

## **Duke of Edinburgh News – The Quest for the Bronze Award**

Adventure! Excitement! Discovery! Fatigue! That's what twelve year 10 students felt recently when they undertook their practise Duke of Edinburgh camping expedition over the weekend of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May.

The Duke of Edinburgh award is a qualification for young people aged between 14 and 24. It requires students to undertake four different sections in: volunteering, practising a physical sport, learning a new skill and then undertaking an expedition - all over a period of about 6 months. The aim of this is to develop social and teamwork skills whilst building self-esteem and having fun. However, upon completion, you don't actually get to become the genuine Duke of Edinburgh. The challenge requires persistence and commitment and can change the lives of those who participate, introducing them to new experiences and developing talents. Both employees and universities recognise the award which helps young people to become fitter, make a difference to their communities and gain a greater understanding of the natural environment. Basically, they become a powerful combination of Bear Grylls and Captain Planet.

At Reading Girls' School we are excited to be offering the Bronze award for the very first time and twelve year 10 girls have been throwing themselves into a journey of self-discovery and developing their mind, body and soul... and knitting techniques. The group have been in training since January, planning their journey and learning new map, camping and safety skills. It was a joy to witness them putting a tent up for the first time. There was a real possibility that we could all have been there forever.

The first expedition went incredibly well. Terrible rain was forecast for the weekend but we were greeted with sunshine and smiles at the start of our journey. Once we had started the hike it didn't take long for one of the groups to become slightly lost – but after thankfully ignoring adult advice, the students managed to get themselves back on track. The walk took the groups from the dark edge of West Reading up through Pangborne and then to Beale Park, which was guarded by terrifying geese. There was time to stop for lunch (mostly Pot Noodles) and play a new game called 'Drop the Frisbee'. The heavens then opened and the brave adventurers got to try out their waterproof kit.

Camping overnight was a total success. One group set their tents up with military timing and precision, the other group not so much. Delicious, gourmet standard dinner was made on gas stoves by all the students – this ranged from hot pasta with a Dolmio topping to some kind of gazpacho pasta with peas. We think they were peas. There was even time to play some cards and football, before toasting marshmallows and going to sleep. Eventually, once an airbed had been re-inflated.

The second day was another adventure. The intrepid group stumbled upon rare creatures such as horses and cows (and an actual deer) and managed to cross several boggy fields. Some students learnt how to use their compasses properly and danger was averted as one explorer was bravely rescued from some ferocious brambles. And then the second group got lost for a bit. Once everyone had made it back to the finish point with muddy boots and sore backs (from rucksacks packed with only the bare essentials, drowned in an actual tonne of Haribo and Pringles) it was agreed that it was the best weekend ever!

**Here's what some of the girls had to say:**

Charlie – 'The practise expedition was a good experience to have. Yes there were challenges to it, yet my team supported me and helped me carry on. Whilst walking I fell, yet my group helped me get straight back up and carry on. After having this experience, I feel I am more confident for the future'.



Nimrah – 'I found it funny that Mrs Cunningham, the geography teacher, led us the wrong way'.

Asya – 'Walking with my group, I had a full sense of determination. Being in such a rural area is like being placed in a whole new world full of rich, green nature and more traditional ways of life'.



Mhridu – 'I liked making food together as a group as it showed good teamwork. We made some delicious pasta, even though it was cold'.

Aliyah – 'I liked evening activities of playing cards and football and having a Eurovision party with little flags. There was a positive atmosphere amongst all the students and with the teachers'.



Anu – 'Walking around 18km in two days was a really good experience. I enjoyed the evening football and learning how to pack a rucksack (apparently 10 Kit Kat Chunkies aren't necessary). Even though we all came back with aching bodies, it was worth it.

Urooj and Zobia – 'What we enjoyed the most was being surrounded by people we love and finally finishing the first half of the expedition'.



Throughout the two days the girls showed endless teamwork, strength and friendship and were a pleasure to accompany. They helped and encouraged each other at every moment, whilst coping with all the challenges thrown at them (nothing was literally thrown at them). Hopefully, they all had an enjoyable experience that they'll remember forever.

The exciting news is that they get to do it all again over the weekend of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of June for their final, assessed, expedition. This will be near Bramley and take the girls through the historical site of Roman Silchester. The site was ritually cursed when it was abandoned over a thousand years ago but we aren't anticipating this will cause much of a problem.

In the meantime the girls will be undertaking additional bag packing, orienteering and cookery sessions to prepare them for their final adventure – the quest for the Bronze Award is almost complete.

The students: Zobia, Ayesha, Urooj, Mhridu, Aleena, Kanza, Anu, Nimrah, Asya, Charlie, Courtney and Aliyah

The teachers: Mr Boyd, Mrs Cunningham, Miss O'Reilly and Mr Nichols