

INFORMATION FOR VISIT ORGANISERS

Plas Pencelli is a Swindon owned Outdoor Education Centre based on the edge of the Brecon Beacons of South Wales. Historically it has had many links with Wiltshire schools which continues and they still represent one of our largest user groups. The Centre specializes in providing residential, outdoor education courses for young people from 9 years up to adulthood. Apart from working with schools we are also regularly involved in the training of youth groups, teachers, management groups, members of the public on recreational courses and those seeking to specialize and gain National Governing Body Awards. The pool of specialist outdoor staff also allows involvement in a range of specialist and advisory ventures including the current role of outdoor educational advisory service for Swindon Borough Council.

Outdoor Education

Plas Pencelli provides programmes of Outdoor Education that make a unique and powerful contribution to each individual's broad education and development. Using a variety of instructional methods adapted to a range of individual learning styles within a challenging environment each course also focuses on many specific learning objectives within the National Curriculum. In particular the disciplines of Citizenship, Physical Education and Personal, Social and Health Education are particularly well visited. Achievement is centred on 4 main areas: *personal development; relationships; social skills and appreciation of the natural environment*. Throughout each course a high priority is placed on Health and Safety.

Outdoor Health & Safety

The Centre complies with current legislation on the operation of outdoor activity centres. This involves compulsory annual inspection by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) on behalf of the Health & Safety Executive. In brief this looks closely at the staff used, the procedures employed, the activities undertaken and the facilities and equipment used. Further background information is available on the website www.aala.org.uk. This information may be useful for parents. Meanwhile the Department for Education and Skills has issued generic guidance to schools on educational visits. Much of this guidance overlaps with the work of AALA. Again Plas Pencelli uses this valuable source of guidance. In terms of activities there is great emphasis placed on LEA advice and also advice by *technical advisors*. The staff pool at Plas Pencelli contains sufficiently experienced and qualified staff that most technical aspects can be covered "in house".

A wide range of risk assessments covering more than a hundred locations are held. The staff we deploy are subject to Swindon Borough Council recruitment systems and are selected, trained and approved in a systematic manner. Daily activity is monitored, directed and reviewed by a tight management structure. All outdoor equipment used is chosen, inspected and maintained in accordance with guidelines laid down by the EEC. National governing body guidelines are used when running activities.

From a safety perspective Plas Pencelli monitors and controls the risks that visitors are subject to from the point of arrival until the point of departure. Additionally group organizers will also want to consider and take steps to control the risks associated with coach travel and supervising young people in a residential setting. Visiting staff retain pastoral care of their students, particularly so overnight. It is suggested that these areas would normally be risk assessed by leaders.

Centre Recognition

Plas Pencelli is a Licensed Provider under the terms of The Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995. This is a statutory requirement and is achieved by adopting sound principles and systems of establishing and managing adequate levels of safety whilst moving in and around the outdoor environment. The Centre receives rigorous annual inspections to ensure that we conform to current safety standards in the Outdoor sector. Plas Pencelli is also a *Welsh Canoeing Association* approved Centre for the instruction of Canoeing and a *Mountain Leader Training England* approved Centre for Mountain and Rock Climbing Training. Additionally *British Cave Association* courses are also run from the Centre.

Staffing

The professional staff at the Centre are all well qualified leaders with a wide range of expertise and experience of instructing and leading groups in a range of outdoor activities. They are not just outdoor leaders but are attuned to the outdoor educational philosophy that the Centre promotes. By developing good group and individual professional relationships they are able to play an effective part in personal and social development. Staff fully comply with the requirements of the activities licensing authority and are approved to run activities within the safety frameworks set out by Swindon Borough Council. You can be confident that a high level of safety is maintained on all the courses we run. For further details please see the licensing authority's website - www.aala.org. Our outdoor Leaders are also assisted in their roles by a team of Assistants. These are usually young people spending a year or so at the Centre.

They learn new skills and gain experience in working with young people in the outdoors. Many go on to become outdoor leaders in their own right.

Courses

All activities are overseen by the management team on a daily basis. Each programme is individually designed and visiting staff are invited to make contact before their visit to discuss aims and preferences. Each course broadly focuses on sound outdoor educational principles but visiting staff will also want to introduce their own particular aims for their students which are likely to be complimentary in nature. The aim is to create as many positive learning experiences as the course length permits.

Instructors make use of many different venues for different venues for different outdoor activities. To use the best ones Centre minibuses are used for travel. Venues are chosen taking into account the age, experience and needs of the students, group dynamics and anticipated learning outcomes. Courses are also flexible to account for changes in the weather, other local conditions and logistics.

Students are encouraged to take an active role during their stay at Plas Pencelli. They are given a number of responsibilities. These include making packed lunches, clearing up after meals, house duties, organizing group lunch crates and flasks and helping prepare and put away group activity equipment. Reviewing is very important to the aims of each week. The process is on-going and is the focus of at least one staff meeting each day.

Staff Responsibilities

Activities and venues are continually monitored by the management team. Centre Staff are assigned responsibility to discharge their duties safely and effectively. Their plans for each day are discussed formally within a staff meeting and are always subject to veto by the management team. This applies particularly to the choice of activity and venue.

There is a degree of transferability of responsibility between Centre staff and Visiting staff during the stay of a group. The body of responsibility for the students when on activities rests with the Centre staff. As it is not expected that Visiting staff are experienced in any of the outdoor activities pursued any other arrangement wouldn't be logical. However, it is suggested that visiting staff should be enthusiastic and supportive of the work done by Plas Pencelli staff. Visiting staff will also want to be involved in issues to do with student behaviour.

