





Young Explorer Will Dyer 2021

A WILD FUTURE

British Exploring Society celebrates its 90th year in 2022.

Our ten-year strategy A Wild Future takes the charity up to 2032 – 100 years on from planning our first adventure with young people. At the heart of A Wild Future is our drive to secure sustainability; how we welcome everyone, deliver benefit, and protect our planet.

Why did we spend time at St George's House?

The active support and experience of our community will be instrumental to our progress towards achieving the goals set out in A Wild Future. We invited members of that community and added a group of people we respect and admire to join us in the safe space of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, for two days of consultation.

How did we spend our time?

We came together as a group of practical people. We wanted clear, meaningful outcomes, with personal and professional routes forward and tangible actions.

We wanted to draw knowledge from each other, and to benefit from practical, inspirational alliances. Specifically, we shared experiences and considered practical ideas to help us all deliver;

- Purposeful, sustainable, inclusive exploration
- Better access to the outdoors for young people

By the end of the consultation many participants had made specific commitments to;

- Question their assumptions more
- Work further to inform themselves about sustainability and inclusion
- Challenge others and encourage more inclusion work

The value of the residential consultation was intensified through conversations between sessions. We hope new connections will be sustained into the future, to drive forward the positive changes we discussed at our consultation.

To support the best possible outcomes from our time we:

- Agreed a social contract for our time together
- Committed to sharing what we had learned more widely



Training weekend 2022 Sam Drawbridge



What follows is a compressed expression of the subjects we discussed, and the commitments we at British Exploring Society are making from what we learned at St George's House.

There are obvious links between sustainability and inclusivity.

They are two sides of the same coin. The more people feel included and welcomed, to experience the joys and issues of the outdoors first hand, in real life, in tangible ways, the larger the positive body of support for the outdoors and for nature there will be.

THE ISSUE – our countryside and our wild places are amongst our most precious resources, increasingly understood to be an invaluable support for good health and well-being, and a transformative learning space too.

But significant parts of society still can't enjoy adventure or feel equally welcome in outdoor spaces. At the same time, we need to become more effective in the sustainability of our work, and in raising awareness of the precious nature of every green space we have.



UK Explorers Spring 2022 Sophie

There isn't – or shouldn't be – a single or right way to love the outdoors.

We want to be able to celebrate every level of engagement in the outdoors from the most extraordinary acts of exploration to a first walk and a first sleep under the stars. At its best, spending time in nature can be liberating. It can remove people from expectations of them within their home environments and lifts barriers for their personal development. It helps us thrive, explore who we are and what we're capable of.

No-one 'owns' the outdoors. But the outdoors is still a space where some people assert traditional and cultural identities. This can extend from a lack of awareness through to active discouragement of others who don't 'conform' to a particular model of outdoors engagement and appear hostile to universal access to the outdoors. There is evidence of ignorance and prejudice which we must acknowledge, and which we must counter. We need to recognise and defend the experiences of those who don't feel safe and provide new opportunities to ensure a diverse range of identities can thrive in nature.

The collective value of youth voices could be very powerful in helping us achieve change in making the outdoors a more welcoming place.

The widespread, lasting and positive impact on well-being, life choices and community contribution linked with engagement in the outdoors and the increased focus on mental health and wellbeing post-covid were themes threaded through all our discussions.

There remain many barriers for many people to getting outdoors safely and enjoyably. We are all losers as a result. Individuals and organisations – often wrestling with challenges themselves – are nonetheless finding positive, effective ways to tackle barriers for significant numbers of people, and are being more fully recognised for their roles as activists and champions. There is a risk in the process that, having made no claims to knowing all the answers to outdoor accessibility, they are burdened with status as instant 'solutions' for the whole sector, whilst still finding their own way.

ACTIONS.

