more information.

## News from our Regions

### Gwent

Autumn has well and truly begun in South East Wales. The Wye Valley and Black Mountains are a spectacular assortment of yellows, reds and oranges which has made for some unforgettable outdoor experiences.

Our Gwent High Sheriff funded Adventure Therapy programme has been supporting a group of young people from Abergavenny with activities to support them in re-engaging in education with Crosfield Outdoors. So far, the group have been caving in Ogof Clogwyn and rock climbing at Llangorse Climbing Centre. The next stop is a paddle down the lower Wye Valley and an ascent of the highest mountain in the Bannau Brycheiniog - Pen y Fan!

Throughout October half term we worked closely with MonLife Outdoor Adventure and Caerphilly Adventures to provide a variety of free adventure days for young carers in Gwent. The week gave over 100 young carers the opportunity to experience an adventure activity, with more planned for Christmas and February half term. All thanks to Amser funding.



### Ayrshire (continued...)

And finally, a few weeks ago The Outdoor Partnership was excited to join the ASN support group Spotty Zebra on an adventure day at the Dolphin House Outdoor Education Centre in Culzean Country Park. With support from TOP Ayrshire inclusion funding we joined them for a morning of beachcombing and rock pooling, and after lunch a great session exploring the park, walking through the drainage ditches and discovering remote parts of the park not usually accessible. A great time was had by everyone.

If you wish to find out if TOP Ayrshire can partner up with your organisation supporting Outdoor Adventure opportunities please contact: [Vincent.mcwhirter@outdoorpartnership.co.uk](mailto:Vincent.mcwhirter@outdoorpartnership.co.uk)



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## Northern Ireland – Sperrins

The Outdoor Partnership have now been operating in the Sperrins AONB for 10 months. During that time, we have been able to build community links and conduct various forms of consultation, from face-to-face meetings to online surveys and building links with local councils, clubs and community groups.

Along with this, we have been busy working in partnership with various sporting governing bodies and clubs, delivering further programmes of interest and to areas that were highlighted within our surveys.

The total number of participants attending outdoor activity opportunities through our projects' taster sessions and events came to 60. Of these, 23 were under 18 years of age, 16 were female, and there were 4 volunteers.

We have delivered programmes including two Gortin Trail Centre Youth Rides, in partnership with Cycling Ireland, Race Fit MTB and Gortin MTB Club. There was a Halloween Youth Taster Session at Garvagh Trail Centre MTB, in partnership with Cycling Ireland and Race Fit MTB. We had four Gortin Lakes Kayaking Skill Sessions, in partnership with Erne Paddlers. There were two Get Wet Stay Safe Water Safety Programmes, in partnership with Swim Ulster, at Gortin Lakes and Lough Macrory. And, finally, a Happy Hiking Hill Skills Programme, in Partnership with Mountaineering Ireland, at Moydamlought Forest.



We hope to build on these programmes and use them as a method for further consultation and gaps analysis which will help TOP to identify opportunities and barriers. We would like to thank all the Volunteers, Governing Bodies and Clubs that helped to support us in the delivery of these programmes.

We'd also like to report on our 'The Power of the Outdoors for Mental Wellbeing Workshop'. In November, TOP delivered the Power of the Outdoors for Mental Wellbeing Workshop in partnership with Sport NI and the Sperrins Partnership.

In recent years, the health and wellbeing benefits associated with using the outdoors have become more apparent. The question is, how do we utilize the outdoors and adventure therapy within our organisations to deliver health and wellbeing initiatives?

## News from our Regions

### Northern Ireland – Mourne Ambassadors

Our Mourne Ambassadors were very busy recently. The shovels were out and the gloves were on for some important landscape restoration work. Our Ambassadors were accompanied by James, the National Trust Ranger, last weekend, with the objective being to restore pathside areas which had become eroded as people veer from the paths themselves.

On this occasion, the work took place near the Donard / Commedagh Saddle. As you can see from the photos, the weather was fine and it was an opportunity not only to do some necessary restoration work, but also to revisit some of the National Vegetation Classification quadrants from 2017, which were identified and compared with the current status of those sites. And we are happy to report that there was an apparently favourable improvement.

We utilised three different methods for landscape restoration in order to repair the eroded pathside areas. Firstly, we plugged in vegetation that we had sourced from other, donor sites. Secondly, the work involved making a turf revetment with large turfs that had, once again, been sourced from donor sites. And, finally, the job of undercutting the hag and resetting the turf on top was also undertaken.

