



Aim Higher

For a career in outdoor pursuits

What is a career in Outdoor Pursuits?

Outdoor careers can include such jobs as instructor at a centre or freelance, teacher, youth leader, sports coach, countryside ranger, development trainer or centre manager. You could be working in this country or abroad. In a big city or out in the wilds. You could be part of a large team or work one-to-one with clients. The training available is equally diverse partly because of the range of career paths available and partly because of the range of skills you need to be competent at the job. This is a brief guide to your options as a school leaver.

Within the field there are opportunities for 'apprenticeship' roles suited to inexperienced enthusiasts of school age and above. Our company ROCK FROG allows 14 year olds and upwards on to it's trainee scheme. The earlier you start, the better. You can gain a number of the basic skills and become practiced at working with groups well before you are allowed to take any formal qualification assessments at age 18.

Despite the wide range of options for work in this field there are skills common to all those who have success in a career in outdoor pursuits.

- Technical skills such as personal proficiency in the activity, management skills and environmental skills.
- Process skills such as instructing and group leadership.
- Meta skills such as sound judgment, creative thinking, ethical behaviour and clear vision.

With the right attitude, aptitude and good training the technical skills are the easiest to achieve but the meta skills grow over a lifetime. It is very important to focus on your meta skills when constructing a C.V. as employers know these are preferable in a trainee. Technical skills can be picked up along the way.

If you are seriously interested in a career in the outdoors there are several branches of the profession from which to choose and many routes you can take to get there. The three main areas are:

Outdoor Recreation:

leading people on outdoor activity sessions and trips or instructing people in the skills of their chosen outdoor pursuit. Roles include leading, coaching, technician and recreation manager.

Outdoor Education:

using outdoor experiences, including both environmental and adventure activities, to provide learning opportunities for people in through and about the outdoors. Roles include teacher, tutor and youth worker.

Outdoor Training:

using outdoor experiences, probably combined with other training methods, to help people realise their potential as individuals, in teams or for organisations. Roles include development trainer and therapist.

Another option is to specialise in the provision of facilities such as kit stores, climbing walls, day and residential centres and country parks. This field of Facility Management often retains a strong people focus as public relations is very important. Roles include centre manager, technician, and countryside ranger.

A related field is Countryside Recreation. Contact the Countryside Commission for details of career and training opportunities in this field.

You can train for a career in the outdoors full time, part time or on the job.

On the Job Training. It clearly helps to have qualifications when you are applying for a post but it is not essential if you are prepared to volunteer or accept low salaries in exchange for training. A good employer will provide a full induction training programme and may offer you opportunities to train for and be assessed in certain qualifications even for a seasonal appointment. An active interest in outdoor activities will help your application as will involvement in youth work as a group member or a young leader.

Some employers offer Volunteer or Training Placements for which you or a training agency pay. In this case you should have a number of opportunities to gain awards whilst on the job. The awards most likely to be offered are outdoor coaching awards from the various governing bodies of sport covering activities such as orienteering, sailing, canoeing, caving, mountain walking, single pitch climbing, etc. Most of these awards are soon to change so that they are recognised as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) for coaches. An important award to obtain is a first aid certificate as this is needed in all outdoor work. It may also be possible to obtain NVQ's in facility operations through opportunities such as these.

There are a few Youth Training and Modern Apprenticeship schemes available for people interested in this field of work but are unable to find employment. To see if there is one near you ask at your job centre.

When selecting an organisation ensure that they work in the sector in which you would like to operate ie outdoor activity holidays (recreation) or outdoor education.

Further Education

It has been possible for a number of years to take an award in Leisure Studies which specialises in outdoor recreation. It is now possible to follow a similar course with an outdoor education option. Colleges to consider include Bicton, Norfolk, West Cumbria, Reaseheath College, Cheshire and Amersham and West Sussex Colleges of Further Education.

These courses will often give you the chance to gain governing body awards as well. They will also include extended placements to help you practice your skills.

Higher Education

Degrees are available in Recreation Management (with an outdoor focus), Outdoor Education for teachers (BEd), Outdoor Education for youth workers (this offers a diploma that can lead to a degree) and general degrees in Outdoor and Environmental Studies which do not tie you to a particular profession.

However, unless you are sure of the profession you wish to follow, a wider range of degrees can form an excellent foundation for a career in OE. Consider any Environmental Science, Psychology or a teaching degree in another specialism eg PE or Science or the Humanities. Several professions other than teaching and youth work can make use of the outdoors. There is a

growing interest amongst the Probation and Prison Services, Social Work and Mental Health Workers. Consider a professional training in one of these fields before specialising in OE with a post graduate course.

Beware of degrees that mention an outdoor pursuits module as part of the course but not as a specialist subject. They are excellent as a taster and for personal development but do not give you a professional qualification in OE.

Overseas

A number of people have been attracted by the opportunity to take a masters degree in Outdoor Education in the USA. This is certainly worth a look if you wish to broaden your experience with the perspective of a different country. Americans are very articulate about the learning process and have developed expertise in different fields to the UK eg wilderness travel and therapeutic outdoor work. Contact the Association for Experiential Education for help. 'Outdoor Education' tends to mean 'Environmental Education' in North America. Look for Adventure or Experiential Education courses if this does not suit you. A number of higher degree courses in OE exist in Australia as well. You will need to consider funding and visa arrangements carefully.

Vocational Training

New awards are appearing called National Vocational Qualifications. They can be gained on the job and can be very flexible in approach. They are based on work based assessment rather than exams or tests. Awards exist for Outdoor Education, Facility Management and Training and Development. The latter two are progressive leading to a high level of professional standing. The last can lead to a masters level qualification.

The awards are especially useful for people who have gained experience through work but never gone to college. They can also form a natural and easy pathway from one professional field to another eg from teaching into training.

An advantage of NVQs is that they are accepted as professional qualifications throughout the European Community.

Short Courses

Many training organisations offer short courses in a wide range of topics related to our field. Those that offer courses specifically about the outdoors are listed below. Other topics that can extend your skills in useful ways include Counselling, Management, Care Work and the Creative Arts. Outdoor Education is, above all, an approach to learning and so many skills can extend your scope into new markets or activities. The limit is your imagination. It is not a structured career but it can be a very rewarding and constantly changing one.

Further Help

Rock Frog Outdoor Activities. Local outdoor pursuits company. Established for 8 years. Runs a local climbing club and provides training programmes for schools and colleges. Rock Frog also offer traineeships and Junior Leader opportunities. www.rockfrog.co.uk tel: 01344 622918. The British Mountaineering Council. The national body overseeing mountaineering skills such as climbing and mountain walking. www.thebmc.co.uk . The British Canoe Union. The national governing body for canoe and kayak. www.bcu.org.uk H.O.A.C. Hillingdon Outdoor Activity Centre. The borough 's own outdoor pursuits centre which offers work experience. www.hoac.net . Plas y Brenin. The Welsh National Mountain Centre. Their website offer useful information about nationally recognised qualifications, the costs involved in training and assessment and the syllabus for available courses. www.pyb.org.uk

The last word.....

Be active, take up a physical outdoor pursuit. Get involved with a club. Get involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme or Prince 's Trust. Take a sports leadership award. Ensure your basic literacy and numeracy skills are not failing you. Develop an interest in geography, geology, ecology. Work on your "soft skills" listening skills, negotiation, motivation etc. Every day you participate in a new outdoor activity such as kayaking, canoeing, walking, climbing, mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding, riding, sailing, archery, shooting, cross country running, caving (and many more) is another day you have put fitness and experience in the bank to draw on for a future career.