



THE JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is the process of making wise decisions which have positive benefits in economic, social and environmental terms. It is becoming a topical issue for all of us and we need to demonstrate that we are at the cutting edge of best practices in this area.

In particular, the Expedition section encourages 275,000 young people every year to undertake a journey in the natural environment and it is in this section that we can showcase how we are managing our impact. We can also ensure that the young people with whom we work can access their surroundings well into the future.

This article gives you the chance to reflect on your group practices and gives you some tips about the first step of the journey – travelling to the starting point.

A quick quiz to get you started:

1: How many places have you been to in the last four years for Bronze, Silver and Gold practice and qualifying expeditions?

- 10
- 20
- 30
- 3 (we only have three maps)

2: On arrival at the camp site does the owner greet you:

- with the invoice?
- with a cup of tea?
- by name?
- none of the above – they did not know we were coming?

3: How many hours have you spent in the last year in a minibus?

- under 10 hours
- under 20 hours
- over 50 hours
- lost count – I fell asleep in the passenger seat too many times to remember

4: How many stops do your groups request in journeying to the start of their expedition?

- one stop
- two stops
- more than three stops
- I insist that they do not eat or drink before they leave

5: How many times do you stop to refuel the minibus on expedition?

- never – we bring it home half full
- once
- twice
- usually lose count

Unlike the majority of survey quizzes there are no right or wrong answers. This is also true about the whole subject of sustainability.



Stephen Brown, Executive Officer for the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel and Outdoor Adviser for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough gives tips on making your expedition more sustainable, by cutting down travel time and finding expedition locations closer to home.

Influential

I was influenced as a young Leader by a clear statement in the mid 1980s from a well-respected outdoor educator. The philosophy behind his work in Birmingham was to try and ensure wide accessibility of outdoor adventure experiences for as many young people as possible. He questioned putting 14 young people into a minibus and driving them to North Wales for first-time experiences of adventure activities. Instead, he wanted young people to be able to find opportunities for early experiences of adventure activities in environments close to their homes – opportunities that they could then revisit throughout their lives.

Linked to this is the concept about young people and their community. Next time you are with a group of young people, get them to describe their range of regular travel, and then their range of *independent* travel. Most will be confident in their

home community and travel with parents or carers, but independent travel will often be limited to a route from home to friend, home to school and home to town centre. How extensive is their experience of their town and other local areas where they are not educated or do not live?

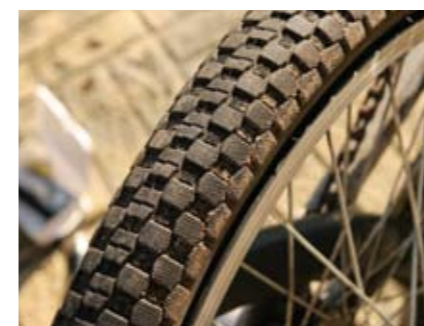
With fuel costs doubling in just over two years and a growing awareness of environmental footprint of activity, is it still justifiable to continue to undertake expedition practices that were developed when fuel costs were not even considered? Here are a few areas to think about it in terms of sourcing opportunities locally and encouraging young people to get to know their local area.

Cutting down drive time to expedition time ratios

Some example ratios:

- **Bronze Expedition:** School to White Peak & return, six hours: 12 hours planned activity = ratio 1:2
- **Silver Expedition:** School to Dark Peak & return, six hours: 21 hours planned activity = ratio 1:3.5
- **Gold Expedition:** School to Lakes & return, 12 hours: 32 hours planned activity = ratio 1:2.6

Can you affect these ratios? Why not try opening up some mapping software, or the Ordnance Survey map for your local area and review the range of footpaths, routes and opportunities that you could use? One group I know has started this approach for their off-road cycling expedition group. After training using local routes near to school, the young people have returned to cycle the same route with friends and family, and proudly tell school staff of their further adventures.



Deciding on an ideal environment

Every Leader has a clear view of their favourite or perfect area for expedition training. It could

include a good camp site, footpath network involving route choice and decisions, some interesting points on the landscape to see and record, and little interference from other users/groups/public. My list includes a network of footpaths where I can easily slip away from my group and then rejoin them a short distance later, allowing the group to start to make independent decisions, but still allowing me to continue to coach and encourage them if needed.

Why not try creating your own ideal environment criteria list and see how you can apply this to a new area closer to home?

Is the minibus the only option?

With the limited application of the guidance on minibus driving from the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Transport about voluntary driving, we will continue to face driver shortages. Therefore there must be other options.



Coaches move large numbers at a cost but also create problems on arrival. Unless your departure point has multiple routes leaving the car park, a coach full of participants will continue just to snake across the landscape for hours after their start.

Why not use a combination of train, local buses or a National Park Bus to create a range of starting points for groups? Some groups are starting to use public transport, or a combination with some school-based transport, as a more affordable and practical way to move young people to and from their expedition area. This could ease the concerns about minibus drivers and reduce our travel impact. With group travel options on rail, this could become more cost effective.

Over-used routes

We run the risk of over-using certain areas and having a huge environmental impact on certain landscapes. For example, are



groups fixated upon the Lakes, Snowdonia and the Peak District? Are groups driving past other very appropriate foot areas which include Dumfries & Galloway, the Cheviots and mid Wales?

Why not try thinking about how used the areas are that you are going to and considering the benefits to the young people, community and environment, investigating going somewhere less well known.

Future-proofing

Sustainability is not only about our travel but is also about considering other factors to ensure that DofE programmes remain accessible for all young people, including those with additional learning needs, or aspects of financial affordability. Basically, we have to make sure that young people can still do DofE programmes in ten, 20 and 50 years' time. This means we have to think now about how we maintain our appeal, meeting different needs for young people, an undamaged environment and promoting a positive view of young people in society. One thing that will help this is making sure we run the Expedition section wisely.

Will you meet a Bronze Award holder 20 years from now, still using the pathways in your local park or common? And, if so, will you be able to reflect in years to come that you saw your expeditions develop more sustainable practices? Good luck with planning your future expeditions!

Have you got any top tips for making the DofE more sustainable? If so, get in touch with us at magazine@DofE.org