It was hard work, but a job well done, and in such beautiful surroundings. Well done to all involved!



### Sperrins (continued...)

This workshop had various guest speakers from the Western Health and Social Care Trust, Sport NI, Outdoor Reaction NI and TOP. They covered topics on social prescribing, adventure therapy, and data on how people use the outdoors and its benefits for wellbeing. The workshop also consisted of a series of group activities which provided an excellent opportunity for networking and shared learning. The workshop finished with a lovely walk around the Gortin Glen Forest Park.

We were delighted to see such good engagement and passion within the room for the topic and we hope to take forward and develop some of the key learning from the day.

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## Mid Wales

Mid Wales' NRW-funded Opening to the Outdoors programme, which started in November 2021, is coming into its final stage and we have been going out with a bang. Two walking intervention programmes, one in Llandrindod Wells led by Bryn Walking and one in Aberporth and Cardigan led by Leanne Bird Wellbeing and Adventure, recently came to a close, and thanks to the thoughtful planning and delivery of the providers and dedication of the participants they have both been a huge success.

"The sessions have provided not only physical exercise but a chance to explore the natural beauty around us and the joy of being outdoors," one participant of the Aberporth programme reflected.

Meanwhile, young people from Hywel Dda's EIP recovery programme have been taking to the sea on a 10-week surf programme led by Tonic Surf. Again, thanks to the dedication of Kwame and his team, as well as the recovery practitioners, and of course the commitment of the young people, the impact of this project was huge. The increase in confidence amongst the team became apparent not just in their surfing skills but also back on dry land, with several members of the group finding the confidence to speak about their experiences in front of hundreds of healthcare professionals at two recent conferences. A huge well done to everybody who took part in all aspects of the programme.

However, this is not the end of the story, it is just the beginning. An important part of this project was to build in further skills training for participants and the staff who work with them so that they can continue enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits of the outdoors long after this project finishes.

We have had 5 people from the walking programmes go on to complete their Bronze NNAS (National Navigation Award Scheme) and one has completed her Silver NNAS and Hill Skills as well. Three young people are going on to complete personal skills training to prepare them for their surf lifesaving qualifications. In addition to this, 7 people working and volunteering in the health and social care sector in Mid Wales have completed their Lowland Leader or Hill and Moorland Leader Training, and two of these have gone on to pass their assessment so far (well done Kerina and Matt!), with three more having their assessments booked in for January. Five people have also completed a Level 1 in Outdoor Learning and Play and 12 have completed their Outdoor First Aid. We've also been able to fund an off-road wheelchair – the Mountain Trike pictured – to help even more people to access the outdoors in Mid Wales. So all in all – doors to the outdoors have been opened and, despite the draft, we are keeping them well and truly open! Huge thanks to NRW for funding this project.

The Amser-funded Young Carers' Project in Powys and Ceredigion has seen 10 activities take place over the last 6 months – from snorkelling to canoe expeditions and from bushcraft to indoor climbing. We've seen amazing engagement from young carers and their families and with much more still to come. Huge thanks to our delivery partners and the partner organisations we have been working with, and a special thanks to the outreach workers who get everybody engaged and motivated and make these events happen!

## News from our Regions

### Swansea Bay

We had a fantastic (and busy) half term here in the Swansea Bay Region despite Storm Ciaran! We were out with the young carers' groups all week as part of the Amser Young Carers' Programme. A massive thank you to the young carers' services for their support with this. We had Bushcraft with Stuart from Tread Gower, and it was a jammed packed day with some waterfall walks, cooking soup over an open fire, wood carving and even some hot chocolate! The group had a fantastic time and dodged the rain (for the most part!).

Then we had two awesome days at Llandysul Paddlers, with the Young Carers from Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. They did some kayaking and paddle boarding and then some rafting as the river levels were great for this! We finished off the session with some smores. We are looking forward to lots more fun sessions with the Young Carers before March, including archery and snorkelling!

Here is some of the feedback we received from Lisa Mansell from Action for Children, Pembrokeshire:

"I have been working with Sioned from The Outdoor Partnership for a few months now. She approached our service, and we were delighted to be offered some exciting activities for our young carers. With the financial cost of living crisis, everyone is feeling the pinch, even us as a charity.

"Our first activity was held at Wild Lakes, Pembrokeshire and it was a rewarding day for us as a team. The children thoroughly enjoyed trying out a new activity and the benefits of seeing them enjoy some time away from their caring role and be able to be themselves was astounding. The second activity was paddleboarding at Windswept in Dale. The weather wasn't great, but did that stop us, no it didn't!!! The children enthusiastically entered the water and splashed and smiled for the entire activity. Even the cold exit did not dampen their spirits. One Mum thanked me and said how desperate her son had been for a break from his brother who has autism, and that it had brought tears to her eyes watching him in the water.

