

SET YOUR MIND FREE

Mel Palmer challenges your preconceptions about Nights Away and asks you to stretch your imagination



When we think of Nights Away, it is very easy to focus on summer camp. However, Explorer Scouts can experience a wide variety of Nights Away, so the only limit is your imagination. Not only are there the traditional summer experiences, there are also expeditions for the Awards (more on that later) and opportunities for International Experiences. Nights Away can, and should, be an integral part of your normal term's programme, whatever the time of year, whether or not your Explorer Scouts require it for their Awards, because they love it!

NEW EXPERIENCES

So where do you go for your Nights Away? What type of experiences can you get?

There are of course the obvious experiences – camping, Youth Hostels, bothies, bunkhouses, other Scout meeting places, and hotels – but how about broadening that list a little, or challenging the Explorers to come up

LONE EXPLORERS

If Explorer Scouts are away without a Leader (including Expeditions for Duke of Edinburgh and Scout Awards), one of the party needs to lead – s/he needs to be competent and to hold an Event Passport for that expedition/event (see p72–73). Arrangements, including Home Contacts and emergency procedures, need to be checked in advance by a Leader.



with something different? These are just a few ideas. I'm sure your Unit can think of lots more to add to the list, which you can keep for future reference when considering a Night Away experience.

Camp up a tree

Clearly this one will need some thoughtful risk assessment and safety considerations, but if you have a good carpenter (or a school CDT wizard) in your Section or among the Leaders and parents, then building a sturdy Lord of the Rings-style 'flet' in a tree shouldn't be a problem! (Programme Zones – Skills, Physical Activity, Outdoors)

Cardboard city

Are you working on a Community Service project with a homelessness charity? Build a cardboard camp and raise sponsorship funds for a homelessness charity. (Programme Zones – Outdoors, Community Service, Values)

Nights Away on water

There are so many different ways of doing this. The most obvious choice is narrow boating, but nights away on a 'tall ship' or on board a Naval vessel or submarine might be possible. There could also be water-side nights away, if you stop for the night on a sailing or canoeing expedition. (Programme Zones – Physical Activity, Outdoors)

Survival camp / bush craft weekend

The Ray Mears phenomenon has swept the UK and there won't be many who haven't heard of him, but Scouts have been 'backwoods camping' for a lot longer

– since 1907! Create a 'Bush Craft' camp and see how well you do. Secretly stashed contingencies of tents and food may be a good idea, just in case! You could reflect the popular television shows such as 'I'm a Celebrity...Get me out of here!' and 'Survivor' and offer extra rations for undertaking some special activities. (Programme Zones – Skills, Outdoors)

Compass challenge

Challenge your Unit to camp at the four extremities of the UK (or just the mainland), furthest North, furthest West, furthest South and furthest East.

The most-est camp challenge!

Before you contemplate any of these, get a handle on the authorisations required – but once you have them all sorted, this could be the ultimate camp challenge for your Unit! Adapt them to your own environment and add in some challenges of your own. Camp at:

- The highest point in your County or Region
- The lowest point in your County or Region
- The coldest place in the UK
- The wettest place in the UK
- The most remote place in the UK.

Alternatively, keep it simple:

- A mountain camp
- A coastal camp
- A city camp
- An island camp.

Regional challenge

To make links between neighbouring Counties, each Explorer Unit should

NIGHTS AWAY TIPS & TRICKS

- Remember to get Permission Forms and Home Contacts sorted out well in advance.
- All authorisations should be in place for any kind of expedition.
- Make sure that at least one person leading the event has an appropriate Nights Away permit.
- Any adult on the camping experience needs to be checked with the Criminal Records Bureau.
- Write a kit list and encourage the Explorer Scouts to write their own. Many new Explorer Scouts are also new to Scouting, and they may find it very useful.
- Consider making it either a camp craft weekend with fire lighting, wood chopping, camp cooking, etc. or an activity weekend with simpler catering arrangements. Both are of value. Feedback suggests that participants also like to spend time 'just camping', without designated 'activities'.
- Make sure Explorer Scouts know what the timetable is. They are very good at occupying themselves, but they do like to know when things are happening so that they can organise themselves.

spend a Night Away in each of the Counties/Areas in their Region/Country.