The Instructor will discuss with the Visiting member of staff their role on any specific day. Schools benefit tremendously from the shared experience between staff and students.

It is highly desirable that at least one member of Visiting staff accompanies each activity group during the day. If this is not possible we will always ensure that there are at least 2 responsible adults with every activity group.

The evening session is coordinated by a Plas Pencelli Instructor with the help of Assistants and Visiting staff. At 9.15 pm Visiting staff take welfare responsibility for their students until 9am the next day. A member of the Plas Pencelli staff will be in residence every night undertaking security duties and is also available in case of domestic crisis. For more serious incidents a member of the management team will be on call and reside locally.

Equipment

All protective clothing and safety equipment conforms to European Safety Standards. Equipment is subject to regular checking which is recorded for Health and Safety purposes. Students are encouraged to take some responsibility for their own and loaned equipment. This involves hanging equipment in the areas provided and a responsibility for paying for all lost or damaged equipment. All safety equipment is checked immediately before activities to ensure it is fitted and worn properly.

General Health and Safety

The Centre has a comprehensive Health and Safety Policy which assures the safety and well-being of all persons within the Centre environment as well as identifying managerial responsibilities and attributing specific responsibilities to appropriate members of staff. Instructors are responsible for the safety of students and visiting teachers within their care during activity time, and also for specific stores of equipment. Plas Pencelli maintains an up to date record of all accidents, and this helps in the process of continually updating risk assessments. The accident record book is available for inspection.

Each group that visits the Centre is briefed on fire evacuation procedures and a fire drill is carried out. Fire alarm checking is recorded. Parental consent forms are sent to schools prior to the visit. These indicate any medical or dietary requirements which may be relevant, swimming ability, past experience and emergency contact details. These should be returned to the Centre **at least two weeks** before the course commences so that any necessary preparations can be made.

Insurance

Plas Pencelli holds full public and employers' liability insurance. However, you are advised to take out personal 'trip' insurance for all members of your party for the duration of your visit.

Current advice from the DfES recommends: "*the group leader should write to the parents to tell them which responsibilities the LEA/School accepts and the scope of any insurance cover the school is to arrange*".

Relatively inexpensive travel insurance for groups visiting Plas Pencelli can be arranged by party leaders through a number of companies including:-
Endsleigh Insurance, FREEPOST, 42-44 Commercial Road, SWINDON SN1 5BR
Tel: 01793 512622.

Arrival Times

Coaches aren't able to drive up the narrow lanes right up to the Centre. Instead they stop at the large lay-by immediately south of the village. A Centre trailer is used to transport bags to the Centre and students walk the short distance. The most common arrival times are 11 am on a Monday or 5.30 pm on a Sunday. Monday arrangements are straight forward but on a Sunday staff are only available from 5 pm. It's best to time your journey so that you don't arrive much before 5 pm and so avoid a wait. Ideally you would ring the Centre (01874 665241) when passing through Abergavenny. This gives enough warning for the trailer to be put into position. If running late a phone call would also be useful. Any messages left will be picked up.

Accommodation

Accommodation conforms to standards identified in the A>C>A>C> code of practice for Outdoor Adventure Activity Providers. It is comfortable rather than luxurious and is in line with the aims of a course of outdoor education. All bedding is provided and all rooms are centrally heated. Reconnaissance visits by organisers are welcomed. Please contact the Head of Centre for an appointment.

Student Kit

An equipment list is supplied but the following are worth emphasising:

- 1 Hats and gloves should be brought by each person, regardless of the time of year.
- 2 Visitors are encouraged to bring their own outdoor clothing and footwear if they already possess it. This will be checked for suitability by the staff at Plas Pencelli.
- 3 All visitors should bring 2 large bin liners to line their rucksacks and for wet clothes.
- 4 It's important to bring several sets of outdoor clothes for activities as they are likely to get wet most days and drying can be problematical.

Student Possessions

Money - there is little to spend money on during a stay at Plas Pencelli so it is advised that students bring only a modest amount.

Mobile phones - courses at Plas Pencelli are intense periods of personal development relying on establishing good levels of communication. Mobile phones can undermine this process. They are also a theft risk. We ask that students don't bring phones to Plas Pencelli.

Aerosol sprays - these can adversely affect asthmatics and set off fire alarms so that again students aren't allowed to bring these to the Centre.

Centre Shop

The Centre shop is available to be run by visiting staff during each evening if required. The Centre shop can be opened most evenings for sweets and drinks as well as souvenirs. Students need only bring a small amount of cash to the Centre, but it is useful if they are able to buy one chocolate bar to keep in their rucksack for emergency use. The following items are usually available from the shop:-

Drinks; Sweets; Pens; Pencils; Badges; Souvenirs; Postcards.

Records of Achievement

Records of Achievement are available from the Centre at £1 each. It is usual for party leaders to pay for these at the end of the course or have the charge added to their invoice. Please ask students to bring pens/pencils for their record of achievement sessions.

Leisure Centre

The evening programme usually includes a visit to the Swimming Pool in Brecon. There is an additional charge for this which is at present £2.10 for children and is likely to change at the beginning of the new financial year. There is also a climbing wall and ten pin bowling alley along with other facilities.

Please note: The students' telephone number is 01874 665909 in the main house and 01874 665908 in the Lodge. The office number is 01874 665241 which is available as an emergency contact number in office hours. At other times use one of the student numbers as an emergency contact. It is advisable to provide a mobile number for emergency contact that is carried by one of your visiting staff.

If you require any further information about your visit then please contact:

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www.plaspencelli.co.uk