

Roots and Wings

**A History of Outdoor Education
and Outdoor Learning in the UK**

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Russell House Publishing



Institute for Outdoor Learning

*Lyne Regis
(2013)*

association whose volunteer members did an enormous amount to renovate old bothies in Scotland over the years so that by 1997 it was looking after 90 of them.

This section could only attempt to give a very patchy impression of the variety of provision burgeoning at this time. That much was happening is not in doubt. The regret is that it has not been possible to record it all – like trying to catch a swarm of butterflies!

16.3. The Newsom and Plowden Reports rattle the cage

The influential Newsom Report, *Half Our Future*, was published in 1963. Its chair, John Newsom, had a history which was sympathetic to the outdoors as an educational medium – he had been CEO in Hertfordshire (1940–57) which had been one of the few counties to try and get Hahn's County Badge scheme going and where Jack Longland had been his deputy – see Ch. 14.10. Two other members of that Committee attract our interest – Mr A.B. Clegg, CEO of the West Riding whose deputy was Jim Hogan (first warden of OB Aberdovey), and Prof. B.A. Fletcher who would produce an evaluation of Outward Bound in 1971. With such a strong sub group of outdoor protagonists within it, it was hardly surprising what it said. The Newsom Report considered the education, including extra-curricular activities, of children of average ability between 13–16 years. The 'half' to which it referred was that below the perceived top ability 'half' of the school population who were already well catered for. It confirmed the 1959 Crowther recommendation of the need for a longer school life to 16 because life was becoming so complex pupils needed more time in formal education to be equipped to cope. There was recognition for the value of outdoor centres like Outward Bound and the D of E Award and it avoided getting into arguments about the relative merits of Secondary Modern Schools or Comprehensives since they were too recent to be able to pronounce judgement. A longer school life also included a longer school day with the extra time devoted to extra curricular activities of many kinds from which to choose. The standard of ability indicated by 'average' was rising rapidly all the time and the report considered that the IQ was not in-born but

an acquired characteristic because of the specifically cultural oriented nature of the tests used to measure it. The terms 'less than average' or 'below average' were misleading and full of pitfalls. Other factors in intelligence were equally valid such as the social and physical environment:

Many children are 'bored' with school. Evidence suggests that many pupils are capable of more sustained effort and show themselves able to respond to opportunities of a larger range of activities.

Newsom, 1963: 41

An adequate education cannot be given to boys and girls if it has to be confined to the slums in which they live. They, above all others, need access to the countryside, the experience of living together in civilized and beautiful surroundings and a chance to respond to the challenge of adventure. They need priority in relation to school journeys, overseas visits and adventure courses. . . need to have a stake in something more than the streets in which they live.

Newsom, 1963: 26–27

Among this lower ability group there was much unrealised talent which needed to be tackled by a longer school life, by relating their education more to adult real life and taking proper account of vocational interests. Newsom also extended the concept of 'homework' which might encompass all kinds of activity including 'mapping the route of a coming school expedition'.

The Newsom Report, in emphasising the value of residential experience, also supported the various ways of approaching the environment such as Environmental Studies and Outdoor Activities:

. . . introducing boys and girls to fresh surroundings and by either helping them to acquire new knowledge or try their hand at fresh experience and skills, such an approach to the countryside can provide a general educational stimulus.

Newsom, 1963: 49

This report was immensely important as it rattled the education cage in a number of ways. It helped move natural history out of the 'nature study' cocoon it had occupied for many years towards the more articulate environmental work forged in the Nuffield Foundation Projects (initiated in 1962)

which adopted a more dynamic approach towards the natural environment and released it 'from the stranglehold of examinations' (Jenkins, p. 297). It gave a boost to the growth of outdoor activities in schools and in the establishment of LEA centres. The report gave impetus to the establishing of outdoor centres and to their much needed credibility:

One of the most striking developments in recent years has been the increase of informal out-door pursuits offered to young people through the schools and through youth and sports organisations. Cycling, camping, rock-climbing, fell-walking, sailing, canoeing – these and similar activities have proved to have wide appeal . . . they may have a special value for the pupils with whom we are concerned.

Newsom, 1963: 139

In a marvellous statement meshing together various bits of recent thinking it said there was a need:

. . . to assess nationally the various forms of residential provision, including camps and out-door-pursuit centres of which many have been recently opened. These out-of-school extensions of physical activity would have the advantage of introducing pupils to recreational interests that can readily be carried forward into adult life, and might go some way towards bridging the gap noted by both the Albemarle and Wolfenden Committees.

