

Access to the Countryside Trips - Report (Excerpt)

1. *The Benefits of Countryside Trips to Ethnic Communities*

1.1 Environmental awareness and understanding

- 1.1.1 The encouragement and support given to ethnic groups going out to the countryside for the first time has laid down the basis for future visits. Continual contact with nature by urban based ethnic community groups is a setting for the increasing awareness of nature and environmental concerns.
- 1.1.2 Exposure to the new experience of the countryside, especially for children from urban inner city areas - silence, real darkness, the sound of wind in the trees, seeing the horizon - has begun to give a real context to the environmental concerns they hear about.
- 1.1.3 An awakening to the pleasure of the environment has stimulated an impetus to seek out further opportunities for contact with nature . Some groups are in reach of aspects of nature nearby and yet have never visited it. A first enjoyable trip has sparked new interest to take advantage of accessible destinations.
- 1.1.4 Contact with nature at large gives a new meaning to green elements in urban areas. They are now symbolic items of continuity with the wider environment. A tree in the pavement is no longer just a tree in the pavement.

1.2 Cultural and social benefits

- 1.2.1 The simple pleasure of being out in the open. This ultimately lays down the basis for the wish to return to the countryside. Many ethnic communities live in some of the worst environments in the inner cities. The use of the countryside by ethnic groups for enjoyment and recreation directly improves their quality of life.
- 1.2.2 In relation to ethnic groups who have left behind a rural background when they migrated to this country, there is an intense sense of re-union with nature, of 'coming home'.
Nature is always familiar. Grass is always recognised as grass. A tree cannot be mistaken for anything else. Beyond that, there is no landscape that is completely unique. Some groups are extremely touched by the similarity of micro-landscapes to remembered aspects of their country of origin.
- 1.2.3 Going out as a cultural group enabled those who speak no English to be included in a new experience.
- 1.2.4 Going out as a group enabled those who are new to the countryside to feel safe, and comfortable among people they know and to whom they can talk. This supports members of the ethnic communities in gaining confidence to venture out alone or as family or peer groups.
- 1.2.5 The experiences of learning new skills, dealing with excitement and fear in new surroundings as a group give impetus to self-development, developing confidence and team development.
- 1.2.6 The achievement and enjoyment of being involved in the planning and organisation of countryside trips help members of ethnic groups to gain skills and confidence in accessing the countryside.
- 1.2.7 The countryside has provided a positive environment in which to build new relationships. New friendships have arisen in an atmosphere of enjoyment for many who feel isolated or who saw themselves as loners.

- 1.2.8 Experiencing the friendliness of British people in the countryside counterbalances the negative experience of racism in the countryside.
- 1.2.9 Visits to botanical gardens combined with countryside trips enable significant connections between nature at large here and real growing examples of flora from their countries of origin. It encourages the conscious bringing forward of the cultural interpretation of nature.
- 1.2.10 For many isolated groups there is the generation of a feeling of belonging and integration. The sense of expansive space, and the general sense of the possibility of moving into new areas of life is a healing and invigorating experience.
- 1.2.11 For many groups, especially young people who feel that they are both British and linked to another culture, there is a sense of being enabled to claim a rightful ownership to this country which is also theirs.

1.3 Impetus for environmental action

- 1.3.1 Fascination for and the appreciation of natural elements lead to the greening of the inner city. For example, the growing of items such as snowdrops, or daffodils are felt to be very accessible. These small scale projects can reach into the very homes of people living in high rise flats and are perceived as personal connections to nature at large. More ambitious consequences include the transformation of schoolgrounds and derelict land.
- 1.3.2 Experiencing the wider environment takes ethnic communities onto the first step of putting the environment on their agenda. The stage is set for the bringing forward of their missing contribution in environmental participation.

2. *The problems encountered*

2.1 Organisational difficulties and lack of resources

- 2.1.1 Written information about places to visit and the programmes of possible associated activities, at a venue or within the local area, is not always available. They can be in English and would be translated by the community group themselves.
- 2.1.2 With women only groups, often the women do not drive, and find it uncomfortable to have a male driver.
- 2.1.3 Transport to faraway places is very expensive, which makes regular visits impossible.
- 2.1.4 Directions to destinations are not always clear. Even coach companies on certain occasions had difficulties getting efficiently to the destination.
- 2.1.5 In certain groups, individuals and small groups or families have a real wish to return to places visited as a community group by coach, as they feel they are returning to a known place where they have enjoyed themselves. Often they are disappointed to find that the particular place is not readily accessible by public transport.
- 2.1.6 For many groups, a countryside trip means a summer trip, with the hope of sunshine and dry weather. Trips in other seasons and to more ambitious destinations would necessitate equipment. Items as basic as secure walking boots and waterproofs are not owned by most community groups.
- 2.1.7 Begging and borrowing equipment for camping etc. is very time consuming and is maintained only by sheer enthusiasm.

