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ABERDYFI

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## Outward Bound

Young sailors succumbing to the dangers of the Atlantic Convoys were the inspiration for one of the oldest outdoor pursuits centres in the UK.

**Andy Jeffrey** tells us how Aberdyfi's Outward Bound centre came to be.



Outward Bound began in 1941, the brainchild of Laurence Holt and Curt Hahn.

Hahn was headmaster of Gordonstoun School and during the Second World War he was told by the Defence Department to move his school from Scotland. A father of one of his pupils, Lawrence Holt, said he had connections with Aberdyfi and why not move there. They set up in local houses throughout the town, though eventually the school settled near Newtown.

During this time, he got talking to Holt, a director of the Blue Funnel shipping line, about the dangers of the Atlantic convoys. They realised that when a ship was torpedoed, the first to die were the young, fit sailors - the older, longer-in-the-tooth sea dogs were more likely to survive, which you wouldn't expect.

They decided this was because the younger sailors had less life experience - in a difficult situation they were more likely to fold up and give in. So they began to work together - Holt funded the venture and Hahn set up a crash course in maturity for young merchant seaman and Outward Bound was born.

They didn't teach survival skills so much as presenting young people with challenges and helping them realise that by working in a team you can complete difficult and daunting tasks. It was great preparation for dealing with difficulties in the Atlantic convoys and, though we no longer work with seaman, we still do similar things.

Young people these days are faced with different challenges. They're bombarded every day with so much information - from TV, the internet, radio. We provide them with opportunities to explore their own potential, and to gain experience to enable them to make decisions based on all this information they constantly receive.

We use a wide range of activities - sailing, canoeing, improvised rafting, rock climbing, gorge walking, mountain expeditions - anything from overnight to five days. We take the young people all over North West Wales, including up Snowdonia, Cader Idris, the Rheinogs and Arans. On the



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### Tai Hanesyddol

O blastai crand i ffermydd gwledig, camwch dros drothwy rhai o dai mwyaf

hanesyddol yr ardal

longest courses, which last for three weeks during the summer, the young people will arrive, pack a rucksack and not see inside a building for all that time.

We deal with a wide range of young people - some with learning difficulties, some from overseas, top public schools who want their pupils to gain personal development and schools who are interested in an holistic approach to education. The point is to help a young person realise their potential - they might not be successful academically, but will realise they have the skills to help build a raft or rock climb - everyone's got potential.

We're keen to get more schools in Wales involved because we service the rest of the UK, but have very few links with schools in Wales.

The Blue Funnel Line used to rotate the wardens over the years, but the person whose name is most synonymous with Outward Bound from 1949 to the 1960s is Captain Freddie Fuller. He contributed a lot to the young people here in Aberdyfi and helped Outward Bound through difficult times.

I'm general manager now. I was born in Aberdyfi and went to Tywyn Grammar School, as it was then, before leaving to become an apprentice with Jaguar cars. I then became an instructor here in 1975 before joining the Fleet Air Arm. But I returned to Aberdyfi in 1996 and have been working here ever since.

It's fantastic to be back here - I'm looking out of my office window over the Dyfi estuary, down to the sea and across to Pumlumon. The sun is trying to peak through and it's absolutely gorgeous - I never tire of looking out of my office window.

I've got a young family and for them to grow up here in this environment is fantastic. It's safe, everyone knows each other and there's so much to do outdoors. You can be up on Pumlumon and not see a soul for days. Everyone's trying to bag Wainwright's Lake District or all the Monroes in Scotland, but it's so much more peaceful here.

*Andy Jeffrey*

#### your comments

**Brian Wattison Worcestershire**

I attended the OBSS at Aberdovey in Jan 1954 and well remember the cold showers in the morning. I was sent by my employer Lewis's [a now defunct Dept Store chain]. What a wonderful experience in learning to handle the difficulties which you would no doubt encounter in life's journey. Only yesterday I stood on the bank of the Tallylyn lake looking up at Cader Idris telling the friends we were with how 55 years ago with a team of four colleagues we spent the night up on top as part of a three-day expedition. What wonderful memories.  
Wed Jul 22 14:33:32 2009

**Karl Hewitt, Deeside, North Wales**

I went to the OB Aberdyfi in 1984, which has to be one of the most fantastic experiences and achievements of my life. The trekking, orienteering, the canoeing and surf canoeing, rock climbing, abseiling, rafting and sailing, the camping and walks in what has to be one of the most beautiful places in the world. A must-do experience for any person keen on outdoor activities.

