



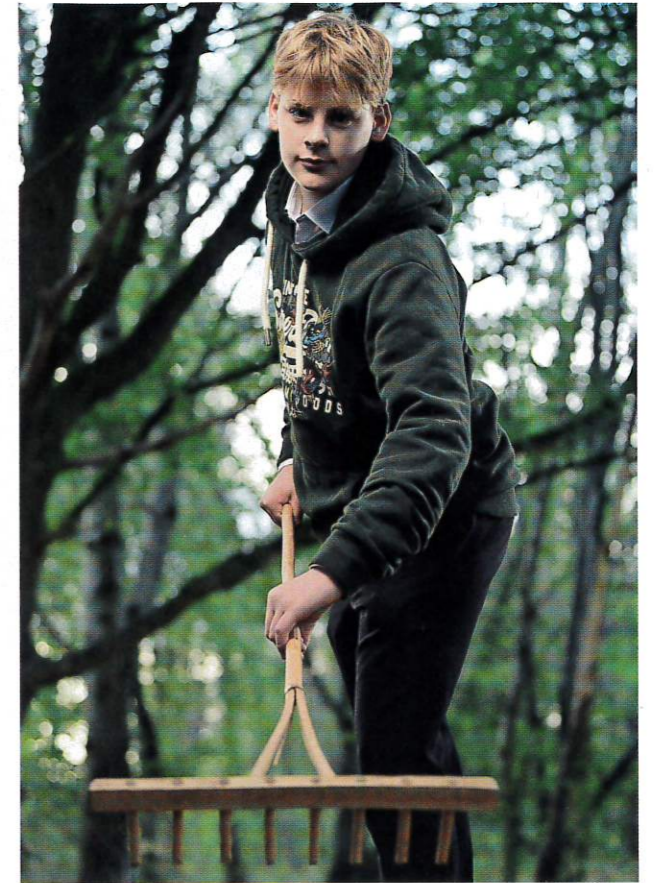
George, Joe and Riley all agree it's good to be out of the classroom in the fresh air, enjoying 'different things from what we do in school'. As Year Nine students in 2022 they were among five pupils from The Cotswold School, Bourton-on-the-Water, taking part in nine outdoor learning sessions spread across two terms.

Hosted by Cotswolds National Landscape the outdoor activities aim to give young people experience of rural skills vital to looking after the landscape and to open their eyes to the possibility of future careers in the countryside.

The day-long sessions for The Cotswold School group included drystone walling, hedgelaying, safe use of tools, and different types of woodland management. The three students enthuse about foraging for ingredients to make and cook woodland stew over an open fire: 'It actually tasted quite nice! And we carved apples and put chocolate on them to melt over the fire.'

The toughest activity was moving logs up a steep slope (there are jokes about who slipped and who fell), and the most enjoyable was tractor-driving: 'It was fun, a bit of a challenge,' they say before an animated discussion over the contrasts in handling 'two very different tractors: the older one was very plain and simple, quite easy', while the technology on the modern one took a lot more to understand.

Instructors across all sessions 'knew everything and if we didn't get something the first time,



they would go over and over it again until we did,' the three students say, adding: 'They were all-inclusive; they asked us lots of questions about what we do.'

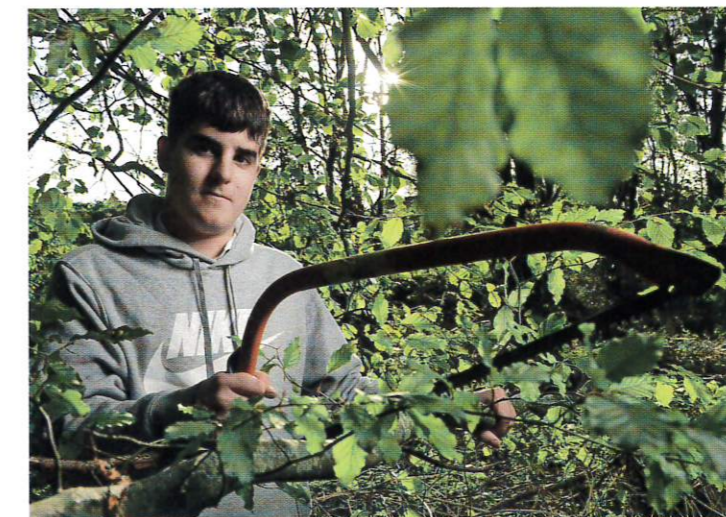
In the final session, at FarmED the centre for Farm and Food Education at Shipton-under-Wychwood, the group acted as instructors for a change: leading pond-dipping and bug-hunting activities for primary-age children.

