



SHELTER
Darach and Finn learn to make a den

Scotland's first Adventure Academy is set to give more children the chance to enjoy and learn about the great outdoors.

The venture has been launched by the Nae Limits adventure group in conjunction with education charity Countryside Learning Scotland.

The Wee Limits Adventure Academy is for kids aged five to 12 and offers a programme of activities and school sessions focused on outdoors fun and education.

Nae Limits founder John Mason-Strang reckons the academy is timely in a western culture, where children have become increasingly disconnected with the natural environment.

Research repeatedly shows how computers, mobile phones, TV and parental safety fears keep too many youngsters indoors.

Meanwhile, health experts continue to highlight the health and social benefits of children having less screen time and more outdoors play.

John explained: "It's proven that connections with the natural environment improve children's learning, communication, physical health, mental wellbeing and confidence. "We are keen to show youngsters this for themselves and to let them see the outdoors as a place they can play, learn, socialise and begin to think for themselves."

Having studied similar academy-style concepts in places such as Canada, John is enthusiastic about the possible results in Scotland.

He added: "We have such a fantastic outdoors environment in this country, so we know that it's perfect for getting children reconnected with the land and water.

"From our own experience and what we have seen of young children, we know they love making shelters, building controlled fires and cooking outdoors.

"The aim, through a schools programme and special day activities, is for the kids to have fun but also to learn about the land, how it is the way it is, how it is managed and how to be good custodians.

"The school element also allows us to demonstrate how children can take their love of the outdoors and turn it into a potential career. By doing this



ALL FIRED UP L-r Darach and Lachlan Stephens, Finn and Woody Mason-Strang and helper Josh

OUR CLASSROOM IS ONE BIG ADVENTURE

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FIONA RUSSELL

now, we may be creating responsible guardians of the future.

The first Academy Wilderness Days take place during the October school holidays in Perthshire, with children learning bushcraft and survival skills.

Next, a schools programme will be rolled out, which ties in with the guidelines of the new national curriculum.

The Curriculum For Excellence guidelines state that all Scottish children should have opportunities for "planned, quality outdoor learning experiences".

At the Adventure Academy, children are divided into age groups – the Wee Tikes for five to eight-year-olds and the Wee Tearaways for nine to 12-year-olds.

Olivia Aitken, seven, and six-year-old Lachlan Stephens were two of the first to attend a Wilderness Day.

They spent the day journeying by raft on the River Tummel and learning about Scottish hydrology.

The kids moored the rafts at a wooded island close to exciting rapids

to set up a base camp. The guides taught the youngsters bushcraft skills – fire making, shelter and den building, tool making – and baking bread in naturally-created ground ovens.

More lessons included land use, geology and geography before they headed back up river to be collected by their parents.

Olivia, who was holidaying in Perthshire with her family, said: "I loved going down the river in the raft and the bread-making was great fun, after I managed to get the dough on my stick. It was quite tasty as well.

"The wilderness day was interesting and I'd like to do it again."

Lachlan, who lives in Perthshire, said: "My favourite part was the den building. The guide showed me how to tie up the corners of the shelter to trees and rocks and it worked.

"We put some blueberries in the bread and it tasted great.

"There were some burnt bits but we just took them off.

"My mum and dad said I can go again, which is great. My little brother



SHIPSHAPE
Start of the Wilderness adventure