INTERNATIONAL NIGHTS AWAY

Explorer Belt

The Explorer Belt is a fantastic opportunity for an Explorer Scout over the age of 16 to take part in an incredible life-changing international experience. You plan and train as part of a small team and then travel through a country of your choice for ten days, mostly on foot, completing projects as you go along – a major project and ten smaller ones.

Clearly you are having Nights Away while on the expedition, and in a whole range of situations. The participant gets a real understanding of the way of life and people in the country as they travel. More information on the Explorer Belt can be found in Unit essentials and Network essentials, and previous issues



of *Scouting Magazine* have included reports from many expeditions.

Service opportunities

Travelling to another country is great, but if you can benefit the local community while you are there, all the better. Explorer Units can travel abroad with a particular project in mind. I was lucky enough recently to have been invited to a presentation by a group of Explorer Scouts who travelled to the Dominican Republic this summer, where they built two classrooms and a basketball court for two villages they visited.

Jamborees

We all love them! Nights Away in an international environment – we can't wait to get to Hylands Park in Chelmsford in 2005 and 2007, but keep an eye out for other Jamborees happening around the world in the meantime.

International information

On the website www.scoutbase.org.uk you will find a listing of International Opportunities coming up. This is well worth a look and includes International Jamborees, organised expeditions and much more. If you cannot access ScoutBase, information is also available from The Scout Information Centre on 0845 300 1818.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE NIGHTS AWAY AWARDS

Clearly while we are enjoying ourselves and having a great time with the Balanced Programme and lots of Nights Away, we also want to encourage our Explorer Scouts to achieve the Awards available to them through their Scouting, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

YOUTH HOSTELLING

The Youth Hostel Association and Youth Hostelling in Scotland (www.yha.org.uk and www.syha.org.uk) offer free membership to groups of Scouts. You can enrol your Explorer Scout Unit for free!

The membership is valid whenever more than six of you use a Youth Hostel, providing bargain accommodation.



The requirements for these are:

Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award – a 'two-day and one-night' expedition in a rural environment.

Chief Scout's Platinum Award – a two-day and one-night expedition (as required for the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award), plus six Nights Away as an Explorer Scout, of which at least four are spent camping.

Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award – a three-day and two-night expedition in rural or open country.

Chief Scout's Diamond Award – a 'three-day and two-night' expedition (as required for the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award), plus 12 Nights Away as an Explorer Scout, of which at least eight are spent camping.

Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award – a 'four-day and three-night' expedition in open or adventurous country and a 'five-day and four-night' residential project in an unfamiliar environment with people who are not already known.

Queen's Scout award – a 'four-day and three-night' expedition (as required for Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award), and a 'five-day and four-night' project (as required for the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award), plus 18 Nights Away as an Explorer Scout, of which at least 12 are spent camping.

The expeditions should be by foot, cycle, horse, canoe, boat or dinghy and should include careful preparation, training, responsibility and review (some ideas for training for an expedition are given in the Programmes on a Plate this month).

The extra Nights Away for the Chief Scout's and Queen's Scout Award are cumulative, that is, they can include Nights Away from previous Awards.

THE RULES!

It's your first time camping or on Nights Away with Explorer Scouts... What are the expectations? What limits should be set?

This depends very much on the young people in your care – their age, camping experience and maturity – but these young people are not adults yet, and they do need consistent boundaries. Set guidelines early on and to stick to them.