It was good to experience the boot on the other foot, they say, admitting some of the children were a handful! (Their teacher – listening in – suggests with a smile they might now be more appreciative of the challenges of teaching. They agree.)

Are they keen to get jobs working in the countryside? George and Joe say 'yes', including in farming. When they leave school (hopefully with the required qualifications) their sights are set on Hartpury College or Harper Adams Universities. Riley is focused on another practical career, in mechanics.

They say the sessions have boosted their confidence in their abilities and, back in the classroom, given them greater understanding of the relevance to their career goals of lessons like geography, biology, science, as well as choices available to them.

The Cotswold School students were chosen to take part in the Cotswolds National Landscape rural skills project because it was thought they would benefit from the experiences. Teachers say it has been 'a massive success'



MAIN:
George, Riley and Joe have been learning how to care for the Cotswold landscape

ABOVE:
Joe and Riley (pictured left) from The Cotswold School have been taught hedgerow and meadow management

Training future land managers of the Cotswolds

Outdoor learning sessions for young people, hosted by Cotswolds National Landscape, are proving a hit: sparking interest in the countryside and training potential future land managers

WORDS: Siân Ellis ♦ PHOTOS: Russell Sach

thanks to the variety of 'high-quality learning opportunities in an industrial environment which we are unable to create in schools. It has been amazing to see the pupils' confidence levels develop during the programme,' they add: increasing their independent skills and gaining unique insight into careers and activities within rural settings. Moreover, 'the school has witnessed improved academic engagement and focus. Pupils' confidence levels and career focus has been outstanding during the programme and after.'

Sessions for a new cohort of students from the school are already under way.

BELIEF IN ABILITIES

The outdoor learning project runs for two years, from autumn 2021 through 2023, explains James Webb, partnerships and fundraising lead at Cotswolds National Landscape. In the first year some 450 places have been filled by children and young people, from inside and outside the Cotswolds. They have come mainly from schools, ranging from Naunton Park Primary School and Thomas Keble School in Stroud to Al-Ashraf Secondary School for Girls in Gloucester.

'We believe very strongly they are the next generation of land managers and leaders in the Cotswolds'

A forest school-style approach has been adopted for younger children, taking them to green spaces to learn about plants and animals, while sessions for older students like those from The Cotswold School have incorporated rural skills in farm and woodland settings.

'We have taken students to multiple farms to show different systems, from very small organic

DISCOVER MORE

To find out more about Cotswolds National Landscape's outdoors learning project, contact James Webb, partnerships and fundraising lead, james.webb@cotswoldsnaonb.org.uk



farms to big commercial arable farms and diversifications,' James says. 'We recommend multiple sessions of different activities with a group to embed learning.'

He adds: 'We want them to realise that we believe very strongly they are the next generation of land managers and leaders in the Cotswolds. We can show them different careers in the outdoors, but the direction of travel is up to them, and we tell them they need to think about the [academic] qualifications they need in order to get where they want to go. If they want to drive a tractor with GPS, for example, they need a basic understanding of English, maths and science.'

Funding for the outdoor learning project has come from several sources including Thames Water, whose dedicated Community Investment Fund is used to support (among other things) projects that: benefit a resilient environment; improve social mobility and access to



The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is looked after by the Cotswolds Conservation Board.