2.1.8 Lack of money and resources mean that a countryside trip is seen as a one-off luxury and sometimes an annual summer treat rather than a regular part of one's life. There is a general awareness and sadness that they lack the means to access something which they now wish to be part of.

2.2 Developmental and social difficulties

2.1.1 The workers of community groups which have not been connected to the countryside before do not feel that they have the confidence to access the countryside which is also new to them. They feel that they need guidance and support. They feel that they themselves need to be introduced to the countryside to acquire the confidence to introduce it to others.

2.1.2 To some the countryside is such a new idea that it awakens feelings of apprehension. It is felt that a video about aspects of visiting the countryside would be very useful.

2.1.3 In some community groups, most of the menfolk are working 7 days a week, so that plans to involve them have been considered not possible.

2.1.4 In some groups sharing the experience of the women's projects to the countryside have been difficult as the men have their own cultural centre, which is exclusively male.

2.1.5 Some very deprived groups feel their poverty even more keenly when they arrive at their destinations and are exposed to the excesses of those who have monetary resources. It is difficult not to buy your child an ice cream or not to be able to feel comfortable to go into a souvenir shop when so many other people around one seem to take it for granted.

2.1.6 Racist remarks encountered when visiting the countryside.

2.1.7 Being the objects of curiosity in the countryside

3. Identified needs

3.1 Awareness of opportunities for access to the countryside

3.1.1 Promotion of the awareness of pleasure and benefits of countryside trips.

3.1.2 Promotion of the range of countryside destinations.

3.1.3 Promotion of the range of activities associated with a destination and within the immediate area.

3.2 Support for the organisation and resourcing of countryside trips

3.2.2 Information on where to go.

3.2.3 Information on accessibility by private or public transport.

3.2.4 The provision of funds and resources for access to the countryside for groups who have no monetary and other means.

3.2.5 Organisational and developmental support through an advice, information and networking service.

3.2.6 Networking with environmental organisations.

3.2.7 Networking with other organisations working with the theme of environment, such as outdoor adventure and arts organisations.

3.3 Creating an entry point to the environmental movement through building a framework for access to the countryside

For many groups, access to the countryside can set the stage for their future contribution to the conservation, preservation and development of the environment. It generates awareness, initiates an emotional commitment, and an inspired understanding of environmental care.

Countryside trips can act as the creation of an 'entry point' to environmental involvement. However, for countryside trips to act as a springboard for environmental participation, we need to build an integrated framework for involvement within the wider environmental movement :

- 3.3.1 The significance of countryside trips need to be firmly on the agenda of the environmental movement . The role of countryside trips in the process of environmental involvement understood. Their importance to the impetus for involvement need to be recognised.
- 3.3.2 The provision of training for environmental personnel needs to be put into place in order to enable them to work with awareness and effectively with ethnic groups. Front-line personnel such as environmental project officers and countryside rangers need to be able to interpret the stage of development of community groups in relation to environmental participation. They need to be able to recognise the alternative meanings that contact with nature has in relation to particular ethnic groups and thereby develop countryside interpretation that is relevant to ethnic communities.
- 3.3.3 A networking service to needs to be in place to link local and national environmental organisations to community groups in order to support initiatives for access to the countryside and for the development of opportunities for environmental involvement.
- 3.3.4 We need to develop the knowledge of and the effective use of the wider scene by environmental project officers. Fields of work may include community development, cultural aspects, the arts, and outdoor adventure.

4. A summary of future avenues of development to stimulate and enable access to the countryside by ethnic communities

- 4.1 To run grant schemes which aim to enable ethnic communities to visit the countryside
- 4.2 To stimulate visits to the countryside by ethnic communities through the promotion of opportunities, and the highlighting of the associated benefits to the community groups
- 4.3 To initiate projects which explore issues relating to access to the countryside and ethnic communities through partnership with environmental agencies and other organisations in different fields working with the theme of environment
- 4.4 To produce reports and to run events and seminars sharing the lessons learnt
- 4.5 To provide training for environmental personnel to gain the skills to bring forward access to the countryside by ethnic communities through creating an appropriate framework within the environmental movement.
- 4.6 To develop countryside interpretation relevant to different cultures.

The Countryside Commission funded BEN to run a series of Countryside Trip Awards from 1993/4 to 1995/6. The reports written aim to share the lessons learnt.