Mon Jun 29 16:29:05 2009

**Garry Pryor, Cheshire**

My Dad says he made a promotional film (must be 50 years ago) in connection with the Garibaldi to recruit merchant sailors. Does anyone know of it's existence or who might know more?

Wed Jun 3 16:34:27 2009

**Mike Kirlew Gladstone Australia**

I attended the OBSS in April 1943. The walk over Caderidris (SP) will never be forgotten. I then went to sea with Shell Tankers then known as Anglo Saxon Petroleum on the North Atlantic and North Russian convoys

Wed Jun 3 10:57:56 2009

**Beth John, bristol**

I have just come back from a week away at Outward Bound in Aberdovey. It was such an amazing experience and it made me realise I can do so much if I put my mind to it, and with the help of my team I managed to overcome many challenges during the week. I can safely say that it has been one of the best weeks of my life, and one I will remember for many years to come.

Mon Apr 27 10:38:15 2009

**Mike Sayer - Cyprus**

I attended the Outward Bound Sea School at Aberdovey in October 1961, probably the same course as Bob from Mousehole as I too remember a storm and a run for Aberystwyth in the fishing vessel Golden Valley! Not exactly why I had signed up as aircrew but a priceless, character-building experience nevertheless. Sailing dinghies, rowing cutters, cold showers every morning and lots of hill walking including Cader Idris and back. We were mostly just out of school, but we all went on to the more arduous RAF training a lot fitter in mind and body. Keep up the good work, Outward Bound (I hope to see my two grandsons in Sydney attend OB Australia one day).

Mon Apr 27 10:21:28 2009

**Bob Shorthose from Scotter, Lincolnshire**

I attended Aberdovey Outward Bound Sea School in 1963 along with Phil Morgans and Alan Sturdy - all of us were sent by Appleby Frodingham Steel Co at Scunthorpe. I remember that we did a lot of work digging out the hole in readiness for the "drown proofing" pool that was to be constructed. We used to wheelbarrow the stuff out up a narrow plank. I remember our instructors were Percy Lipsett and Keith Strudwick. A Mr Lancaster looked after the riding part of things. The sunsets on the Dovey estuary were fantastic. I've got a set of 35mm slides that I took whilst there. I would love to go back some time.

Mon Feb 16 09:35:30 2009

**Gordon Smith-Vieira.Hayes .Middx.**

I went to O,B.S.S in Sept/Oct.1945 Through the Sea Cadets in Hayes. My memories of that time are still with me.Climb Cader Idris,with a compass,map and a packet of sandwiches and get back of course. On watch one night on the Garibaldi,the tide went out, ship went down,I forgot to releae the gangplank,said gangplank fell on deck,waking half of Aberdovey,what a rollicking I got. I have a bad memory for names,but thanks to everyone at that time for setting me up for the rest of my life.

Thu Jan 22 09:29:39 2009

**Colin Chilvers, New Zealand**

I attended OB Aberdovey March 1945 aged 17 after my first Blue Funnel trip. My brother who had been torpedoed was doing an R and R at the evacuated Gordonstoun and I was invited to lunch with Kurt Hahn and his guests. We were given a single rail ticket and told to walk back over Cader Idris. It is still a brilliant memory, we went on the Prince Louis for our three-day cruise. We too had a borstal boy, great team mate but you asked him not told him what to do.

Tue Dec 30 09:20:37 2008

**Peter Davison, Pembroke**

Together with 5 colleagues from West Wales Maritime Heritage I have just collected the lugger Activist from Aberystwyth to add to our fleet of regional boats. Activist was built in 1956 for the Outward Bound School and we would like any information about her - builder, history, exploits and photos. We will work on her during the winter and hope to sail her next year. Anyone wanting a sail in her to renew old memories will then be able to join us.

Tue Oct 21 09:17:47 2008

**George Nieman, Bebington**

I trained at this school in 1944-05 via Alfred Holt Shipping Co. There was a 100ton ketch there named 'Garibaldi'. I loved it there and the area. Is there anyone who can tell me what happened to the sailing ketch named?I look forward to any information you may find.