For more information, visit cotswoldsnaonb.org.uk or email info@cotswoldsnaonb.org.uk

TOP: George, Riley and Joe: Land managers of the future

skills; enhance wellbeing through water-based activities; help to conserve species like water voles; raise awareness of water management and conservation through education; and promote citizen science.

The Cotswolds National Landscape outdoor learning 'is a wonderful project to be involved with,' says Claudia Innes, Thames Water's community projects manager. 'Working with young people is so important, and as well as increasing skills and team working, we hope the sessions will improve wellbeing, and mental and physical health. I have had fantastic updates on pupils' focus and engagement.'

Last words to George, Joe and Riley: would they recommend rural skills and outdoors training to other students? They reply with a resounding: 'Yes.' Joe adds: 'I've been encouraging all my mates in the year below to do it because it gives you ideas and other job options.' ♦



POINT - TO - POINT

Peter McNeile reports on the grass roots of steeplechasing

An unseasonably dry summer has tried the patience of early season point-to-point secretaries staging fixtures in November. Ironic, therefore, that the opening weekend's fixtures at Knightwick in Worcestershire and Great Trethew in Cornwall were staged under heavy rain.

Knightwick's riverside location by the Teme attracted 31 runners in November, but that was dwarfed by treble that number who came for schooling afterwards. Perhaps there's mileage in adopting the model of schooling races that works so well in Ireland.

NINETEEN fixtures comprise the racing season in the geographical area run by the West Mercian Point-to-Point Association, stretching east from Ludlow to Paxford's popular Easter raceday in the North Cotswolds, and from the splendid Tabley House near Knutsford in Cheshire to the equally grand Didmarton, by the gates of Badminton House. Couched between these are picturesque rural venues, each with its own ambiance. A clever ruse this year is the invention of season tickets, offering entry to all fixtures. The £130 price tag makes this a realisable New Year treat, starting at Chaddesley on December 28.

The news from Cheshire is that Cousin Pascal, winner of the Aintree Foxhunter Chase last April, will be aimed for the race again via Haydock in February, and a ladies' race beforehand. Lady riders are no novelty between the flags, unlike under Rules, where flagbearers like Bryony Frost and Racheal Blackmore are still in the minority. Nearly 50 per cent of



Welcome to a new season

riders in amateur steeplechasing are women, and it's a great credit that the sport is so open to all comers.

TIME WAS when riders between the flags were farmers' sons and daughters, or owner-riders. Now many riders already work professionally within the sport. However, there are still owner-riders about, funding their own horses. They are a select bunch, not least as this is a rich man's game.

ABOVE: David Maxwell, from Chedworth, finishing alone at Chaddesley

Following the retirement of Sam Waley-Cohen after his memorable victory on Noble Yeats in this Spring's Grand National, senior amateur status now sits with property entrepreneur David Maxwell, who has a Cotswold bolthole in Chedworth. David's affable and self-effacing, but with a sharp mind to crunch the numbers in the competitive world of property finance. That modest approach disappears while racing, where he has a terrific record of 60 wins under Rules and another 40 Point-to-Point winners, born of a competitive streak. Like every amateur, his dream is to win the Cheltenham Foxhunter at the Festival, but more recently, he acquitted himself well in November's Paddy Power Gold Cup, generally the domain of the top professionals only, just a 121 7th to Simply The Betts. Expect to see his colours on our courses over the next few months.

THE RACING world is a remarkably small one, and one thing we do very well over here is export our knowledge worldwide. Guiting Power-based Wendy Rollason is currently combining duties as general factotum to top jockey Tom Scudamore with a senior role at Stratford Racecourse.

Wendy's no stranger to the pointing scene, but her daughter Maisie has been working for trainer David Eustace in Australia these past few years and looks after no less than Gold Trip, winner of this year's Melbourne Cup. Looks like Maisie might be turning left on the plane next time she returns home. ♦ For details of upcoming fixtures and to buy tickets, visit: pointingwm.co.uk

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