

Mosaic Youth Project: Activity Case Studies

The Campaign for National Parks ran the Mosaic youth project from 2013-2016 in partnership with the YHA and five National Park Authorities (Exmoor, Lake District, New Forest, Northumberland and Yorkshire Dales). The project aimed to make positive changes in young people's lives through engaging with National Parks.

We chose four activities that took place during the project that particularly inspired us. They are all different, and inspiring in different ways. We hope that they demonstrate how Mosaic has worked, and that they are useful to others seeking to engage 16 to 25 year olds in the outdoors.

Case Study 1: The Exmoor Pony Trek



'The Exmoor pony trek was an experiment for me, to find out if something like this was possible and how others would react to the experience. I am eager to repeat it and share it with others. I thoroughly enjoyed myself knowing that I was walking in the footsteps of our medieval ancestors.' James Gibson, one of the walk organisers.

Since King Edward I decreed it in 1279, people have been walking the borders of the old Exmoor Forest in what has become known as the Exmoor Perambulation.

James is a young champion with the Campaign for National Parks' Mosaic project. He has a keen interest in history and the outdoors and is training to become an outdoor instructor. At an annual gathering of champions from National Parks, across the country, James came up with the idea of organising a walking event which would also re-enact a local story.

Enter Dave Gurnett, the Exmoor National Park Authority Education and Outreach officer. He suggested the annual perambulation of the Exmoor National Park as a perfect opportunity for James to plan his walk around. James decided that to do such a big walk would need two days and that it would be ideal to have some Exmoor ponies, both as part of the re-enactment and to carry camping gear. Dave worked with James and the Mosaic project officer for Exmoor, to help plan the route and event, including risk assessments etc. James spoke to other young champions about it and went with a group of four others and the Mosaic project officer, to test the route on two different days. Dave spoke to the Exmoor Pony Centre and they agreed to provide two ponies for the event

When the weekend came, 7 young people attended together along with staff from the Exmoor National Park and of course the two ponies with their handlers. The start was inauspicious. One of the ponies spooked at the equipment she was carrying and bolted. She found a wild stallion and it took some time for the handlers to bring her back. She was too excited to continue and had to be returned home. It created a talking point and sense of excitement for the weekend.

James described the walk as having *'incredible views and just as incredible company. As we walked across fields, along country lanes and down valleys. I thought about how we were following in the footsteps of the medieval people of Exmoor... As we descended into Horner valley, I looked at the old oaks in the forest and how they provided shelter for travellers.'*

Why did it work?

- Having a themed walk tapped into people's imaginations
- It was a serious walking commitment. The whole route was 20 miles over different terrain. The ponies provided a distraction, especially when the walking was hard.
- James' idea fitted with an actual event. It made sense to people so they were inspired to help him plan it or join him for the walk.
- The weather was perfect
- The route went through a varied and stunning landscape. Staff from the National Park Authority were able to give information about that landscape.
- The route and the event were well planned. James, the National Park Authority and Mosaic worked together to pull it off.
- James was able to apply for funds through the Mosaic project to help pay for food and camping fees.

What did Mosaic project do?

- James had been a Mosaic Young Champion in Exmoor for 18 months. Over that period he has helped out at National Park Adventure Days and done conservation work, walk leader training and a range of other activities on Exmoor.
- Mosaic's partnership with the National Park Authority meant that James could get support for his walk - equipment, knowledge and guidance.
- James had been keen to do something like this for some time but had not had the confidence or resources to organise it. Consistent support throughout his time as a Champion helped him gain the confidence to pull this off.
- Having a ready made group of young champions who were willing to take part and inspired by the idea was important.

What did people get out of it?

- James said, 'it's given me a massive amount of confidence. Didn't think I could plan such a large event'. It was a big thing to see an idea grow into a plan and eventually a successful event. James and another Champion are now planning to set up a business that takes people on historical and re-enacted walking tours on Exmoor once he's finished college.
- The National Park Authority were pleased to take part and introduce the young people to the beauty and cultural heritage of Exmoor.
- The young people who took part felt a huge sense of achievement from doing such a long walk and of course made friends along the way. Some of them are now thinking about how to set up a teenagers' walking group in the area.

Case Study 2: The Coast-to-Coast Bike Ride



'Complete! Toughest thing I've done, not just physically but mentally also. Great work Clive, Steph, Nafaa, Cameron, Laura, Marcio, Paddy & to the rest of the team!' Shofi Islam, Young Champion, Newcastle.

