

Study Tour to Birmingham, UK - An Outdoor Education Experience

A group of 14 students from the School of Physical Education of NIE was enriched with a 3-week expedition in May/June this year to the United Kingdom to experience working in the Urban Outdoor Education Centre and associated schools in the City of Birmingham. The objective was to study how physical education and robust outdoor activities are promoted in the Birmingham area in the UK - a densely populated urban area like Singapore. This has great relevance for us as Singapore must find ways to get our young people to develop a taste for the outdoors and to take part in rugged activities.

The experience gained will also enable NIE to better promote the recommendations of the Advisory Council for Sport and Recreation in the school situation, with particular reference to rock climbing, orienteering, canoeing, sailing and boardsailing.

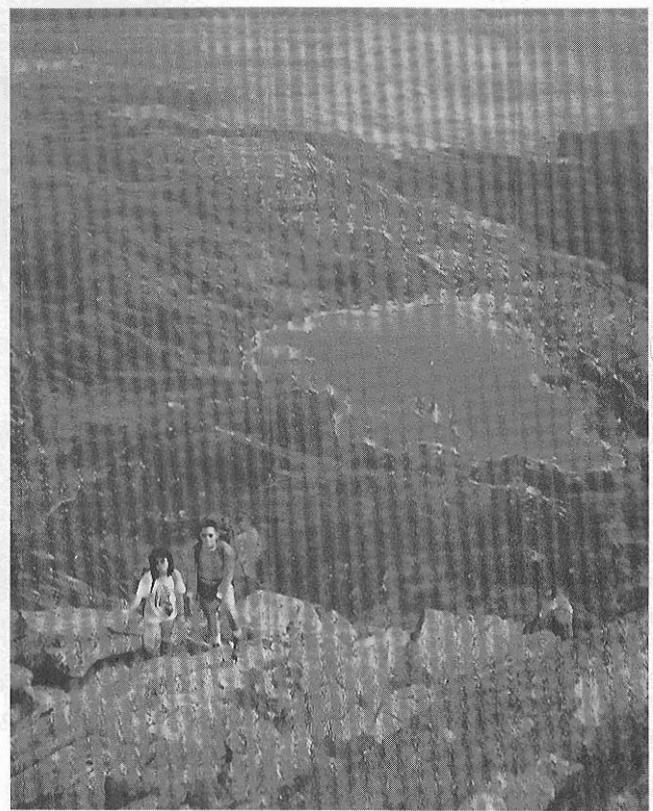
The study tour project was first mooted in March this year when Mr Glynn Roberts, Head of the Urban Education Centre, Birmingham was invited to Singapore as a keynote speaker for the Conference on "Physical Education in Southeast Asia - Future Directions". He invited students of the School of Physical Education to visit and work in the Urban Outdoor Education Centre.

Below is a personal account of the 3-week study tour (25 May - 19 June '91)

by Mr Malcolm Gilbey, Leader of the Study Tour Delegation and Lecturer with the School of Physical Education:

We arrived on Saturday 25th May, to an unusually bright and clear morning in London. We then drove the 280 kilometres to North Wales on Sunday 26th June. Just outside Birmingham we ground to a halt on the M6 motorway, major resurfacing work had begun that day. It took us one and a half hours to travel 4 km which played havoc with our estimated time of arrival.

The National Mountaineering Centre, our base for the first week, sits at the end of the twin lakes of Llynau Mwmbwr, and on a clear day gives the classic view of the Snowdon Horseshoe. As it was reasonably clear at 5 a.m. on Monday morning, we stood by the lakes to admire the view. Following breakfast we began a fairly gentle introduction to Welsh mountains, by climbing



The ridge on Moel Slabod Snowdonia National Park

Moel Siabod (720m). A gentle ascent over open moorland, and then more steeply rising ground through forestry commission plantations brought us eventually onto quite a steep and precipitous ridge.

The summit appeared quite abruptly and we sat in pleasant sunshine to eat lunch and view the surrounding mountains.

Day two dawned clear and dry and so the round of the Snowdon Horseshoe was selected as the day's route. This is probably the most enjoyable mountain day in North Wales. Ascending from Pen-y-Pass youth hostel to the summit of Crib Goch (921m) and then along its knife edge ridge, the drops on either side of which vary between 300 and 450 metres! In the midst of the arduous climb, one member of the party commented, "if you get me down from here alive, I promise never to eat meat again", a reference to the enforced vegetarian diet everyone was on. We continued over Crib-y-Ddysgl (940m) and onto the summit of Snowdon (1085m), the highest mountain in England and Wales, before swooping down to Bwlch-y-Saethau the pass of the arrows. Then climbing to the final summit of Lliwedd (898m), we completed the



Dry slope skiing at the Ackers Trust Centre

"Horseshoe by walking back to Pen-y-
The conditions had been superb, the
rock dry, the views magnificent, but much
adrenalin had been used as people
and knees.

The other mountain days were more
usual (weatherwise) as we lost the moun-
tains in the clouds and rain. Navigation
became more difficult and the exposure of
being on open ridges was lost.

