

GHYLL HEAD JUNE 09 YEAR 4

Here, for the benefit of parents and carers, and children, and prospective year 4 children, and anyone who might be interested, is a quick snapshot of what we did on the weekend of 12/14 June 09 in the Lake District.

Friday

Well, we all gathered together around lunchtime on Friday...packing the kit on board was efficiently done and, about 1.15 we were off. The children were cheering and singing almost before we had got out past the Baptist Church.....and our genial driver got the kids shouting (boys vs girls).

Our outwards journey was good....no stops needed and little traffic. We arrived at Ghyll Head around 3.15. It was sunny but quite blustery.

Ghyll Head basically is a grand old house converted into accommodation. It overlooks Windermere and is up a steep little road off the main road which runs along the south coast of the lake. There are huge grounds with woods, walks, toys, and wildlife...as our children explored the grounds, a deer bounded away into the distant undergrowth....a wonderful sight, seen by some of the children.

Anyway, we were early and our rooms almost ready....so we chilled. Our main guide, Sara, had greeted us on arrival.

We started our weekend with a briefing in the large common room and Sara explained some basic rules about where we could go....and how...and when etc. Basic stuff. Also fire exit procedures.

The children then took their bags to the dorms (mainly groups of 4/5)....and they had the pleasure of making their beds with pillowcases and duvet covers (parents/ carers please note!!!). One or two shapes were interesting but the children got the job done. Hurrah!

5.30....at the ring of a loud handbell (as at school) it was tea time....Pizza, jacket potato, beans...with water/juice...followed by a sponge pud and ice cream. Just the ticket!

After which the children (or rather batches of them) helped tidy away the pots to the kitchen (parents/ carers please note!) where Mr How and his band of smiling assistants washed and tidied away the pots.

At this point the children were told which of 3 groups they were in....then in groups, in the brilliant kit room they were given their walking boots, and waterproof clothing (which we prayed they would not need!). ...the others frolicked and gambolled around the lawns, gardens and bushes and got to know the place. A few dirty knees but no bones broken. One group found a sheep's skeletal head...and skeleton to match...they were put on display on a window ledge then (later) discreetly returned to the undergrowth.

By 9.30 it was all in bed and lights out.

Oh, I should have mentioned that Ghyll Head is split into two by a staircase....girls and female staff on one side, boys etc on the other. Lots of loos and shower rooms off the corridors. Children are brilliant at working out logistics like this. They felt so very quickly "at home".

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Saturday

The rule was that children stay in their room until 7.30, with breakfast at 8. Noises were heard around 5, and little voices gradually after that as the minutes ticked by. When the doors were opened at 7.30 (by the way, there were no locks!!), the children rushed down and out....breakfast started on the dot at 8.

Fruit juice, cereal (choice of 4), toast, jam and marmalade, or honey. Staff had a big pot of tea.

If ever a theatre needs a group to act like a swarm of locusts, we have them.

Again, the children were free to run around while the leaders sorted out fine detail of the activities. Remember, three groups of about 11 children, mixed, boys/girls.

There follows a description of what we did and where we went. But I have an apology to make....I stayed with one group so many fotos have my group on them. All children, however, did the same activities, but at different times. And rightly so. At least the pics will show you what the children did...and there are group pictures at the end of the album.

Cathedral Quarry.

We had to drive to Tibthwaite (?) to park up and walk to this quarry...the drive was through Ambleside and took about 30 mins, towards the Langdales. From a remote hamlet, we walked over the famous Slaters' Bridge and through woods to the Quarry. There was a short sharp downpour but that did not deter us at all.

Cathedral Quarry? This is an old underground slate quarry which we approach down dark tunnels....when the quarry was being used (long ago) people were shorter so our adults were glad of the crash helmets we all wore....we could all stand up safely but to add to the adventure, we had no lights. It was spooky and we all had to be brave! We reached a ginormous cavern with a natural "window" up high filling it with light. There was lots to see here, including an underground lake, smooth slate with climbers pitons and bolts...they must be mad to climb in here!

More walking then along narrow corridors in pitch black....we walked with right hands against the walls and left hands holding the person in front. On and on we slowly went, then having tested the echoes, we emerged into hot sunlight

So we sat and had our packed lunch....sandwiches, drinks, cake and chocolate bar, with fruit. Then a few children had another peep inside, this time with candles, whilst the rest of us sunbathed.

Oh, I should have mentioned that each of the 3 groups was led by an expert and highly qualified leader (we had Sara but there was also Graham and Nick). They were invaluable. I applauded them loudly here.

Stickle Ghyll

Back in the minibus we drove the 15 mins to the big car park at the foot of the Langdales....it was jam packed, we were lucky to get in!