It started in the west end of Newcastle. A group of Champions were chatting with their Mosaic project officer, Paddy, about what they could do in the Northumberland National Park in their local youth centre run by the CHAT trust. They were interested in cycling and wondered how to get hold of bikes and get them to the National Park. At that time, the Northumberland National Park was opening a new cycle trail – the Sandstone Way. Paddy talked to the National Park Authority and they provided bikes and requested the group to test out part of the new trail. The group went out for a day – some more experienced on bikes than others – and had a brilliant day. They were joined by National Park staff and ended the day giving feedback on the ride – unanimously positive. 'So what can we do next?'

Out of that day Mosaic linked up with Sustrans, who encourage more people to use and own bikes, and a local Cycling CIC, Bike for Health. The next idea was to cycle from Newcastle to Kielder in the National Park. A two-day bike ride, 60 miles in length and the first time any of the Champions had done anything like it. 'It was a real mission – it was cool to start in the middle of Newcastle and end up in this beautiful place,' said Paddy. The group who did this mission consisted of two groups of friends, from different parts of Newcastle and different social backgrounds. They had a fantastic time, sleeping in a camping barn, preparing their own food and doing some hard cycling. Afterwards, one of them commented, 'they weren't the people I'd usually hang out with, but we got on really well. It was great'. No-one put emphasis on the fact that the group were from such different backgrounds – it just was – and it worked.

Inspired by this, some of the lads contacted the Mosaic project officer. They wanted to ride coast to coast – from Whitehaven in Cumbria to Newcastle across the Lake District and Northumberland National Parks - to raise money for the CHAT trust. We brought in the National Park Authority, Sustrans and Bike for Health. They were generous and together the adventure was planned. Champions worked with Sustrans and Bike for Health on the route, they sorted out food and accommodation. The YHA, one of Mosaic's partners, offered a night's accommodation in Alston. Bike for Health offered to lead the ride and loan bikes. The group found a photographer and he became the support vehicle. The Champions applied to the Key Fund to fund the ride – with help from Paddy, a trained keyfund facilitator. The National Park lent waterproofs and did press work.

It was a challenging ride – 120 miles over three days. A few of the Lake District Champions joined them – cycling from their hometown of Whitehaven. They were all committed to the ride and all of them made it, notwithstanding a few bumps and bruises along the way. ‘I’ve never been over to the Lake District – I was blown away by it,’ said Cameron, one of the Northumberland Champions. ‘The experience of cycling for three days and going all the way across the country was amazing!’

Why did it work?

- The champions had the idea and had a purpose for doing it – not only a personal challenge to ride across the country, but also to raise money for their youth centre.
- Their energy created a strong partnership between the Champions and the supporting organisations – Mosaic, Sustrans, Bike for Health and the National Park Authority. With everyone inspired, each party found ways of contributing what was right.
- The Champions were from very different areas and backgrounds – but their single purpose in doing the ride united them and friendships were struck
- There was a long build up to the event with other bike rides before it in Northumberland National Park, supported by Mosaic, Sustrans and Bike for Health.

What did the Mosaic project do?

- Supported the Champions who had the original idea of trying out cycling and then the idea of cycling coast to coast to do it – on their own terms.
- Used contacts with other organisations to bring them into the adventure. They all had their own reasons for being involved but had the same intention.
- Project Officer was trained to help with Key Fund applications – the Champions could work with him to create their application.
- Being a national project, we linked up the Northumberland Champions with the Lake District Champions. It gave the ride a bigger feel and gave people the opportunity to meet others from different places.
- We marketed the ride on social media and other channels. More people heard about it and more people sponsored the Champions.

What did people get out of it?

- Champions gained confidence from conceiving an idea and seeing it through to a challenging end.
- Some of the Champions who did the ride were inspired to do bike leader training with Sustrans. They are now leading rides for younger people who use the CHAT trust youth centre, many of whom have not used a bike before. Younger members of the youth centre have also been inspired by the stories, video and images of the ride.
- Most of the Champions have continued to do lots of cycling – some in the Northumberland National Park.

Case Study 3: The New Forest National Park All-Staff meeting



'One member of staff ... was very inspired by what you had said and plans to try and find ways of making his work more focussed on providing opportunities for young people' Excerpt from email to Young Champions from New Forest NPA officer.

Troy, Amy and Jordy, 3 young champions, talk to youngsters about the New forest National Park. Amy spoke about this day as one of the highlights of being a Young Champion.

The entire staff of the New Forest National Park Authority were gathered for their bi-monthly all-staff meeting in the wooden panelled Council Chambers in Lymington. Step up four Young Champions. They spoke with humour and poignancy about how they got involved in the New Forest National Park and what they'd done – ('hand feeding a lynx', 'talking to the public about the New Forest'). At the end, each of them asked a question of the Authority staff. Amy asked 'How can I get more involved? What activities are there aimed at our age in the New forest?', Marianne's question was 'How are you involving young people in the New Forest's future – especially with changes in technology and climate?'

