

Press Release

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Walk on the Wild Side

An expedition in the wild has taught a group of Air Cadets the thrill of land-based adventure.

Cadets from the Number 3 Welsh Wing Air Training Corps are used to reaching for the skies – but recently they've found something fascinating about keeping their feet firmly on the ground, thanks to a Sports Leaders UK course.

The Air Cadets, from the Swansea Wing, have been learning the fundamentals of group leadership through the Level 2 Award in Basic Expedition Leadership (known as the Level 3 Certificate in Basic Expedition Leadership from 1 September 2010). This nationally recognised qualification has proved popular across the country, as well as across disciplines. In fact, it's such a thoroughly solid training that Number 3 Welsh Wing have now decided all prospective outdoor leaders will need to pass it as a prerequisite. Squadron Leader Lynn Jeremiah, the Wing Adventure Training Officer, explains why.

"We're using it as our baseline, our starting point. As well as covering the basics of expeditions, it also raises awareness in general about group leadership and safety. Candidates have a lot to take on board for this course. It's quite intensive training – but at the end of it, we know they'll have a thorough grounding in expedition leadership and be able to cope with the kind of situations you'd expect to arise in lowland camping."

This 'solid grounding' includes units on weather and using forecasts to predict and plan; First Aid training; selecting and using appropriate equipment; and basic camp skills like cooking outdoors.

"They learn from the bottom up," continued Sqn Ldr Jeremiah. "This starts with basic map reading and camp-craft - such as the best places to make camp and the sort of issues you need to consider before doing so. Map reading is obviously very important, so these skills are put to the test, as are the things to look out for to protect the other members of your group. Candidates are asked to consider the planning and preparation aspect for routes, equipment, emergency supplies and backup."

Candidate Rhian James enjoyed the whole course package. "It was great fun," he says. "It wasn't easy, but there wasn't one part I found boring. I feel capable now of preparing cadets to undertake their Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, and I'd recommend this course to anyone considering going on it."

The Level 3 Certificate in Basic Expedition Leadership is split up into units, each one allocated a certain number of hours to both practice and deliver. Units include planning and preparation; basic navigation; and understanding conservation and how that can affect access for an expedition. Whilst the course is aimed at low-level trekkers, the camping weekends were definitely no walk in the park.

“They camped out in the Afan Argoed forest in all weathers and had to fend for themselves,” says Sqn Ldr Jeremiah. “Cadets got to grips with what weather forecasts can really mean, and the potential dangers and issues of the type of terrain they were in. This part of the course really brought the team together! Then at the end of the expedition element of the award, there was community work to be organised and carried out back in Swansea Wing.”

The Number 3 Welsh Wing team completed their allocated hours of tuition and assessment, which included two camping weekends of two nights each. Candidates led their own teams and pitched their own camps, with their basic expedition skills being supervised and assessed by a qualified Mountain Leader.

To complete the qualification, candidates also carried out more than 30 hours of service in their local communities, training other young people. Air Cadets do this training with their own squadron – and assist other local squadrons. “In this way,” says Sqn Ldr Jeremiah, “they can give something back to their squadron by helping bring on the next group of young cadets.”

The Air Training Corps is a youth organisation similar in make-up to the Army Cadets – a group with a military theme, designed to help young people gain experience, friendship and knowledge that will serve them well in later life. There are more than 1,000 squadrons based in large towns across the length and breadth of the country, working with young people from 13 to 20 years of age.

“Some cadets go on to military careers, but most become involved in jobs in civilian life,” says Sqn Ldr Jeremiah. “We’re trying to help them develop into good citizens - and the Sports Leaders UK courses are helping us achieve just that.”

Note to editors:

Sports Leaders UK is a charity delivering sports leadership awards and qualifications to more than 200,000 people a year, through 4,000 schools, colleges, local authorities, prisons and young offender units. It acts as an Awarding Body providing nationally recognised qualifications, and has a Foundation to deliver free or subsidised courses in areas of greatest need.

Sports Leaders UK

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