We can all make the outdoors a more welcoming place. Taking time to understand more about cultural and community barriers to participation is a good place to start;

We;

- Must all lead by example. Not all of us are part of campaigning organisations, but we recognise the importance of activism
- Understand the need to be part of a safe community to take first steps outdoors
- Acknowledge potential barriers in expectation, training, finances, equipment
- Are sensitive to the idea of emotional access, and to the challenge of disconnecting from home. To step out of domestic issues and trust gatekeepers enough to embrace an opportunity can be hard
- Will consider language and what it means to different people. Language of the outdoors may suggest 'beyond my capability'

We can;

- Create youth panels/include young voices
- Share more opportunities which celebrate different ways to be outdoors
- Find ways to develop diversity in adventure leadership. There aren't enough new leaders in the outdoors changing existing methodologies and language
- Be proactive in considering how to make the adventure environment a home for all (eg. providing prayer spaces, or helpful food choices, or access routes to adventure which work better for particular people and communities)
- Consider how we challenge the perceptions of elitism and demystify technicality and unhelpful 'outdoor' language wherever we can
- Challenge training providers to adapt, and to deliver programmes that fit the needs of a diverse and inclusive audience. A lack of skills to access the outdoors safely can be a barrier (and may even be used as a justification for one 'you don't have the skills') – but with too rigid a structure to acquire the training, this won't be overcome. We need to adapt to meet the needs of new kinds of leadership



DNG Iceland 2018 Craig Borthwick

FURTHER ACTIONS

We are;

Developing relationships with youth ambassadors

Working with partners who help us to understand and mitigate many of the challenges identified here to enjoying the outdoors

We will;

Ask ourselves – if these measures and forms of advocacy aren't already being actioned wholesale, why not?

Work harder to demystify the language of the outdoors wherever we can, and whenever we can

Do more to celebrate diverse voices and ways of enjoying the wilderness



Hartz Scottish Explorers 2021 Kate Suart

Schools, outdoor learning, and routes to adventure

THE ISSUE – Traditional education is failing to connect young people with the outdoors, and is therefore also failing nature.

All young people should be able to access and experience nature and the outdoors – from early in life, and frequently. This should not be on a 'wish list'. A lack of connection with the outdoors will undermine the development of a sense of environmental custodianship. 'We look after the things that we love' – and the basis for a capacity to care.

Classrooms don't necessarily support engagement with the real world and 'troublemakers' in school can be champions in the natural world if given the chance. We can support easy, engaging access to knowledge about the natural world outside formal settings for those who want it. We could also provide more positive steps that more young people can take to 'make a positive difference', as well as providing better education on the challenges we all face. The work and approach of the John Muir Trust already provides a great, and positive, framework for this.

Seeing really is believing. There are profound opportunities outdoors, in the 'best classrooms on earth' to consider that everything is natural and came out of the ground – from a city to a mobile phone.

Field work is the front line of ecology. It's where all the numbers we need to understand the jeopardy we face come from - and is where science happens. Fostering an appetite to collect Field science data is critical, as is sharing your stories to bring them to life. We are committed to a mix of adventure, personal development, and knowledge. Once young people have started to tackle their survival and social skills, they can focus more on knowledge which excites them, and on connecting with the environment.

But how do we ensure expedition climate learning is relatable to day-to-day life?

Amazon 2019 Eleanor Grieveson



We are;

Commissioning a practical review of our knowledge provision to ensure that what we provide is accessible, relevant, engaging.

Tracking the link between field based learning and positive outcomes.

We will;

Find ways to communicate that idea of the 'front line', and will share accessible, critical front-line data through our work.

We aspire;

To offer young people collaboration in leading design-research projects to see our consultation develop into concrete outcomes.

ACTIONS

The wider issue...

Without consistent, inclusive school programmes of outdoor activity, developing authentic engagement with communities of young people without early exposure to outdoor experiences takes significant time, commitment, and the support of trusted, recognisable mentors and community leaders.

School-based experiences can really change things – a young person is more likely to say 'yes' next time they get an invitation to step outdoors.

The consultation consistently voiced deep concerns about the negative impact of poor school engagement with outdoor learning, and described impoverished opportunities for young people to experience the outdoors, particularly those already impacted by other forms of disadvantage.

ACTIONS

We are;

Working in partnership with schools to provide transformative experiences for those least likely to access them without our support.

We will;

Develop new and extended access to adventure through school settings, including 'light touch' and first adventures.