"I can honestly say that the support from Sioned has made a huge impact on the wellbeing of my young carers and we are so grateful that we could provide such adventurous and entertaining activities. We look forward to our next session in December with a new group of young carers who will benefit from the activity."



# The Outdoor Partnership NEWSLETTER



## Coastal Cumbria

During 2023, and with thanks to Cumbria Community Foundation, TOP have been working closely with Millom School to develop an extra-curricular Adventurous Activity club. Following consultation with the students and staff it was decided the club would focus on mountain biking as this was most popular and there were limited opportunities in the area for progression.

Students have taken part in progressive mountain biking sessions on a weekly basis, starting on the accessible running and bike track next to the school before moving to local trails around Millom and finishing with an all-day adventure ride.

The extra-curricular school club removes barriers, and with further funding from Active Travel, has enabled the school to purchase a fleet of mountain bikes and helmets, so everyone has the opportunity to get involved. This gives young people the opportunity to foster a love of the outdoors, expand horizons and take up outdoor activities as a lifelong pursuit. According to Rory Moore, of Millom School, "The project has been fantastic for our school community, we have been able to offer our students, mountain biking off site with a qualified coach allowing them to really challenge themselves as well as learning new skills. The project has also enabled us to have a staff member qualify as a MTB leader, so that we can continue to offer this amazing opportunity for our pupils".

Alongside the school club, TOP have been working with local residents to set up a community mountain biking club, through our affiliation with British Cycling, that provides a continuum for young people, connecting them with the local community. The training of teachers and volunteers from the community club with British Cycling coaching and leadership awards will enable increased delivery. This community club will run separately from the school club but will support the sustainability of the school club as well.

TOP Cumbria also had an inspiring day at the Vertex industry event. This year's industry event was focused on inclusion and impairments, following on from last year's theme, and continuing to focus on people. There were a selection of workshops and guest speakers to cover the topic of "Inclusion for All". The industry will be asking ourselves how we can better cater for all body types, shapes and personal needs so that our attractions, activities and venues can be open to as many people from our communities as possible.

If you have any questions or would like to get in touch regarding the support TOP can offer your organisation or club please contact your local development officer. We at TOP Cumbria value the opportunity to work with any groups or organisations who wish to access the outdoors. Why not get in touch and see if we can work together and support each other?



## News from our Regions

### Coastal Cumbria

We end this month's Cumbria news with the words of a young carer who has taken part in some of our outdoor activities and sums up the immeasurable difference that being outdoors can make:

"As a young carer for my dad, I struggle to feel I live the 'normal' life of a 22-year-old. When me and my mam saw the sessions advertised through The Outdoor Partnership on Facebook it was a perfect opportunity to try new sports and have time away from the stress of daily life. We had tried paddleboarding roughly 5 years ago but were very excited to try it again but had reservations about our abilities. The paddleboard sessions were interactive and very informative without being over-powering with information. With the sessions being women only we felt more confident and it created a non-judgemental environment. All staff were very helpful and happy to answer any questions we had throughout the session. While on the water we felt safe and all staff ensured we managed. After the sessions we felt more confident in our abilities and happier overall. We then went home and purchased a board for ourselves. We felt well informed on the type of board we should buy for our size and ability. From the group we have been taking time to paddleboard and feel confident on the water to do this ourselves. Being on the water allows us to focus on paddleboarding and the surroundings which leaves a lasting happy feeling. The option for the catch-up session was perfect and to have the option for half day meant we were able to attend. The catch up session was amazing, we felt more confident to navigate paddleboarding while the weather was windy and it was nice to build on the skills we previously learned.

"Following on from the paddleboarding we signed up for the wild swim sessions. This session was the moment we re-found our love for being in the water. The session again was very informative and we felt safe in the water at all times. Again, from this session we felt comfortable to continue wild swimming on our own. From the sessions we have now joined the Mental Health Swim national group that run local swims in Crummock and Derwent monthly but without the wild swim lesson we would have not felt confident to join the group. Wild swimming leaves us with high endorphin levels that last. In the water the stress of home life disappears and I feel able to do something for myself and not be a carer. Now we have the confidence to swim and paddleboard on our own we will continue to use these skills to help our mental health and well-being".

