

## LOCAL YOUTHS NO LONGER LANDLUBBERS AS THEY RETURN FROM SAILING THE OPEN SEAS

SIX YOUNG PEOPLE from Buckinghamshire schools put their sailing skills to the test last week as they skippered a yacht for the first time.

The intrepid sailors were at the mercy of the elements, facing anything from force 7 to force 9 gales as they sailed around waters in Southampton, Lymington and Cowes on the Isle of Wight.

Indeed there were times when it was just too dangerous to hoist the sails and they either abandoned them for a motor, or abandoned sailing altogether and found out more about maritime history, including the Titanic, in Southampton and about Southampton town itself.

With the help of yachtmaster Robin Gould and council youth activity development worker Geraint Hughes, the voyagers set sail in a 43' yacht on Sunday 10 August and returned to dry land on Friday 15 August. The overall aim of the watery adventure was to develop essential life skills of self confidence, respect, teamwork and self-motivation.

They devised their own menu and shopped for it within a budget. They then took turns being leader, deputy leader, cook, safety officer and motivator throughout the week.

They took part in group discussions and games which teased out their characteristics, what went well and what did.

The expedition is just one of many activities organised by Green Park Outdoors, the Council's Outdoor and Adventure Education Centre in Aylesbury, to help young people develop their potential.

The young sailors, aged 14 to 16, had previously taken part in a six-week sailing programme at Green Park in preparation for their expedition.

Geraint Hughes said: "The most exciting bit for them was when we were sailing in a force 8 wind and they were strapped in in safety harnesses while we had to use the motor instead of sails.

"This was no holiday. We really pushed them to the limits. They prepared well and have shown a high level of commitment to becoming good sailors."

Margaret Dewar, cabinet member for youth and community, said: "This was a wonderful opportunity for these young people to grow while being challenged but yet having fun. They all want to do it again. They have developed skills they can use for the rest of their lives, and hopefully will be able to mentor other young people with similar aspirations."

Lewis Brown, 15, from Aylesbury, who attends Mandeville School, said: "The most important thing I learned was how to sail a proper boat around the Solent. It was the highlight of the trip for me. I gained lots of things personally, but the best was how to take care of myself."

Sean Tann, 14, from Lacey Green, Princes Risborough, who attends Misbourne School, Great Missenden, said: "I have benefited by going on our sailing adventure because I've learned how to work as part of a team, which has developed my independence and confidence. I especially enjoyed my day as leader and the challenge of mastering a yacht over choppy seas."

Ben Cutler, 16, of Great Kimble, who attends Princes Risborough School, said: "I have learned how to sail a 43ft yacht. Also on the trip I have found out we take things for granted including the space that we have. My highlight of the trip was when we were out in the bad weather and we could not put the sails up. One of the main things I enjoyed about the trip was being with a great group of people that are caring and very helpful. From this trip I have gained personal experience of working as a team player and under pressure."

Jack Geraghty, 15, of Aylesbury, who attends Mandeville School, said: "I learned that I take for granted everyday things such as people cleaning up for me. That talking to people can just be as fun as watching the TV or on the Playstation and that sailing a boat has many other things to do with it than just putting sails up and steering!

I enjoyed sailing the boat, the evenings were fun when we had some downtime where we listened to music, played games or even just slept. The highlight of the trip would probably be the time where we were out on the sea sailing when it was really sunny and we were looking at The Needles.

I thought I gained a lot of respect for people who sail boats and that I should do more to help around the house as we had to cook and clean a lot and I mean a lot. I would definitely recommend it to other people as it was a really good experience for me."

Tom McCorkell, 15, of Aylesbury, who attends Lord Williams School said "During the sailing trip I learnt that I take a lot of things for granted such as cooking and cleaning. When I was at sea I had to cook and clean all by myself and I could not rely on my Mum or Dad doing it for me. I also learnt how to work well as a team and be able to sail and manoeuvre the yacht through some very harsh and thrilling situations.

During the trip I enjoyed meeting new people and visiting different places, I also felt the trip was well organised.

The highlight of the trip was when we sailed across the Solent from Cows to Southampton when the sea was extremely choppy and the weather conditions were not great. I feel that we all supported one another and worked well as a team.

I feel by participating in this trip I gained new friends achieved things which I didn't think I could achieve. I feel that it was a great opportunity and I am very grateful to have had the chance to try something new.

For more information about Green Park Outdoors call 01296 633833 or email [gpark@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:gpark@buckscc.gov.uk)