

Our Journey To Thornbridge Outdoors

It is 9am on a Friday morning in the summer term. Year six children, accompanied by parents, dragging and carrying assorted luggage are arriving at Chapeltown Train Station in Sheffield for a weekend residential visit to Thornbridge Outdoors. Excitement mounts as we board the train bound for



Grindleford. Out of the train window, after a change of train at Sheffield Station, the children experience a gradual change from a city landscape to countryside. Following the challenge of trying to hold our breath through Totley Tunnel our train comes to an abrupt halt at Grindleford Station.

We make our way to Grindleford Café, buy some refreshments and wait for our luggage to be collected by a member of staff from Thornbridge Outdoors. Three children borrow cagoules (Thornbridge staff usually bring a few cagoules, rucksacks and wellies in case our children need to borrow them), we wave goodbye to our luggage which will be waiting on our arrival at Thornbridge, and set off on the eight mile walk that will



take us to our accommodation. We head off towards Grindleford village and then through fields and woods to Froggatt. At Froggatt the children marvel at the beautiful gardens, peer into the River Derwent looking for trout and smell the aniseed aroma of the herb Sweet Cicely. We

follow the river and the head uphill towards Stoney Middleton. Damsel flies make an electric blue spectacle and tiny frogs leap from under our feet as we pass two small ponds before we descend into Stoney Middleton village. The kind staff of The Moon Inn refill our water bottles before we head to Stoney Middleton Recreation Ground to eat our packed lunch.



After a short play in the playground, we begin the slow climb through what must be one of the most unpolluted dales in Derbyshire, Coombs Dale. This part of our walk takes quite a while as the stops are plentiful, we see black clouds of tadpoles in clear ponds, newts, orchids, herbs - marjoram, thyme and we feel the cool air coming out of Sallet Hole Mine. Eventually we get our first glimpse of Great Longstone as we look down from Longstone Edge. From here we run downhill through a meadow like field, falling with laughter at the other side.

Having walked through the village of Great Longstone, at last we push open the small iron gate that leads us to our accommodation and the excitement of the weekend ahead. The children sit on the low wall while I collect the key to our accommodation. We are all tired but satisfied with the day's activity.



About ten years ago the staff who organise the residential visit at Angram Bank Primary School decided to investigate if it was possible to travel to Thornbridge Outdoors by public transport. The main ideas behind this was to reduce cost (the cost of coach travel had greatly increased the overall cost to parents/carers) and to extend the weekend visit by a day by walking to Thornbridge from Grindleford on the Friday.

We now realise that this gradual acclimatisation to the residential greatly enhances the experience. Most children travelling have not been on a train before. Sophie wrote this after her visit: *"We started out at Chapeltown*

Station at 9:15am, waiting for the 9:38 AM Northern Rail Train to Sheffield City Station... When we arrived at the station, we switched trains, and began our expedition to Grindleford. This was an exciting experience as I had never been on a train and ended up doing more laughing than talking. Soon there were no more houses. There was a 3-4 minute long tunnel, where one of our teachers (Mr. Jacklin) said that he would give any child £10 if they could hold their breath throughout the duration of the tunnel. Of course no-one was able to do it though! As we pulled in to a platform in Grindleford, we got off the train and stopped at a nearby café..."

During the walk the children usually quickly become a close knit team and look after each other. The children have time to notice things they pass and can stop to investigate and show others. Many of our children have not been into Derbyshire walking and few have walked eight miles so this is a first experience for them. We have walked in all weathers. In 2007 we had great fun walking through 'streams' that had once been footpaths and this was the most talked about activity of that year!

Once they arrive at Thornbridge, the children settle well to tasks such as bed making or preparing tea. When they explore the grounds they continue to look at things in detail as they had on the walk. After the evening activities the children are ready for bed and usually sleep well. Paris wrote the following as part of her Thornbridge experience: *"On the way to Thornbridge Outdoors we walked 8 miles to Thornbridge. My best friend Laura and I did lack behind but Laura had broken both her toes and still managed the walk without complaining. Now normally I don't do walking but to be honest it was probably better than a coach because you saw all sorts of wildlife animals and different flowers we saw such as petunias, fox gloves, clematis and many others. We saw sheep, cows and bulls, we saw frogs and we even saw Alpacas. We walked up hills we rolled and ran down hills we walked 8miles...But when we arrived we felt an achievement not like getting off a coach we felt we earned our weekend and that walk made the trip more exciting."*

We have been able to the cost of the weekend visit to a minimum but the the biggest advantage to using public transport is having a group of children that are positive and satisfied about their day's achievement and this sets the tone for the weekend ahead.

I would urge you to consider this method of arriving at Thornbridge
Outdoors.

T. Jacklin
Angram Bank Primary School