

Duke of Edinburgh weekend
Danbury Park
8th - 9th of March 08

Saturday morning 9 o'clock, we arrived at Danbury outdoors, very tired but so excited. As we were getting out of our cars and saying goodbye and hello to our friends we were buzzing. It was funny seeing all the people in their outdoor gear, some of the girls were in all pink, from hats to jackets, boots to trousers, it was quite amusing.

We went into a log cabin where we were given a general brief on the weekend and thinking about why we were there. The instructors, Richard, Jim, Russ and Andy talked to us about the plans for the weekend what they expected from us and what we expected out of the experience.

We stepped outside onto the open plains. It was freezing, very windy indeed! Everyone laughed at me when I arrived and I had a hat, now who was laughing. We were divided into groups and given basic team building exercises. We got through them all until there was one which seemed the simplest ever but none of the groups could do it. All it was a tent pole on the palms of two of our finger whilst we stood in a line and lowered it down until it reached the floor. None of the small groups managed it and when we got into a group of 30 and a 10 metre pole it was just a bit harder. Never the less after half an hour we did it.

Then we separated into different groups and began various activities on map readings, compass skills and using a map. To put our teachings into use we went a small orienteering course around Danbury forest with check off points. Afterwards we had a very well deserved lunch!

Back in the cabin room we had another talk just to say about the route we were going on the equipment we needed and a few other things. Then we went off in two groups with the instructors on a nice walk around Danbury. It was nice to see the outdoors and walk around in the countryside wearing in our walking boots. Most of us moaned about it at the beginning but got over it and just walked. We passed loads of farms, houses, roads, sheep and horses. In pairs we had to lead the group we were with and navigate for a bit.

The walk lasted for about two hours and when we got back to Danbury the other group were already there. It had started to get really windy and black clouds darkening in, the perfect weather to put up a tent. It took Emily and I ages to work out how to do it but eventually we got it up. It was really dark now and we had to learn how to set up the tangier. It was very confusing with all the different parts. First we had cup a soup. Then we were meant to have pasta and sauce. We

thought all you had to do was mix the pasta with boiling water. But instead it needed milk, which we didn't have. After the lovely pasta we had custard. Probably the most horrible thing I've ever eaten. It was just a bit lumpy.

After washing up from the delightful dinner we then got into groups of four and went on a walk in the dark. It was similar to the orienteering we did in the afternoon except it was pitch black apart from three tiny head torches. We were given a map and a number and had to go and find the number somewhere around the centre. It was really hard and took forever. The scariest part was in the forest in the pitch black, it was so terrifying.

We finished second but then had to wait for all the other groups to complete the course. At about 11 o'clock it was time for bed. Well sleeping mat. It was absolutely freezing in the tent. So Emily and I put on 7 layers and zipped up our sleeping bags to our ears. Everyone else was quite warm. They had three people in the tent, but in mine and Emily's tent there were just two of us sharing, the two smallest people sharing. However we were so tired we soon went to sleep and didn't wake up until our alarm went off.

In the morning we changed and washed in the shower room. We had to cook on the tangier again. Pot noodle and hot chocolate. Nice.

So it was our last day at Danbury. We had to pack everything up and put it in our rucksack. We divided the tent between the two of us and the cooking equipment up in the group. We got into the same teams as we had done the previous day for walking and set off on another hike around Danbury countryside.

This time it was so much harder. I had 9kgs on my back but some people had more. The rucksack really slowed us down and going up the hills I thought I would tip over. But my shoulders got used to it after a while. The walk was really funny so many laughs. Again on this walk we had to navigate in pairs, we had more responsibility thought this time. It was cool to feel in charge. We munched on our trail mix during the whole time of the walk, it kept us going, as well as Deana's pink wafers. We got to navigate two or three times each, and then a little while later we arrived back at the outdoors center.

We gathered back into the cabin room and had a lesson on first aid with Andy. We learnt so much about initial first aid, which will be really useful for next time.

We then had a final gathering and just reviewed the weekend. We made posters and did a presentation to the rest of the group. Our

topic was packing a rucksack, and we revised that to the rest of the team and show the guys what we had learnt.

The end of the weekend had come and we picked up our rucksacks and made our way to the car park. Heading to a roast dinner and a bath! Overall the weekend was so much fun. We had a good laugh with each other, grew to new friends as well as learning so many useful skills.

By Lizzi Pepper :)