

Greenhill YMCA 2019

June 2019 and hopefully late enough in the summer term to guarantee good weather. No. We arrived in Newcastle in the pouring rain, it had rained all day yesterday so surely we couldn't have two days of torrential rain in a row. Yes, we could.

But it really didn't matter we were on a three-day trip away from school challenging ourselves and supporting others in so many different activities that we never imagined doing and better still spending time with our friends from St Michael's who we have known for the past three years at least. It was brilliant to have so much time to get to know each other better.

The weather made no real difference to anything, we were so excited to be at Greenhill that a bit of rain didn't matter. We were based in two log cabins and the upper floor of the resource centre, both great although those of us in the resource centre had en suite facilities, very 5 star. After the excitement of finding who our dorm buddies were we had plenty of time to explore the outdoors.

After lunch we were divided into our four groups for all activities and met our host for the stay, Demi, who was really enthusiastic.

Each group was going to take part in a range of activities over the three days, including: camp fire cooking, orienteering, team rope challenge, archery, zip line, and last but definitely not least, paddle boarding.

So with waterproofs on we set off for our first activity. Our groups had camp fire cooking but the rain had other ideas, after half an hour of wood gathering, which was great fun, and endless lighter cubes and soggy cardboard the leaders had to admit defeat, no fire was going to stay lit long enough to cook anything. Quick thinking Demi rearranged the schedule and we were glad to get out of the downpour to the wetsuit store for some team building challenges. We were given huge wooden tangram pieces and took for ever to reassemble these into a basic square, we made it look really difficult. The following shapes were a bit easier but we needed a lot of clues and team cooperation was so important.

Next activity was a scavenger hunt both in and outside where we pestered leaders for answers and got to know more of the grounds, 85 white stones on the driveway, counted more than once.

The other groups were meanwhile getting even wetter on the zip line or paddle boards, more later.

Dinner was a noisy affair with about 80 excited children from various schools enjoying their meal, even the fussy eaters found something. Our first dorm inspection, one of many, took place and we came to realise how fussy Mrs Collins and Mrs Burns could be, imagine losing a point for a welly boot facing the wrong way, but as they said we were so tidy it was hard to take points off.

In the evening we looked forward to a bit of a break from the rain for our group activity, and yes it did stop for a short while but guess what, the midges came out. We could not believe how tasty they found us, no amount of flapping, running away or screaming bothered them, we even wished the rain would return.

Still when you were speeding along on the zip line at least they couldn't catch you. Most people were brave enough to have a go, the scariest part was standing on the platform 20 metres above the ground waiting to be hooked up, apparently the view of Newcastle is spectacular but not many of us could appreciate it. Final safety instructions and an all clear from those on the ground and we flew down the line between the trees, silently holding on, others performing YMCA moves. Plenty of adrenaline rushes.

Time to escape the midges and back to our common room for toast and juice, our teachers could open a cafe they were so efficient at churning out toast with butter, with jam or neither. And so to bed, well to our dorms at least. Most of us were far too excited to sleep, and had too many secret stashes of high sugar sweets to get through. We eventually settled down glad to be warm and dry, hoping for a big change in the weather.

Thursday morning and guess what? No rain. Breakfast was a toast eating challenge, could the teachers keep up with the supply for us?

Our group were buzzing with excitement as we were going paddle boarding, having heard the amazing reports from the other groups yesterday. First challenge was to get the wet suits on, not easy, but we helped each other squeeze into them and zipped up floatation jackets. Then it was all aboard the mini bus for Castlewella lake. The jetty already had canoes, kayaks and excited children from other schools, we felt sorry for any poor fisherman who wanted a quiet morning's fishing.

Our instructor James helped us to unload the giant paddle board which would hold all ten of us and we then received instructions on how to adjust the paddle height, paddle forward, paddle backwards and haul each other out of the water. Then it was launch time. We quickly knew how to balance and set off across the lake to our first destination. We put into practice how to haul each other back on board and it was great to see how supportive we were. We had thought the idea was to stay on board but quickly learnt that was not to be. James encouraged us to jump and if we were happy to push each other in. Then we anchored the board and used it as a diving board to perform: belly flops, somersaults and back flips. The highlight of this was to rugby tackle each other into the water and Rhys was our best volunteer, mind you he got his own back on James.

After an hour and a half of more fun in and out of the water we paddled back to shore, some of choosing to open water swim, it was like being in a triathlon. Cold, but happy we were glad to climb into the warm bus and head back for a very welcome hot shower. The best day ever.

After a delicious lunch, with the best chicken burgers and chips, it was time for our afternoon session and yes the sun was really out now and it was warm enough to leave our coats behind. Our group got our helmets on again and headed for the team rope challenge area with Bjan, our instructor who was both funny and supportive.

We were challenged to balance on a horizontal tree trunk while passing heavy planks along and most importantly not falling off and losing points. Then we had to walk a tightrope again passing planks and making sure everyone in the team was off the ground. It was the best bit of team building and we all showed leadership, cooperation and support.

Our final activity was orienteering. We think the leaders and teachers just wanted a sit down while we ran about looking for numbered posts, some were so well hidden we thought they didn't exist. But eventually all were found and we certainly knew our way around the whole Greenhill site and how to read a map.

After another tasty dinner we set off for Nugaletto ice cream cafe in Newcastle, how much sugar can you get in one giant tub? Plenty. Some of us preferred sugar in another form from the sweet shop. A quick walk to the beach for the traditional group photo and then it was back to base for a bit of a disco to burn off some sugar before the teachers, who probably regretted this, allowed us a donut for supper! Needless to say it wasn't an early night for anyone and as with any school trip it really is a 24/7 job for the staff.

After a late night, or should we say early morning for some, the sun rose on our final day. We were so tired and glad of a lie in until 8, breakfast was quieter than usual. Hard to believe we then had to pack up and tidy our dorms before a final inspection, so many overflowing bins full of sweet wrappers!

We fortunately had a free morning around the site to play football, hide and seek or just chat with friends in the sunshine. The last important bit of the visit was the awards ceremony, a bit like the Oscars with the same kind of speeches. From best dorms to most supportive people, from bravest on the zip wire to the most helpful to others yet more sugary goodies were awarded and a variety of speeches made, some extremely short others a bit more of a ramble, but all from the heart.

After our last visit to the canteen we climbed on to the bus, very kindly loaded by Alistair, saying goodbye to our instructors and our friends.

It was the most memorable experience most of us had in our final year of primary school and we would like to thank both our teachers who supported us, put up with us and more importantly enjoyed our company and all the staff at Greenhill for making it a trip to remember.