

Reid 12.12.94



DEVON
COUNTY COUNCIL

S W G Jenkin
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

Reid 12/12/94

To: All Chief Education Officers
and Directors of Education

COUNTY HALL
EXETER
EX2 4QG

*1 MF to note
2 B Calvert to consider in detail please and let me know if there are any more improvements to recommend beyond those recently introduced. Thank you*

Your ref:

Date: 6 December 1994

Phone: Enquiries Exeter (0392) 382000

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My ref:

SWGJ/SMR

Please ask for:

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SF 12/12

Dear Colleague

LYME BAY TRAGEDY

With the conclusion of the trial at Winchester Crown Court arising from the Lyme Bay tragedy in March 1993, I am enclosing for your attention a copy of the report which I produced with the County Solicitor, Philip Jenkinson, in the immediate aftermath of that tragedy. There is a supplementary report within the papers which adds further information in light of evidence at the trial.

The chronology of the events on that fateful day does not make for comfortable reading. It is manifest that members of the Southway School group were taken to sea poorly clothed for the conditions, inadequately equipped for the trip, insufficiently prepared and under the supervision of instructors whose competence was far below what was necessary. The response of HM Coastguard was examined in detail at the trial. Again, it is clear that the picture for them developed over the afternoon of 22 March 1993 in a haphazard and confused way. Importantly, the first canoe was spotted by a fishing boat - this as an occurrence is not infrequent and, therefore, not regarded by the skipper of that boat nor HM Coastguard as a cause for concern.

So far Government has not felt that legislation to tighten the safety standards of activity centres - public as well as private - is necessary. The evidence heard at Winchester shows that before and since this tragedy many centres do not have trained instructors. You may conclude, as I do that little, if anything, has happened since this tragedy to raise parents' confidence that when their children use outdoor activity centres the lessons of Lyme Bay have been learned. This County Council has resolved to persist in its efforts to see proper safeguards introduced by Government.

Yours sincerely

EDUCATION

THE LYME BAY CANOEING TRAGEDY

22ND MARCH 1993

**REPORT BY
THE CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER
AND
THE COUNTY SOLICITOR
of
DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL**



DEVON
COUNTY COUNCIL

THE LYME BAY CANOEING TRAGEDY

Report by Simon Jenkin, Chief Education Officer and Philip Jenkinson, County Solicitor, Devon County Council, into the tragic incident in Lyme Bay on 22 March 1993 which led to the deaths of Simon Dunne, Claire Langley, Dean Sayer and Rachel Walker, students in the Lower Sixth Form at Southway School, Plymouth.

FOREWORD

On almost every day of the year parties of youngsters from schools, maintained and independent, spend time on outdoor activities. A number of outdoor activities are residential and there has been an increasing use of private centres as provision by LEAs has diminished. Most of these activities are directly related to achievement of curricular aims. In 1988, Devon County Council issued its document "Outdoor Education in Devon" providing a framework within which the outdoor environment could be exploited for the educational benefit of people of all ages in Devon (Appendix A). In 1990 the Council considered and adopted a statement on the relevance of Outdoor Education in the National Curriculum which appears as Appendix B to this report. In the same year, the County Council issued revised advice to all of its schools and education establishments "Safety in Outdoor Education" which is at Appendix C.

Parents rely on schools to select appropriate centres for the activities involved. In choosing centres schools rely heavily on the documentation provided by centres, supplemented by informal comments of those who have used the centres previously and, to a more limited extent, by personal visits in advance.

*where
available*

This report arises from the use by Southway School, Plymouth, of a private centre in March 1993. The residential visit arranged by Southway to the St Albans Centre at Lyme Regis and run by Active Learning and Leisure Limited went tragically wrong and the lives of four students were lost.

This report examines the school's planning for the visit, seeks to piece together the details of the incident which resulted in four deaths, comments on the school's and the council's incident response management, and makes recommendations.

The report and its recommendations have been submitted to the Secretary of State for Education since they have relevance not only in Devon but nationally.

INTRODUCTION

In the days following the tragedy in Lyme Bay, officers from the County Council carried out investigations and interviewed many of those involved. Because of the possibility of court proceedings, it has not been possible to interview all those we would wish to interview. In those circumstances and to that extent, this report cannot be regarded as a complete account of what happened on 22 March 1993. In consequence of that, we acknowledge that there are questions raised by the tragedy which are not dealt with in this report.

PLANNING FOR THE VISIT

- 1 The decision to use the St Albans Centre operated by Active Learning and Leisure (ALL) at Lyme Regis had its origins in previous activities from Southway with ALL derivative companies. These were essentially skiing trips abroad, none of which had caused concern or aroused disappointment so far as achieving their objectives was concerned.
- 2 Mr Ray Baish, a teacher at Southway, had been a member of these activity groups over the years and from 1990 had been a Group Leader. Group Leader is Devon's designation of "the person who is directly responsible for managing a group engaged in a particular activity, perhaps a teacher, youth tutor, or instructor for example. This is a key role." (Appendix C, page 2) In March 1992, he was invited on a preview visit to the St Albans Centre which he had noticed in ALL advertising brochures in 1991. The preview weekend was in April 1992 and he went with his wife. *Albans?*
- 3 About 30 adults attended the preview weekend; Ray Baish was aware that the Centre was newly taken over by ALL; he was reassured by the confidence of the presentations and information provided by the company and the instructors. He does not recall any discussion about qualifications of staff or their competence save that the son of Mr Joe Stoddart was pointed out as a qualified sailing instructor - a reference which stayed in Ray Baish's memory since Mr Stoddart Junior is a former Southway pupil.
- 4 At the time of his visit, Ray Baish had it in mind to take a group of younger pupils to St Albans in Summer 1992 but this did not materialise. He did, however, report to Mr John Ellis at Southway on his findings as he was aware that Mr Ellis was looking for a Centre for a Sixth Form visit.
- 5 ALL described itself as "a specialist schools and youth group tour operator" and its 1992 Brochure under the Going Places masthead contained the following description under the heading "Safety and Supervision" - "In all cases the centres are staffed by capable, efficient and friendly staff. Wherever there is a governing body for a sport we have followed the procedures and guidelines laid down by them for teaching an activity;" and under the heading "Equipment" - "All equipment, to the approved design standards, is supplied by the individual centres. The use of safety equipment (buoyancy aids, lifejackets etc) is mandatory at all centres;" and under the heading "Instruction" - "Instruction in all activities is provided by our own team of trained and experienced instructors. They will ensure the safety and enjoyment of the students...". The Centre was not a British Canoe Union approved centre. *Variation between statements & practice*
- 6 John Ellis is Senior Teacher with a brief as Post-16 Co-ordinator and is a member of the Southway Senior Management Team. He had first started to consider this event in the Summer Term 1992, feeling that a one-week activity programme would fit in well as part of the post 16 curriculum leading towards an RSA qualification. This proposed