

Scottish Natural Heritage

Teaching in Nature

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park encompasses 108mi² of moorland hills, plantations and lochs. There are 3 visitor centres where Rangers are on hand to provide information, lead groups and deliver a programme of seasonal activities. The Rangers can lead a variety of sessions, such as minibeast hunting, pond dipping, rock pooling and orienteering. Schools are also welcome to make self-led visits and the Rangers can provide as much or as little support as required to help teachers to plan, make or build on the visits.

The Ranger Service decided to get involved with the Teaching in Nature project (TiN), as they wanted to try to encourage local schools to visit more regularly and not be restricted by the availability of the Rangers. As part of the project, 5 teachers from 5 primary schools in Inverclyde took their pupils on two visits to the Greenock Cut area of the Regional Park. The Rangers' main role during the project was to support the teachers on their collaborative planning visit by introducing them to the site. The Rangers also provided a pre-visit session in school to help prepare the pupils for their visit, including learning about their rights and responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

The group of teachers decided to collaborate to develop a 'Piracy and Smuggling' topic. Each teacher pursued this with their class (ranging from P1—7) in a variety of creative and innovative ways. They covered Literacy, Social Studies, ICT, Drama and Art via activities such as mapping, use of GPS, studying geographic land marks and researching local history. Follow up activities, inspired by their visits, included: one school creating a BBC podcast; a visit from a customs and excise officer and the building of a pirate ship climbing frame in the playground. Some teachers reported better parental involvement with home learning projects and pupils 'taking' parents and siblings back to visit Greenock Cut in their spare time.

The Rangers commented that they were surprised and inspired by the range of learning activities the teachers had devised to do in the Regional Park. These addressed a much broader range of curricular areas than the Rangers would traditionally offer. They hoped that these teachers would continue to use the Regional Park regularly and



“I was a little concerned that the Teaching in Nature approach is seen as a replacement for the Rangers’ educational role, however, I think it is more of an addition to want the site can be used for.”

Mike Holcombe, Senior Ranger.



planned to use the Teaching in Nature project as a case study for promoting self-led visits as an option for other schools.

One year on, two of the teachers had made return visits to the Regional Park. The other teachers cited travel costs and a new role in the school as reasons for not returning. Never-the-less, they had all taken learning outdoors in the year that followed their TiN experience and had all supported colleagues in a range of ways. Four had helped colleagues to plan outdoor learning, 2 had also accompanied them to help deliver outdoor learning and one had helped a probationer.

The teachers' confidence in taking learning outdoors greatly increased through their TiN experience; having rated their confidence an average of 2.4 out of 5 at the start of the project, they said it had increased to an average of 4.6 out of 5 by the end.

Although most had not revisited the Regional Park, these teachers now felt more able to visit new places—and that if they couldn't find the funds to travel they could use the grounds to greater effect. They commented "Before this project I never really used the area round the school as most of the school is surrounded by concrete and I didn't see how this area could be used. I have now had the children out on numerous occasions, covering a variety of subjects."

"The Teaching in Nature project encouraged me to extend what I normally do outdoors—I would not normally go out in the snow but it turned out to be one of our best ever learning experiences!"

"I have always associated outdoor learning mainly with science topics or with health and wellbeing. I think this project has made me realise that outdoor learning has much more scope than this and that any curricular area can be covered outdoors... I think this will now alter my thinking when planning"

"I am much more confident in letting the children and their interests lead the lessons now and I realise that even though the children may not be doing what was initially planned, other learning is taking place".

[Teaching in Nature](#) combines a collaborative and practical approach to professional development in outdoor learning. It supports groups of teachers to work together to use a nearby place that is special for nature to plan, implement and evaluate challenging and fun outdoor learning experiences for their pupils. An evaluation of the 2012/13 Teaching in Nature project found that 80% of respondents had continued to take learning outdoors in the year that followed and 73% had supported a colleague to take their class outdoors.

If you'd like more information on *Teaching in Nature* or advice on how to use the approach in your context, contact: sharon.cunningham@snh.gov.uk



"It was good to see the teachers making use of the centre teaching subjects that are not normally taught here."

Mike Holcombe, Senior Ranger

