

RESPECT, PROTECT, ENJOY

With the increase in numbers of young people undertaking DofE expeditions, there is an ever-increasing need to educate them in how to behave correctly in the countryside. **Peter Fleet**, DofE Director for London Region, provides advice and encouragement...

When I read this magazine, I am always encouraged by the amazing stories of success and personal achievement. As a Director working for the DofE Charity I have been impressed by our increasing levels of positive engagement with young people and the greater numbers of young people achieving a DofE Award.

I am also acutely aware that, as we engage greater numbers of young people, we have an ever-expanding demand for expeditions. As these demands are met, we need to be alert to the environmental and social impact that we could be having on rural communities, the local countryside and the remote and mountainous terrain of our National Parks. With water-based ventures, that impact extends to our rivers, lakes and coastline.

Having run expeditions for over 30 years, I am reminded of how fortunate we are to have legislation that provides substantial access to get out on foot, bike, boat or horseback into the countryside, national parks and waterways. It is important that we remind ourselves and young people of the need to respect these rights – rights that many have fought hard to acquire on our behalf.



Being conspicuous

The DofE's Regional and Country Offices sometimes receive complaints and comments about graffiti, litter, noise, leaving gates open, minibuses blocking access etc. However, these are not always the result of DofE groups' activities, of course.

It is often difficult to identify who the complaints are being made against, which means they are often only identified as a 'Duke of Edinburgh's Award group'. Ultimately, this has a reputational cost for our Charity.

In some cases we are able to identify the offending parties if they are, indeed, on DofE activities – in one case of graffiti on a bothy wall, most of the young people had 'helpfully' carved out or written the name of their school or group. In a case of littering, the rubbish left at the camp site included a route card with everyone's name on it.

Our Regional and Country Offices would prefer not to have to spend time investigating or following up on complaints but this is only possible by educating young people on all matters related to the environment and their interaction within it, so getting the training right is vital for all concerned.

With my groups, I find that the Countryside Code is the best starting point and the Countryside Access, Scotland Natural Heritage and Natural England websites have plenty of ideas for introducing this topic.

Share and enjoy

It's worth remembering that each of the countries across the UK has its own rules, policies and rights of access and we should be familiar with these as we venture further afield.