Newsom, 1963: 139

One unfortunate effect caused by the emphasis put on the suitability of the outdoors for less gifted pupils was to convey the notion that because outdoor activity had a remedial function it should be provided mainly for them, whereas it was admirably suited to the needs of all pupils. Promoting only the remedial image of outdoor activities as an ideal vehicle for the less able was an unfortunate coupling of ideas – it also supplied any dissenting academics with a ready-made excuse to justify their exemption from the outdoors. Happily, the Plowden Report three years later restored the balance in seeing it as suitable for all children.

Meanwhile in Scotland the Education Department issued a policy document *Primary Education in Scotland* (1965), otherwise known as 'The Primary Memorandum', which was unusual

for drawing attention to pedagogic process and method rather than a mere description of possibilities. In echoes of their own Patrick Geddes, it mentioned child-centred approaches which encouraged children to be active in their own learning 'experiences should be first-hand . . . teachers should be prepared, in the quest for "real-life" experiences for their pupils, to break out of the confines of the classroom . . .' (Scottish Education Department, 1965: 13–14).

Perhaps Robert Mackenzie's message got through after all – see earlier in this chapter.

In 1966 the Plowden Report on Children and their Primary Schools hammered home again the outdoor points of the Newsom Report:

Nearly all [my emphasis] children are interested in living forms, whether they be animal or plant. Some physical acquaintance with them is an essential part of being educated . . . an effective way of integrating the curriculum is to relate it through the use of the environment to the boundless curiosity which children have for the world around them.

Quoted in Parker and Meldrum, 1973: 36

It also suggested that town children would benefit from explorations of the countryside by means of residential centres. Thus were LEAs further stimulated to provide residential and outdoor experience. Within six years, three official government reports covering primary, secondary and the youth service, had advocated learning from experiences out-of-doors. This endorsement of the value of the natural environment in education was taken on board enthusiastically by the primary sector generally and by 1970 even most of the regional examination boards for the Certificate in Secondary Education (CSE) were offering examinations in rural or environmental studies, and including fieldwork in their geography and biology syllabuses. This 'infection' was slower to take root at 'O' and 'A' level but some boards began to stipulate fieldwork in some of these subjects.

Partly as a result of these reports and partly because of other evidence in 1958 which had undermined confidence in the 11+ exam (Secondary Modern children put in for the 'O' level exam normally only undertaken by Grammar Schools pupils, were passing it). The 'three tier system' had been shown to produce less of a

meritocracy than had been hoped and to be more of a system for educating children to occupy different levels of society. So the years from 1965 saw an attempt to achieve 'education for all'. By choosing the comprehensive school route it was hoped to give all young talent a better chance to become good and useful citizens in their adult lives. For long enough, Grammar Schools had been the elitist recipients of the best talent filtered out by a selective examination at eleven years of age. So in 1964 the in-coming Wilson government promised it would do away with the 11+ exam with cross party support in the cause of a fairer equality of opportunity. Both Anthony Crossland, then Minister of Education who was driven by a powerful sense of equality of opportunity akin to missionary zeal, and Shirley Williams Minister of State for Education (1967-69) envisaged the beginning of a period of great variety and great local experimentation which was seen as healthy for the education system.

The Government began a programme actively boosting Comprehensive Secondary Schools, which would be for children of all abilities – to such good effect that by 1979 four out of every five pupils attended them (Thomson, 1981: 351) compared with those earlier figures of less than 1 in 10 in England and Wales in 1965. It was thought that the comprehensive in giving equal opportunity would break down social divisions – and banish the feeling that 'one day [the 11plus] decided the rest of my life and decided my whole future' would be no more. It was about doing things together. A vast experiment rolled across the country driven by pupils' choice of subjects and courses. This resulted in a very complex timetable. Traditional subjects such as Classics vanished before the march of Liberal or Social Studies and formal methods of education suffered a similar fate in being replaced by informal ones. With Comprehensive Schools 'discovery learning' was 'in' and traditional subjects were replaced by cross-curricular approaches using topics and projects and small mixed ability groups sitting working at tables not in rows. The principle of the comprehensive curriculum from 14 years was to maximise the choice of all students by letting them choose what they did. The theory was that by broadening the base of the curriculum all abilities would be catered for. The principle of 'choice', which was meant to create conditions favourable