Anyway, we hopped out of the bus, hats back on, bracing ourselves for the next challenge....girls holding their own against the boys (not that it was competitive!). We got onto the river (Stickle Ghyll) at the back of the car park, so up and away we went in no time at all. Even I was excited as this was something I had never done!. The kids, of course, were like lizards as they hopped and skipped up and over the rocks, a boot occasionally dropping into the stream (not too deep as it has been fairly dry).

On those few occasions when long legs were called for, the children just let go and dropped the few inches into the stream....to loud cheers and guffaws from friends....suffice to say, all were happy and wet, staff included, but not the expert Sara.

When we reached the top about an hour later, job done, we dropped back along the path to a particularly deep plunge pool, with an overhanging tree. Who would like to jump in....not all hands shot up (mine didn't! nor Mr How's....I'm a bit old and timid for this caper)....one by one our intrepid mountaineers jumped in. It was a hoot. Given the scorching hot day, there were no complaints of coldness....well on the way to being dry by the time we were back on the bus.

(You can get an idea about all of this from the photos of course)

And so back to Ghyll Head for a cavort around the grounds before dinner, Many of the kids chose to shower and clean up....mums would have been proud....you don't get this from years 5 or 6!...

Dinner? Well it was roast chicken, roast spuds, broccoli, carrots and gravy....washed down with juice or water. Pud was a sort of trifle with cream on top. A cholesterol blaster. As the children shared their stories of the day, some chose to explore the extensive grounds but, on the sound of the bell it was back to base for the walk up to....the night line.

Night Line

For the uninitiated, this is a long rope tied through, up and over bushes, sand, rocks, slippery slopes, roots etc etc. The children hold the rope and walk the 4/600 metres

length...oh, I forgot to mention that they do it blindfold!!! Folks, I wish you had all been there....tempers got tested, but not their resolve, despite kissing a few trees. We should all be proud of our little ones who all made it through....a few dusty knees and bots but no bones broken.

So back to supper (hot chocolate or juice and toast)...and limply to bed.

You might not believe this but our children were a wee bit quieter tonight than last night....what a day!

Sunday

Up at 7.30...much quieter than yesterday....breakfast at 8, all present and correct.. Similar breakfast but this time supplemented with BACON BUTTIES....yahoo!...with lashings of brown sauce for those who needed it.

Out and onto the mini bus again but only after having packed (I use the word loosely) and moved the kit bags and stripped the beds, so they could be ready for the next school party later today.

Ghyll Head has been run by Manchester City Council for years and can be used by Manchester schools any time of the year. It's a hidden gem.

Gummer How

Back to the main event....we drove 5 mins to the car park at the foot of Gummer How. This is not a nickname of our head teacher but a mountain just over 1000 foot....accessed via a pine wood and rocky scramble....through a small herd of benign calves Before we knew it we were hugging the trig point at the top. Then down round the back, looping back to the bus....the views were simply spectacular, able to see the entire length of Windermere (11 miles long), river estuary to the south...and, to the west, THE SEA!

From there back along the road for 5 mins to the Ghyll Head boat house by the shore of Windermere.

Messing about on the lake

To cut a long story short, our intrepid band hauled out 2 metal hulls, lashed them together with a wooden beam (like a huge letter H) with ropes joining front and back.

On with our flotation aids, then across Windermere, like the university boat race (not that we were competitive!). On the other side, we crawled into Sara's motor launch and had our packed lunch...it was hot and the food was excellent. We all felt terribly affluent.

Before the return across the lake, the kids had a chance to explore the little island near us....it was like Swallows and Amazons, I jest not. Now, under calm conditions we would row back across....but there was a strong wind and our children were running

out of steam, so smiles all round when Sara offered to tow us sedately back. A bit of water was splashed about...why not!!

Back ashore, those who felt they had enough energy could leap off the end of the jetty....I respect those who did, and those who chose to lie back and ponder the sky (me included). Enthusiasm and enthusiasm...all under the careful gaze of the watchful Sara.

Rope course

Ghyll Head was only a 5 minute drive and in no time at all, all were dried and changed, ready for a quick go at the rope course (a series of climbs (low level) like an obstacle course....try to get round without touching the ground. Including a mini zip wire....they were all there, laughing and joking, supporting and encouraging each other. Where does this energy come from?? (Was it the bacon butties, I ask myself).

Back to the main building where we said our final farewells and thanks to our great leaders....a few more fotos, then onto our coach for the return journey to Beaver Road. Slight delays en route, but noone had the energy to get bothered by that.....you know the rest!

Before signing off, a word of thanks to the staff (How, Mellish, Greenhouse and Ferguson) and our drivers...to Sara, Nick and Graham at Ghyll Head...and our cleaners and cooks there for taking care of us.

Thanks to the children for giving us oldies such a special time! And last but definitely not least a million thanks to parents and carers who let your children come to Ghyll Head. Hopefully you now have an idea what you got for your money. And if you are really proud of your children, you certainly should be.