



## CASE STUDY

### 'Learning & Discovery' School Visits



Last year, our education visits provided welcoming experiences for almost 9000 young people. From the youngest children at Primary school to A-level, from den building to wildflower identification, our visits offer chance for both young people and their accompanying adults to connect with nature and the special properties of the national park. For many, it is their first experience of the Peak District and a gateway to enjoying the outdoors.

#### Who was involved in delivery?

Our small team of Young People & Community Engagement Rangers delivered sessions, supported by volunteers. Young people aged between 4 and 18 visited with their schools, from a wide geographical area: from local village schools and nearby cities (Sheffield & Manchester), to locations as far afield as Birmingham, Boston and the Wirral. We have targeted schools in line with our Diverse Audience Plan, and many are from communities under-represented in our visitor demographics.

#### What was involved?

Our rangers led visits for schools on a wide variety of topics, in locations around the national park. Our landscapes provide an ideal outdoor classroom, giving context and inspiration to students' in-school learning. A range of programmes are offered ([advertised on our website](#)); the majority are designed to support pupils' curricular learning in geography and science topics, as well as investigative fieldwork opportunities to aid students in coursework and exams. We also offer non-curricular experiences focused on exploring the landscape and connecting with nature. Celebration of the Peak District's special qualities is embedded in all visits.

#### Who were the beneficiaries?

Participants were school children, aged 5 -18. Around 75% of our schools come from urban areas, and many are from levels of high urban deprivation, with high levels of Pupil Premium children. It is these groups who may be least likely to visit. Participants are typically from a wide range of income levels and ethnic backgrounds. As well as mainstream primary and secondary schools, we have also worked with special needs schools, and with groups of Young carers to provide respite days. Teachers are able to draw on our rangers' subject knowledge, and their classes' experiences on the day, to add value to their teaching. Parent helpers are often some of the

most enthusiastic beneficiaries. Many express a wish to return with their children.

#### What were the outputs?

In 2023-24, we delivered 220 visits to 8632 young people. 25% of these visits were secondary visits. The remainder were primary, largely focused on key stage 2 (ages 7-11). The most popular booked programmes were GCSE Hydrology fieldwork, Primary River Studies, hillwalking days, map skills and A-level Ecology fieldwork. Other popular sessions included A-level fieldwork examining the effects of climate change on peat, and 'Rocks and Soils' days. We also delivered bespoke sessions, including on the cultural heritage of local areas, Forest schools and nature connection walks. A new session, 'Discover the Peak District', focuses specifically on connecting with nature in the National Park. These visits took place at a range of sites around the National Park. Experiences were delivered from our 3 main education centres at Longdendale, Longshaw and Macclesfield Forest, as well as Crowden, Castleton, The Goyt Valley, Upper Burbage and Hayfield.

#### What are the outcomes of the project?

Young people received high quality outdoor learning experiences that helped them gain knowledge and experience of the natural world. They boosted their understanding of science and geography, while connecting with nature and learning what makes the National Park so special. Many young people are amazed at the close proximity of the national park to urban areas, and have never before thought about visiting. Meeting our education team helped to provide a welcome to the national park, and our visits aim to empower them with the inspiration, knowledge and skills to return to the Peak District again.

Perhaps it's best to let the young people speak for themselves:

*"It's so peaceful. I can't believe we're so close to Manchester"*

*"This is seriously the best day ever!"*

*"At school we just push pencils around, but this is living!"*

Comments from Teachers: *"It is so important for our children to have these experiences"*

*"Thank you for being such wonderful hosts, making us feel so welcome"*

*"Fantastic impact. Some of our students have never been out of their borough, let alone to a national park".*

#### What has been learnt from the project?

The main learning point is the continued benefits of direct, hands-on engagement with school groups. Amidst a picture of increasing demand from schools to visit the national park (demand now exceeding pre-COVID levels), working directly with teachers and young people enables us to ensure that our care messages for the landscape's special qualities are at the centre of each experience.

We are also learning about developments in what schools want - Ecology programmes and nature connection/green wellbeing have shown increased interest. As we learn more about increased demands, we are also seeking to learn more about barriers to visiting - transport costs are a key issue - and how we can remove these.