to learning by 'liking what you are doing', was misinterpreted by traditionalists and twisted into 'pleasure' and 'doing what they like', or worse, 'as they like'. This dichotomy of perception lay at the roots of an on-going conflict about the aims and purposes of education which ensured that the post-war optimistic reforms, leaving behind selection by parental income for a meritocracy selected by the 11plus, led to the comprehensive revolution before about-turning with the Conservative Govt's 1979 Education Act repealing the obligation of LEAs to provide Comprehensive Schools. It was back to square one again in the late 1980s and 1990s when parental selection by parental ambition began to prevail once more. When class division lies at the heart of the education system any hope of comprehensive altogetherness becomes impossible.]

16.4. PE heads for the hills, water and confusion

Anticipating the Newsom report by over a year, John Abbott, a young geography teacher in his first year of teaching began The Schools Hebridean Society which lasted from 1962 to 1989. He started it with a camp on the island of Gometra off the west coast of Mull for 30 youngsters, having been inspired to do this by two previous trips to Rum and Raasay. Over the next 27 years the Society, a voluntary and non profit making organisation, mounted four or more expeditions a year which were run mostly by university students and young teachers which meant that the operation retained its valued quality of being spontaneous and uninhibited. More than 4,000 youngsters between the ages of 12 and 18 went to some of the most remote corners of the Hebridean islands where they experienced a programme with a quality mixture of outdoor activities ranging from rock climbing and hill walking to canoeing and sailing. Abbott was keen on creating exciting opportunities for youngsters to learn more about themselves and the world around them and feeding young peoples' confidence by giving them real challenges:

All come back deeply influenced by living amid such beauty and having battled the wind and the tide around some of the most tortuous coastline in Europe.

(Abbott, 1999: 42)

and outdoor worlds began to proliferate to the point of becoming a necessary evil as much as to be a welcome opportunity to represent a particular viewpoint.

Arising from a Wolfenden recommendation about the use of reservoirs and other restricted waters for recreational purposes was a conference set up in 1961 by CCPR, with Jack Longland in the chair, for representatives from the Nature Conservancy, the British Canoe Union, Amateur Rowing Association, Royal Yachting Association, British Water Ski Federation, and National Federation of Anglers, to explore the issue. It eventually led to a combined operation with the various Water Authorities, the British Waterworks Association, the Institute of Water Engineers and the Birmingham PE Department to conduct a sample survey to highlight any problems. The consequence of this survey in 1964, *Inland Waters and Recreation*, was a decrease in defensive attitudes and an agreement to permit such recreational use. The 1966 *Water Sports Code* was one positive outcome of this venture. Whether the idea of public access jumped across to the Forestry Commission or it came to the idea independently, it was a fact that before long Forestry Commission land was soon also being planned with public enjoyment in mind – Grizedale Forest in south Lakeland under the supervision of Bill Grant who pioneered such schemes was an early example.

A Labour Government pledged to create a Sports Council won the October 1964 General Election; Denis Howell, joint Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, replaced Quintin Hogg as Minister with special responsibility for Sport. Early in 1965 the Government declared that it would establish a Sports Council to advise it on matters relating to the development of amateur sport and physical recreation services, and to foster cooperation among the statutory authorities and voluntary organisations concerned. The new General Secretary of the CCPR, Walter Winterbottom (Phyllis Coulson had retired in 1963) was headhunted to lead the new organisation called the Advisory Sports Council. What eventually transpired was a wholesale transfer of much of the CCPR's assets and operational staff into the new Advisory Sports Council leaving an impoverished and partially disembowelled CCPR to re-invent itself as a kind of standing forum for

the NGBs. The Sports Council received its charter in 1972 giving it executive powers independent of government. Most aspects of sporting life took a leap forward benefiting from the funds that cascaded down.