Such was the pattern of the first week.
rose early, ate a breakfast of cereals
and bread amidst cries for Nasi Lemak and
Prata. We climbed and walked our
way around Snowdonia National Park and
visited various mountain centres, promot-
ing sailing or mountaineering. We viewed
castles and other places of historical inter-
and most of all marvelled at the variety
of wild flowers in bloom everywhere.

The week was over all too quickly and
we found ourselves once again on the
dreaded M6 motorway. This time it was
thronged by cars and coaches festooned in
the colours of Tranmere Rovers Football
Club as they sped south to Birmingham to
compete in a cup final.

No one had really believed me when I
had said that we were camping for ten days
in Birmingham. But our arrival in a field
at the Stables Environmental Centre a few
kilometres from the famous Long Bridge
Motor Vehicle factories, changed all that.
Tents were erected, sleeping bags and



White water canoeing on the River Severn - Birmingham

cooking facilities distributed and two
nights later, when the area experienced its
coldest June night for 88 years, pleas for
a return to civilization were rife.

We were royally received in Birmin-
gham - an official reception in the Lord
Mayor's Parlour, an exchange of gifts, a
tour of the banqueting halls and council
chambers and a delightful buffet meal
with Lord Mayor and the Chairman of the
Education Committee. Our time in Bir-
mingham spent at the Urban Outdoor
Education Centre, was a blur of activity.
Sailing, canoeing, kayaking, dry slope
skiing, rock climbing, an orienteering
competition and visits to local schools to

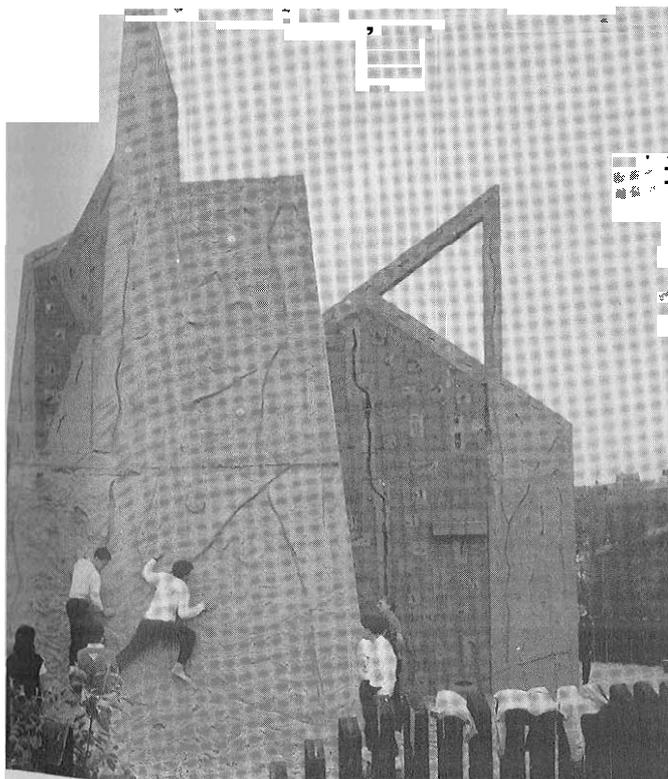
observe how they presented their out-
door education programmes. Raft-
ing on the white water course at
Holme Pier Point resulted in a cold
swim in the River Trent for eight of
us, when someone got the line down
the rapid wrong, and sickness and
dialhorrea was the prize for those who
didn't keep their mouths closed.
The weather was most unkind - un-
seasonably cold and wet! Everyone we
met talked about "the weather".

All too soon we moved on again,
this time to Essex and the Stubbers

Outdoor Pursuit Centre - another wet
week! Groups of primary, secondary and
special school children visited the centre
each day, some for a day of activities,
others for an overnight camp. Each group
needed to be equipped with wet-suits,
waterproofs and buoyancy aids as a never
ending rotation of this equipment took
place. Unlike Singapore, you must add
endless layers of clothing to take part in
any water activity - in any activity at all in
fact! During the evenings, groups of
teachers attending in-service courses
(those pursuing national qualifications in
UK) came onto the site and since the UK
has daylight until 10 pm at this time of the
year, courses ran until 9.30pm.

Once again we sailed, boardsailed,
canoed and kayaked, in between we stood
in the rain to watch the trooping of the
colour, wandered through Rochester
Castle and the streets where Dickens
wrote his famous tales, until on our final
day the group dispersed to go their
separate ways. Some left for Scotland and
to the warm welcome of Scottish
hospitality, others for York and the Lake
District and two to the Churchtown Farm
Outdoor Centre for the disabled. Not able
to maintain this pace, I slept for two days
before attending the 4th International Out-
ward Bound Conference at Aberdovey in
Mid-Wales.

All in all it was a wonderful ex-
perience and I believe the wealth of ideas
that have travelled back with this group to
Singapore will be passed on to teachers
and students in schools here for many
years to come. For me after 20 years of
taking groups to mountains, rivers and
seas in many parts of the world, I can say
I never enjoyed being with a group of
people so much as I did this one.



Artificial Climbing Tower, Birmingham