One of the Champions had a background of trauma and extremely low self-esteem. He wasn't there at the beginning and we thought he'd bottled. But just as we were about to start he slipped in, suited and booted. And for the first time in his life he spoke in public to a full room. That he even came was testimony to how important the National Park and Mosaic was to him. His words about what an impact the New forest had made on him and his health kept people talking about him for months and months afterwards.

By the end of it staff were visibly moved by the Champions' stories, but not only that, they offered help, such as regular workshadowing on archaeology and teaching a group of Young Champions about surveying. By the end of the meeting, the Champions were all standing an inch taller too – They'd done fantastic presentations in front of a large crowd and received amazing feedback.

Preparation

The idea came from the Mosaic project officer and the lead officer from the National Park Authority. They wanted staff across the organisation to know about the Mosaic project, but also to

better understand the New Forest from the perspective of a group of 16 to 25 year olds. Two weeks before the event Gillie, the NPA officer, and Sarah, the Mosaic project officer, organised a workshop for 8 young champions in the Council Chamber – it's an intimidating room and it was enormously helpful to the Champions that they'd spent a day in there before. They provided good food and did a series of reflective activities with the group. They looked at photos of sessions they'd done in the National Park – conservation volunteering, archery, walks in the forest, shared memories about what they'd done and what it meant to each of them. They each described their own story of getting to know the National Park, what they'd got out of it, what more they wanted to do – and this formed the basis for their presentation. It was important doing this session consciously and indoors where there is less distraction than the usual outdoor locations.

What did people get out of it?

Following the event staff organised several sessions with the Young Champions in areas they had said they were interested in. This included group training sessions, conservation volunteering and work experience for individuals. It resulted in real interest in young people across the Authority which in turn sparked off more ideas. Gillie wrote shortly after the event, *'I was inundated during the rest of the day with people coming up to me to ask about the project and say how much they'd enjoyed the meeting and how well you had done. One member of staff who has been with the Authority for a number of years said it was the best team meeting he had ever been to! He was very inspired by what you had said and plans to try and find ways of making his work more focussed on providing opportunities for young people.'*

The Champions gained enormous confidence. They also suddenly understood what the National Park Authority is and what lies behind the extraordinary landscapes.

Why did it work well?

Both Gillie and Sarah and the Champions were able to put in a day's preparation. This made the event successful. It made the champions confident enough to be themselves standing in front of all those people.

The event reaffirmed that consciously taking part in this type of event is very important – and not only for the project but the impact it had on the Young Champions and the staff at the National Park. A year later the Chief Executive of the New Forest National Park is still talking about the stories she heard from the Young Champions on that day.

Case Study 4: The Full Cycle Project



'I'm really proud of coming out of my comfort zone and actually making a knife and a rolling pin'
Beth, Young Champion from Barrow-in-Furness

Between February and December 2015 fourteen young people from Barrow-in-Furness travelled once a month or so to the historic industrial woodlands of the Rusland Valley to take part in the Full Cycle project. They learnt woodland management skills and the history and ecology of the area. The regular sessions encompassed the cycle of woodland management; coppicing, making charcoal, forging blades and green woodworking.

The Full Cycle project was a partnership between the Lake District National Park, CNP's Mosaic project and Woodmatters. It was a pilot for the Rusland Horizons project¹. The fourteen from Barrow were volunteer Champions with the Lake District National Park. For many of them, the first session in the Rusland Valley was the first time they had visited woodlands.

We started by gathering a skilled and enthusiastic team. Clare, Mosaic project officer, is an experienced youth worker with an infectious enthusiasm for the outdoors and links with local youth groups and organisations. Gareth runs a small company, Woodmatters, another enthusiast with deep knowledge of the woodland and a skill for passing it on. Wilky is a Lake District National Park Ranger, also knowledgeable and skilled at working with volunteers and inspiring people. Marion works at the National Park Authority and kept everything together and organised – a critical role. The team were deeply committed to the woodland and sharing it with others.

Clare and a Mosaic Young Champion, James, (also a Barrow lad) visited a few youth organisations in Barrow – Furness College, the Prince's Trust, a local housing association. They showed pictures of the woodland, talked about it and presented the plan for the Full Cycle project. James talked about his experience the previous summer doing work experience as a coppicer. Fourteen people signed up and took part in the first session.

¹ The Lake District National Park received development funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for landscape partnership funding. The Full Cycle Project was a pilot for engaging local communities in the woodland.