15.15. Albemarle Report and its aftermath

Running parallel with the CCPR's Wolfenden Committee was the Education Ministry's Albemarle Committee set up in November 1958 to report on the Youth Service in England and Wales. Since certain allied issues were common to both, a meeting of Chairs was needed to agree who was doing what to avoid overlapping. The *Albemarle Report on the Youth Service in England and Wales* was published in February 1960. Three earlier reports which had touched on the Youth Service (McNair 1944, Jackson 1949 and Fletcher 1951) had so far been ignored, so Albemarle's big task was to get the needs of the Youth Service properly addressed. The Report called for a 10-year plan for the recruitment and training of youth leaders and emphasised the value of physical recreation in 14 to 20 year-old post-school youth; it contained many sections describing and itemising various aspects of the youth service. Crucially, by keenly analysing the sociological changes that were going on – 'British Society is beginning to acquire greater mobility and openness . . . these changes are of the new world of adolescents' – it redefined the primary role of the service as pastoral, association, training and challenge, 'an educational purpose in a sense wider than that usually understood', allocating to a lesser importance the former traditional ideas about moral or educational roles which no longer fitted the new and changing social background. The aim was not to try to remove tensions to help youth to 'adjust' to life but to ensure that those tensions do not 'submerge the better possibilities of children during their adolescence'.

The first aim should be:

. . . to provide places for association in which young people may maintain and develop, in the face of a disparate society, their sense of fellowship, of mutual respect and tolerance.

Referring to the rising new phenomenon of the pop culture it said:

Commercial competition . . . ensures that the weight and direction of the appeals now so insistently made to adolescents represent neither the full variety nor the full potentiality of their interests . . . All these persuasive voices undoubtedly speak winningly to adolescents, and perhaps especially to those adolescents who, not selected for advanced education or training, may feel an obscure but powerful sense of rejection. They have money but little status.

The Report powerfully defended the needs and interests of youth in the face of rising and strong condemnatory remarks being made about 'the youth problem' and the 'generation of teenage delinquents' which it felt had distorted the truth:

An adolescent today moves into a society at once formidably restricted and surprisingly permissive, and finds himself canvassed by many agencies which seek to alter his attitudes in ways congenial to them.

On challenge it said that:

. . . it is immensely important that young people, of different kinds and levels of ability, should have opportunities to display and to respect forms of pre-eminence in fields other than the academic.

The Conservative Government pronounced itself generally in favour of the Albemarle Report, but particular recommendations about physical recreation were largely and quietly ignored, though the Minister of Education did set up a Youth Service Development Council as recommended in the Report. Some Education Authorities used this report as a basis for some action. For instance Manchester LEA's entry into the Outdoor Centre world with its Ghyll Head Centre in 1967 had its roots in this report. Longland at the October 1962 first conference of Mountain Centres said, 'The Albemarle Report's emphasis on challenge and adventure training had affected activities in the youth service and in schools'. The report also recommended the setting up of an emergency training college specifically for the training of youth leaders and this happened at the National College for the Training of Youth Leaders in Leicester whilst existing courses at Westhill Training College in Birmingham and at University College, Swansea continued.

Alan Byde of the Riverside Canoe Centre, Oxford and author of *Living Canoeing* wrote in *Canoeing in Education* 1970 that:

I would guess that the Albemarle report opened opportunities to local authorities to obtain funds for many outdoor activities including canoeing.

Trying to be chronological during this period is not easy. Following certain themes results in a bit of unavoidable jumping about, but we now need to look in greater detail at some other CCPR events already alluded to briefly, to see how outdoor national centres in two of the other home nations began.

15.16. Plas y Brenin

With two national recreation centres for conventional 'pitch' type sports in place and Scotland already with its Glenmore Lodge centre since 1948, there was mounting pressure, partly stoked by the popular surge into adventurous activities, to provide a centre offering equivalent outdoor activity training for England and Wales. This only became a possibility after the national economy began to recover for a brief spell in the mid 1950s and the CCPR responded to meet this need as best it could, even though not many of its staff were experienced in this specialist area. Mountaineering being non-competitive tended always to be a misfit Cinderella in the CCPR, and later the SC. This was because being among all the other higher profile competitive sports which were in the majority, mountaineering rarely offered opportunities for national prestige.

Evans (p. 97) opined that without the CCPR, Plas y Brenin would never have happened and Phyllis Coulson in her retirement address in 1962 stated that:

The country might still be without National Recreation Centres had we looked longer and leapt less quickly when the idea of Centres first came to us late in 1945.

Over the years the inconvenience of having to use a wide variety of locations, sites and buildings for courses gave rise to a wish for owning dedicated centres available for use as and when required. Having such centres was one of the main post-war planks of the CCPR's plans. Finding the capital to buy and equip premises was the crucial problem solved by successfully applying to the

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