We wish we could;

Create 1000 new outdoor champions in 1000 schools

Young Explorer 2021 Will Dyer

The themes of role modelling, mentoring and trust were central to our consultation.

THE ISSUE – who makes us feel welcome, safe, and who will encourage us to take a first outdoor adventure?

Many individual examples were cited. The most compelling examples of the creation of new opportunities to participate in the outdoors were through the work of organisations like Muslim Hikers and Black Girls Hike. In the context of their work, when we say 'role modelling' to support access to the outdoors we really mean trusted allies, mentors, and friends; people with genuine understanding, shared experiences and with time, too. The consultation agreed that without time, trust, and often extended opportunities for engagement, champions for the outdoors may struggle to support change. To get young people who are facing barriers to enjoying the outdoors involved in a new activity – even one they might enjoy – you need to have a relationship with them and to invest time with them.

We are;

Working with partners to develop more trusting relationships with young people

Participating in the RACE Report to support diversity and inclusion within the environment sector

Investigating new partnerships in key parts of the UK to reach out more effectively to under-represented communities of young people

Recruiting and training Leaders with the experience and skills to develop trust with young people and to enable them to thrive with us in the outdoors

We will;

Progress the 'commission' we started to understand how to diversify our Leader community to provide a more inclusive community of allies and mentors for young people

Continue to seek genuine and accessible role models for our work bearing in mind what we learned at St George's House.

Making the case for the value of a connection with the outdoors for society is central to our ability to extend our impact and capacity.

THE ISSUE – Demonstrating impact

How do we balance sustainability with the quality of outcomes we deliver?

When we think of the 'cost-benefit' of getting outdoors, we can measure the negatives – carbon impact or greenhouse gas emissions – much more easily than we can measure the scope of the individual and community-wide positive benefit.

How do we evidence that a young person returns from an experience having made sufficient connection with nature to go on to fight for it in their own life/work going forwards?

Can we join up our measurement to show how we benefit the lives of young people using the outdoors in a way which also, authentically, supports sustainability?

Our work is not just about (for example) our own greenhouse gas outputs, it is about our role in the development of a relationship, a sense of belonging in the natural world. If we help to combat the sense of separateness, and support that with knowledge and understanding, we start to change behaviours in a way most likely to impact on future sustainability.

For example – Kwesia X (citygirlinnature.com) has become, through her experiences, a catalyst for change and for sustainability – she is a champion of change. Supporting this kind of learning journey could be one of our greatest impacts/carbon management strategies. How do we measure this?

Increasing impact

- When coming home, do we celebrate the depth of connections with nature and place that we have made as much as we celebrate the mountains and treks that we have conquered?
- Could we have more focus on sustainability as part of Next Steps?
- Awareness of careers in the outdoors is 'not a thing' except for a very limited slice of society. We can discuss progression and leadership opportunities with explorers whilst on expedition, with walkers, with anyone interested in the outdoors.
- We can promote the idea that post expedition/adventure action is an essential part of the experience
- Recent recipients of adventure to speak out more and earlier about the benefits

Amazon 2018 Emma Brennand



ACTIONS

We have;

An ambitious Environmental Policy in place.

We are;

Investigating how to link our GHG emissions with our outcomes

We will;

Work hard to ensure that we articulate how skills and knowledge acquired outdoors are super-relevant to the workplace. Our leaders already endeavour to draw out all the skills young people bring with them

Include flags about careers and sustainability in the future development of our Expedition Workshops and in future Wildestan sessions

Kwesia used the name Amina when she first joined us on expedition

Small steps, and stepping stones between opportunities and organisations, would make a big difference to improving an individual's journey towards confident and possibly more stretching experiences outdoors.

THE ISSUE – we want a better, more joined up pathway to outdoor experiences but a commitment to ensuring each step of that journey is of comparable quality and welcome is much harder. Why should anyone facing challenges to access their early adventures trust 'signposting' without such a guarantee?

Are we prepared to ask for standards or guarantees in organisations offering stepping stones to ensure a safe place for those adventurers?