The first session was a taster day – the group got to know the area, learnt a little about trees (“I didn’t realise there were different types of tree!”), learnt green woodworking techniques and made mallets, cooked on a campfire. Following that day each session focussed on one skill in particular, such as charcoal burning or forging. In the summer the group did a weekend in the woods, camping out in hammocks, cooking, identifying wildlife, talking. The sessions were run by Gareth, sometimes with help from Wilky and Clare. Sometimes others came too. Colin Barr, who runs Rusland Horizons and is a NPA member came a couple of times. During the weekend in the woods, some of the local regular volunteers turned up with chocolate and chatter. Everyone enjoyed talking to each other – meeting people across generations and social backgrounds they wouldn’t normally meet.

What did the young champions get out of it?

‘I’ve learnt knowledge about charcoal, coppicing and stuff about the area and met more people. I feel more healthy being outdoors and doing things more active and getting exercise. I feel ‘good tired’ at the end of a full cycle day’ (Aiden, Young Champion)

The young champions gained knowledge about woodland and local history. They got basic skills in coppicing, charcoal burning, forging, green woodworking and using a range of tools. For most of them ‘actually making the blades and mallets’ was a highlight. They learnt the language of woodland management and to identify different trees, birds and other wildlife.

They learnt about lighting fires, camping, being safe and confident in the outdoors, keeping warm, looking after themselves and others, cooking meals – leading to discussions about diet and health.

They gained soft skills. All of them reported feeling more confident through the project. Some said they got to see people in a new light and change their relationships for the better.

Beth started taking the lead amongst the group. She found a real skill for coordinating and organising people. Now she’s on a course learning about working overseas and leadership. Josh only did a few sessions at the start. He then attended a Mosaic national event and found out about the YHA. He signed up as a volunteer and after a few months got seasonal work with them. Aiden found his strength and is now applying for an apprenticeship on the scheme.

Why did it work?

The activities

Champions had the opportunity to engage in woodlands in a creative and active way. They got a sense of place by returning to the same place each time. The series of roughly regular sessions – all part of something bigger – made it easy to identify with and feel part of.

The sessions included a balance of fun, learning technical skills, doing things as a group such as cooking, space for doing things alone, and there was always a range of people – not just the Young Champions. It gave everyone a chance to do something completely outside their normal lives.

The weekend in the woods was important. It deepened understanding in a way that the day visits couldn’t do.

The people

The team running the project was hugely enthusiastic and committed. They created a fantastic group dynamic and a safe space. There was lots of banter, but plenty of serious time too.

James, a young champion, who had already been with Mosaic for a year helped with the initial recruitment. They could identify with him. During the project he was a mentor for both the staff and young people. It was also good for him - he's now studying forestry.

No-one had to attend every session. Some people joined part way through, others stopped coming for a while and then came back. The door was always open.

Being part of something bigger

The project was great for the National Park Authority. Not only did young Cumbrians engage in the Park, but they helped restore a woodland. The NPA sold the wood to the bobbin mill and registered benefits to wildlife through the coppicing. They supported it strongly.

Full Cycle wasn't just about the young people – it was bigger than that. They met others who were involved and the others met them. They felt part of something bigger.

The Full Cycle project was like an anchor for this group. They did other things with the National Park Authority and through Mosaic. Being part of the project and a recognisable group gave them the confidence to do other things.

The group shared photos and comments on each day on Facebook after most sessions. This sustained their own interest and got some of their friends interested, and eventually involved as well. This wasn't organised – it just happened.

Challenges

Some days only a few people came. Communication between days needed to be consistent and often. This wasn't always possible due to time and geographical constraints. When only a few people came, it affected morale.

It worked better for the organisers to draw up a list of dates with a named session by each one (e.g. 12 April – Making Charcoal) as it helped the group see the structure of the programme and feel more committed to it.

This project was hard work and required strong time and energy commitment and understanding from the staff. Sometimes members of the group lost confidence or had issues at home. It could be frustrating when not everyone turned up, but the door was always left open and there was always a reason. Building a strong relationship with each person in the group was critical to understanding that.

What did the Mosaic do?

- Outreach in Barrow, done by a project officer and an experienced young champion
- Provided transport and food for the young people who took part
- Helped run the sessions and with evaluation

- Provided between-session support to the young people – from reminding them when sessions were to more intensive support
- Provided other opportunities to the young people to get involved with National Parks in other ways such as feeding back to staff, visiting other areas, taking part in the national annual event.
- Linked young champions with other organisations which was useful for progression. For example, one young champion volunteered and then got a job with the YHA.

This case study includes extracts from the Lake District National Park Authority interim evaluation report.