Mon Jul 21 10:01:51 2008

**Nick from London**

I was there in February 1961 sent by my company IBM. I remember a police cadet who befriended a boy from Bortsal, the young offenders institution. Although around the same age, we were all in our late teens, the cadet became like a father figure to the young offender and really helped to straighten him out. A very fitting tribute to the school and what can be achieved there.

Fri Jun 20 09:43:02 2008

**Keith Mungham**

I was sent, with 2 others from the Junior Leaders Regt, RE at Dover in 1967. Luckily for us 3 the Army's own OBS at Towyn was full - imagine doing OB with blancoed belts & Bulled Boots! I was Watch Commander of Beatty and remember doing the weather readings instead of early

morning PE. I haven't forgotten "Drownproofing" either although I didn't have the cash at the time for the Seal Club Tie.

There were a couple of other boy soldiers in our party and as we all spent lots of time in our units climbing, potholing and etc, we had to do the equestrian option, which did turn out to be great fun. I also remember the experimental dried rations being far better than our army "Compo".

Tue Mar 25 09:51:11 2008

### **D Cant from London**

In Jan 1972 I met some great blokes, all police cadets, from Aberdovey, would love to hear from anyone who remembers carrying me down Cader Idris with a head wound. I am alright nowwww! I remember Scott and his love for 'Homeward Bound' a really great experience that set me up for life.

Mon Feb 25 09:36:24 2008

### **Gerry Chandler St Albans**

Wonderful to read the comments of other people who have had the good fortune to attend the School. I'm going back far longer than I care to remember but I myself attended the School in Aberdovey either in 1948 or 1949. At that time I was a Leading Seaman in the Sea Cadets and as I remember, I was a member of our Class which comprised of youngsters from all walks of life but included such diverse members as trainee Officers of the Mercantile Marine Service from HMS Conway, Borstal Boys and others like myself. The duration of the Course was for 4 weeks and what a wonderful experience it was, during which time we were taught to fend for ourselves as well as working as a member of a team. I remember in particular one experience which I have no doubt all of us in our team will never forget and that was sailing out from Aberdovey into Cardigan Bay in a 70 ton flat bottomed ketch named the Garibaldi when we were hit by a storm which we had to endure for some considerable time and I can remember the sea was so rough that every man jack of us, including our instructors, were as sick as dogs, but we all survived. Other activities of the Course included mountain trekking, topping Cader Idris, learning to map read and making use of a compass and so many other things. The whole episode in my life was a wonderful experience and so character forming that I would not have missed it for the world. I know that the School and its activities must have changed out of all recognition since I attended but I would wholeheartedly recommend a Course at the School to anyone. As a matter of interest I would like to know whether or not the single track railway still exists which stopped at Penhelig Halt, the drop off point for the School, or did Dr. Beeching do away with it as he did with a great deal of our railway system at that time? May I wish all the members of the Staff of the School every success in their chosen career and may the School and other similar establishments such as yours continue to thrive.

Wed Feb 20 11:23:01 2008

### **Sophie Scott from Aylesbury High School**

Outward Bound is an amazing experience to remember forever - if ever you get the chance to go, take it and

prepare. When you get there, make sure you make the most of your time. if you do, it'll really pay off! I made possibly thousands of new friends, and I conquered my fear of heights in less than 10mins. It's just amazing what you can do once you set your mind to it. My group had the best instructors in the world, Tim Hunter and Tim Harrison - they were truly great, especially Tim Harrison who helped, supported and encouraged me so much when I conquered my worst fears. The instructors are a great bunch and me and my friends will miss you loads! Good luck for the future Tim+Tim!

Mon Feb 11 09:27:29 2008

**Bob - Mousehole, Cornwall.**

Subject: Sea School Course October/November 1961. I was one of several trainee crew officers who were put through the sea school course by the RAF. My Watch Captain was a Captain Lancaster. He was also cox of the Aberdovey lifeboat - I went out on a "shout"! He also captained the Golden Valley School boat-ex fishing boat. We got caught out in the Irish Sea and had to make a run for Aberystwyth Harbour. Very exciting (& scary!!), but great character building. Best wishes to all ex-members at that time.