If we are to challenge paradigms and embrace new ways of working to improve the welcome everyone receives, should we also accept that it is pointless for everyone to try to do everything? We will fail, won't we? Can we instead support excellence and defend it where it already exists?

ACTIONS

We are;

Providing earlier and easier access to adventure through our UK programmes, though Wildestan and through Expedition Workshops.

We will;

Explore ways to provide links to local, day-experiences and micro-adventures to multi-day residential adventures, across age-ranges;

We will;

Connect with others to identify ways to complement/ extend their offer (maybe just the 'next stepping stone' rather than too many un-curated 'opportunities?')



How do we become more sustainable in our practices without becoming less accessible in the process?

THE ISSUE – as an example – making kit more sustainable can make it more expensive and hence less accessible.

Most outdoor experiences will require some form of clothing to make it safe and enjoyable – from a first waterproof or day-sac to walking shoes or boots. How do we square this issue?

If we want to equip (with fit for purpose gear) and inspire everyone for a life outdoors for the first sleep to the highest mountain – it comes with a cost – and the higher you go up the mountain, the harder it is to achieve that, effectively.

Could we all have second hand kit? Could we provide our own kit – branded, recycled?

The questions we want to ask ourselves in our programme design and delivery:

- How might we eliminate or better still design out waste in our processes?
- How might we keep products and materials in use?
- How might we regenerate nature and give back through our work?
- Who can help us and work with us in tackling these issues? How can young people help us?
- Can we focus on more the journey, and less on the ‘conquering’ and exploration?
- How far must we go, to be ‘wild’? we know that we have greater, and longer lasting outcomes when we participate in genuinely remote places...
- Should we simply accept offset and focus on quality of benefit?
- Can we focus on human power, boats and water instead of flying
- What knowledge opportunities are we providing to support sustainability? Learning to cook is more valuable as a skill than pouring water over a ration pack and is likely to be more sustainable

ACTIONS

We are;

Providing certified Carbon Management training to staff and volunteer leaders to help us make practical decisions to improve our sustainability

Making travel and destination decisions aided by Carbon reporting from previous years

Putting aside funds to support carbon removal and offset to meet the commitments made in our Environmental Policy

Starting conversations with kit providers and manufacturers to see how we can combine sustainability with access to those who need it most

A final thought – Storytelling

A thread throughout the consultation was the value and power of engaging stories to help convey the magic of the outdoors from a first step to a major adventure.

The jacket-with-a-story...

The consultation team conjured the idea of (e.g.) a more sustainable jacket with a QR code. A high quality item with its own Instagram page, say, where each wearer shares their adventure, large or small, before passing on the jacket for its next adventure, creating a narrative of stories 'hosted' by the jacket and enjoyed by a community of followers (possibly including those funding the story jackets)? Could the first story be by a writer? Someone surprising? Special anonymous stories..?

The power of first nation or indigenous stories

The consultation shared stories which celebrated diverse, often traditional and historic, and careful relationships with landscapes and ecosystems, from which new young adventurers could learn, and might also find more relatable than (for example) the accounts of Victorian and Edwardian explorers.

Mentors and trusted friends

An individual story of an inspiring and relatable journey from someone you trust is priceless.

Printed books

Books can do it too. 3 delegates shared the thrill of Canadian author Willard Price's 14 adventure books for children (always read under the bed covers) - inspiring their desire to explore and get outdoors. These books were published from 1949 – 1980 and appear to still be inspiring young people – particularly when they are being shared with them by their parents, who loved them first. What other, possibly more contemporary books, and more inclusive stories, could we also recommend?

Our thanks

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Jelle Veyt, endurance athlete and sustainability explorer – undertaking the Secutec Seven Summits

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Nigel Winser, UK representative, The East African Wildlife Society

Kwesia X, founder of City Girl in Nature, Explorer Ambassador, British Exploring Society

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David Emmett, The Hempel Foundation and Board Advisor, British Exploring Society

Paul Rose, author, explorer, broadcaster, base commander of Rothera research station Antarctica for 10 years

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Sophie Fernandes, ex-Air Cadet, trustee of the Ulysses Trust and Chair of The Portal Trust (formally Sir John Cass's Foundation)

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