

Here is an account from our secretary of the delights you can expect..

An Activity Weekend in Derbyshire

I am very fond of the Derbyshire Dales so I was very much looking forward to going for the Weekend of April 5th - 7th. Unfortunately I arrived late due to the sheer volume of traffic on the roads on Friday night, but only missed the introductions and evening meal, which I was able to have after my arrival.



Ready to go

Once we had all settled into our rooms, we were to select which activities we would like to do on Saturday and Sunday. This turned out to be quite difficult as I was keen to try as many as I could. I decided to choose Canoeing on Cromford canal in the morning, as I have canoed several times before. I thoroughly enjoyed the relaxing paddle along the canal, especially as it was a lovely sunny day and a perfect morning for "messing about on the river." Naturally we had to wear safety jackets and helmets, but as we all looked the same in our protective gear it was not embarrassing. Our instructor was excellent, spending time explaining to us what we needed to know and was keen to provide the perfect setting for us all to enjoy our paddle. We soon got to know one another. The conversation flowed as easy as the water underneath us. Our only regret was that it ended all too soon and we were on our way back for lunch.

My afternoon choice was to try caving. This was to be a first for me, so I was really looking forward to my new activity. Having been to the stores to collect our protective gear we were once again driven in the minibus through some beautiful countryside, much of which is owned by the Duke of Devonshire, who also owns Chatsworth House.

We arrived at the cave, sorted out the lights on our headlamps and started our descent into the cave. For some reason I had expected it to be slippery, so was concerned that I may end up on the floor, but this was not the case. It was fascinating descending deeper and deeper into the cave, paying attention to the structure and formation of the rock as we walked along. This was very much a team effort as it was necessary for us to have a leader and tail end Charlie so we could all help each other work our way down along crevices and impressive-rock formations. I had also expected it to be quite cold down there, but with all my protective wear on I was glowing. Again our leader and guide were brilliant, explaining as we went what we needed to look out for and the need to pass messages to help each other. The time seemed to go quickly and our ascent seemed so much quicker, as we could see daylight approaching.

On our return to Dukes Barn we had a welcome drink, and relaxed until the evening meal. This gave us an opportunity to talk to each other. Those who wished to, played snooker, darts, watched TV or just relaxed.

After the evening meal we gathered in the lecture theatre where Paul Young gave a demonstration of Brain Gym techniques using the boys as his assistants. Those of you who have been to Conference over the last two years will know the benefits gained by the exercises he demonstrates. As there were several young KS males there, they were very keen to listen and participate.

During the night we had had heavy rainfall, which had swelled the stream we were about to walk through!! When I put my name down for this activity it conjured up a trickling stream, a babbling brook, that kind of thing, but I had no idea we would be walking through rapids!! When we started downstream it was fairly fast flowing, but as we walked our way through the fast flowing stream it became apparent that once again we had to help each other, especially through some precarious situations where the risk of getting completely wet was very high.

Once the water had gone over the top of our Wellingtons it became even harder to walk, but stream walking was what we were doing, so we continued over the slippery stones trying to pick out our way as best we could. I think it was when we reached a mini Waterfall that I became concerned as to how I was going to cope getting over this. Again teamwork and effort was needed, and one by one we helped each other over the rapid flowing water. It really was such good fun,

providing endless giggles and amusement, after which we all felt invigorated by the effort and sense of achievement on reaching the source.



Getting a bit wet!

Our return journey was much easier as it was via the road. After rinsing off our waterproofs we went for a well-deserved hot shower before lunch.

Our final activity was based at Dukes Barn where there were several choices of activities to choose from. These included archery, assault course, indoor climbing wall, or of course just spectating and offering encouragement. I was not going to settle until I had tried them all, so I spent the afternoon swinging along ropes on the assault course, wriggling through the tunnel, attempting to climb the wall and trying to get a Bull's eye on the archery target.

As I went on my own for the weekend it was great to be able to meet lots of parents and adults who shared a common interest in the Association, and what it can offer us in the way of support and guidance. What I was able to see from a fly on the wall perspective was how virtually all the boys had gained in confidence, had learnt so many new skills, and enjoyed themselves immensely. Given the chance I am sure they will wish to return, as they can only have very happy memories of an interesting, energetic, and friendly weekend surrounded by people who can understand their difficulties and offer so much support.

Our thanks must certainly go to Alison Bridges, our Treasurer, who has been organising these weekends for three years now, but also to Paul Young for giving up his time on a Saturday night to come and demonstrate to us how Brain Gym works. Finally, the instructors and staff at Duke's Barn who showed great patience, friendship and security throughout all the activities we participated in.

My only advice to you is if you have not been, watch out for when the next one is planned, and make sure you are on it. Hopefully see you there.

Margaret Stebbing