Mon Jan 28 11:30:28 2008

**Clive Green Totnes Devon**

Now 65, have never forgotten the experience at 16 with OBSS. Now, the need is for a massive OBSS to help some 500,000 youth back into society and away from drug related crime. We can do it, just need the political will.

Wed Jan 9 09:57:22 2008

**george smith**

I was the first boy to be sent to the OBS from the Home Office in January 1959 and also was the first winner of the Duke of Edinburgh`s Bronze Award, what wonderful memories,

Thu Jan 3 09:50:04 2008

**John Sansom, Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada**

I attended OBS in 1951. I was a member of the Garibaldi watch, sailed aboard the Warspite and, with others, dragged myself over a seemingly endless succession of mountain ranges (Cader being the most challenging). Today, more than half a century and a great many alarming and rewarding experiences later, I still regard my thirty days at Aberdovey as both tough and glorious. I'm ever grateful.

Mon Oct 15 09:42:36 2007

**john white from cwmbbran south wales**

i attended the outward bound sea school in 1976 and spent my 19th birthday in the shelter at the top of cader idris after a 2 day hike and still another day to go to walk back to the school. we had walked from the molwyn mountains. the group of 12 was split up into 3 and had different routes back.we were to met at the top of cader idris at mid day and all managed it within 5 minutes. i was brought a bottle of pop and a chocolate cake ( as i did not like the fruit cake which was the delicacy at the school and used to swap for the flapjacks). they all sang happy birthday...my instructor was "bob berry" aka "fred daggs"and his wife pauline " mrs

daggs" who was an artist and i still have 2 of her pencil drawings from the mountain walks.

On my 50th birthday stayed at a farm with my girlfriend at the foxes path side of cader idris. i must admit that it was a very hard climb but worth it and today (monday) called in to see the outward bound school..they were very obliging and looked up the records and printed off my details. i was knocked out - what a fantastic 50th birthday present that was....things have changed a little since then but it will always be a fond memory and something that i will never forget.....can't wait for my 100th ha ha....john white aka "taffy"

Tue Oct 2 09:37:32 2007

**John Petersen,Broadstairs, Kent.**

I had an invitation to attend Outward Bound in the mid 1940s whilst in the sea cadets. The house we were billeted in was away from the main building.I believe it was called "Brech-y-Cellan" or something like that.Zimmerman was the athletics instructor at the time.The three week course was difficult but enjoyable and one I shall never forget even when my silver award was downgraded to bronze for being caught smoking! I remember no pockets in your trousers in case you stood around with your hands in them!

Mon Sep 3 11:15:40 2007

**IAN CAIRNS from LEEDS**

I was lucky enough to go on an outward bound course back in the 1960s when Captain Fuller was in charge. A fantastic life building experience, I was 16 at the time and will never forget it. We even got on the television as BBC did Songs of Praise from Aberdovey with us and the girls from the school at Towyn. It definitely taught me that team work is the best way and that no challenge is impossible.

We were up at 6am to clean the hut and the 12 seater toilet block, breakfast then inspection by Captain Fuller. The the days adventure would begin,rock climbing, canoeing, sailing, horse ! riding or the assault course. Loved the sailing especially the large cutters, lowering and dipping the sail, we made sure we did it right when Captain Fuller was at the helm. Then there was the "Drown Proofing" floating in the swimming pool for 8hrs with only your shoulderblades above water except when you raised your head to take a breath now and then. It was a tough 4 weeks but well worth it. How about a rerun of that Songs of Praise edition?

Tue May 29 09:23:52 2007

**Peter Wright -Redding, California**

I attended course 17 in Jan/Feb 1944. Fuller was commander (?), Curphy was an instructor. I would enjoy reminiscing with anyone who was at that course or who would simply like to yak. Griffith, I believe, was sailing master of Garibaldi on a weekend trip from Aberdovey to Criccieth(?) Zimmerman was athletics instructor. Wonderful days. Irreplaceable experiences.

Tue Mar 6 08:50:38 2007

**Brian Clark Architect San Diego, California U.S.A.**

I attended the North Wales Outward Bound Sea School in

1954 prior to signing on with the Blue Funnel Line aboard the Laeomedan. I would appreciate receiving any information on the current program and summary of some of the people who have attended. Thank you, Brian Clark (born Liverpool 1937)

Mon Mar 5 10:27:17 2007

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