It is unlikely that 14–18-year-olds will respond to a 'bed time' or 'lights out' favourably. They respond better to 'Back in the main camping area by...' or 'Keep the noise down after...' I've known Explorer Scouts to have a 'How many people can fit into a three-man dome tent' competition at 2am. The Leader on duty knew about it, but they were so quiet that I hadn't a clue, and I wasn't camped very far away!

Guidelines need to be set very firmly about geographical boundaries, eg. 'You will not leave the site' or 'You will not go outside ... area'. Teenagers have been known to 'accidentally' wander off site, forcing Leaders and wardens to spend hours searching for them over an enormous campsite in the dark, when they were actually over the fence, in the lane behind the campsite etc.

You need to have set your policies on behaviour (including smoking) well in advance and made them absolutely clear before the camp, in consultation with the Explorer Scouts. If they have helped set the guidelines, they are more likely to stick to them.

Don't leave it vague – on a recent camp, the rules didn't mention smoking but did say that 'if behaviour was out of order then the young people would be sent home'. A worried 17-year-old asked at about 10pm after a long day whether smoking constituted 'send home' behaviour, because he'd been desperate all day! ■

PLEASE NOTE...

Young Leaders on a Night Away with younger Sections need to have separate sleeping accommodation from both the younger Section and from the Adult Leaders, to comply with Child Protection regulations.

TIME	ACTIVITY	ZONE	METHOD	INSTRUCTIONS
One evening	Navigation skills	Skills	Learning together	Set up four bases covering four different aspects of navigation. Each group should spend 15 or 20 minutes on each base and then move on. It is best to have at least three Leaders to run the bases, e.g. compass work, map reading, pacing and timing, or using a computer to look at a navigation CD ROM (advertised in hiking or outdoor magazines and not expensive).
One evening	Micro-navigation	Outdoors, Skills	Outdoor activities, Practical skills	Go outside and practise pacing and timing skills. How long is your stride, how long does it take you to pace a short set distance and, therefore, how long will it take you to walk ten miles?
One evening	Good gear guide	Outdoors	Talk	Talk through all the different types of gear you might need for an expedition. Clothing, hike tents, cookers, safety equipment. Show different items for differing budgets and talk about weight, and what gear is essential/desirable/unnecessary/luxury.
One evening	Lightweight cooking	Skills	Team-building, Outdoor activities	Divide the Explorer Scouts into small groups (three or four individuals) and give £5 to each group. Challenge them to spend their £5 on lightweight foods to make an expedition hot meal for their group, using only one pot. Back at your meeting place, get them to cook the meal on expedition stoves, and then eat it. To finish off, demonstrate your wonderful expedition pancakes!
One evening	Mountain emergencies	Outdoors, Skills	Team-building, Research	Divide the Explorer Scouts into groups and give each group a 'Mountain Emergencies' subject to research (using Safety on Mountains, available from the Scout Information Centre at Gilwell Park). They can then present the information to the other Members of the Unit in an appropriate way (Powerpoint presentation, overhead projector, role-play, practical demos, etc.) Good subjects: moving a casualty to safe ground; mountain weather; hypothermia and sending for help.
One evening	Training weekend	Outdoors, Skills, Relationships, Physical recreation	Visits, Expeditions, Outdoor activities, Nights away	It's now time to put all of the above into practice, and a training weekend on the hills is the only way to do it. Friday evening can involve some night navigation. Saturday morning, check and prepare route cards, base contact and so on. Spend the rest of the day on the hills, doing navigation exercises and learning about group management in a fun way. Saturday night, back at the campsite, they can cook their meals on expedition stoves. On Sunday, back on the hills again, they may need more navigation practice, or they may be ready to practice some emergency procedures. If you want to come off the hills at lunchtime, you could arrange to spend the afternoon visiting the local Mountain Rescue Centre.



PROGRAMMES ON A PLATE

THIS MONTH'S THEME IS A SIX-WEEK PROGRAMME TO PREPARE FOR EXPEDITION NIGHTS AWAY
BY CHRIS BRAMMER AND MEL PALMER