

Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Report

By Carmen Ossimitz, Stella Sharwood, and Alyssa Koit

In week one of term 4, all of year nine embarked on the Duke of Edinburgh adventurous journey at Somerset camp. Although a considerable amount of year nines had been dreading the adventurous journey hike all year, we found that it was an experience we will remember for the rest of our lives. It built and deepened friendships, taught valuable life lessons such as resilience, communication, and compassion, but most importantly it gave us an opportunity to get off our technology and into the bush to explore.

It was the cold and forbidding morning of Tuesday 15th October at the crack of dawn - well, 7am - when the students of year 9 fort street struggled through the school gates one by one, lugging their heavy, overly packed duffle bags and suitcases behind them. The excited chatter of the early birds among the students alongside with the irritated grumbles of the majority of the Fortians could be heard from miles away.

After a two hour bus trip, we got off our coaches and onto the open field at basecamp. We split into our groups and anxiously awaited the delegation of our camp guides. "Oh no, she looks strict", "I hope we get that guy" and "I reckon that leader is really chill" was heard throughout the year group as our fate was decided for the next few days. In hindsight, almost all of the group leaders were very nice and relaxed and it barely mattered who your group was allocated but at the time we were on the edges of our seats. Our group leaders helped us stuff our hiking backpacks as we struggled to stay under the 12kg weight limit - we failed. Rather than doing the intelligent thing and repacking, we decided to do the hike with the fifteen kilo bags (we soon learnt this was a major mistake)! Each of the twelve groups took a different hiking route and plan for the next few days.

Now very excited and feeling like fresh twinkies with our huge backpacks, we headed off to campsite one. The first hike caught us by surprise; it was more challenging than we had expected. The humidity and weight of our bags really slowed us down as we scaled 250m not knowing how far we had left. After half a day of hiking, we finally arrived at our campsite, Peach Tree, where we attempted to set up tents. The afternoons were some of the best times of the day because this is where we were able to relax and play games such as mafia and truth or dare. We all managed to cook dinner surprisingly well and enjoyed our two minute noodles and marshmallows around the campfire that we had started. Eventually, we reluctantly retired to our tents to bed, only 40 minutes after the original curfew. For most people a night of interrupted sleep followed.

The following day after breakfast and attempting to pack our bags orderly and in a logical way, we headed off for part two of the practise hike. Frustratingly the day two began with a very large hill that we had to scale and after one hour, with a few breaks and only one injury, we finally made it to the top where a very long fire trail awaited us. We followed it until we arrived at the end of the ridge and descended into a valley waiting to be picked up and driven back to base camp for night two. Thunder rumbled ominously in the distance.

Now night two of the camp was our break between hikes. All the groups were excited to be back at base camp, which was a chance to repack, relax, and recover. Or so we thought. The evening started off relatively well. Although we set up our tents right on a huge patch of bindis, it was still with a lot less struggle than the previous night. We decided it would be better to do dinner sooner than later and set off to cook. Our group participated in a cooking game called "My Campsite Rules" involving four groups who each had to use the ingredients provided to create the best possible meal for the judges, our group leaders. Amidst our cooking, a light drizzle began. Our food was judged and we headed undercover to eat and plan out each leg for the next day. Tonight was also our only opportunity to shower on the entire camp so we all decided to set off to a shower block, roughly one kilometre way. The sunset and more drops fell.

Then, on this fateful night, while groups eleven and twelve sat in the shower block waiting for everyone to finish, dark storm clouds closed in. Thunder rumbled. It rained. It poured. Screams and shouts of excitement,

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fright and worry echoed throughout base camp, battling the loud cracks of thunder. We were in the heart of one of the most intense storms most of the groups had witnessed and also one kilometre away from our tents... “oh no! Did you close our tent???” was all that could be heard over the bucketing rain on the roof and concerningly the most common answer was “ahh.. Maybe?”. There was no choice but to make a run for it and through the rain sprinted thirty loud and drenched students. Our only light was the lighting strikes which illuminated the entire sky for a few seconds and then left us stumbling through the dark again. Our shoes were soaked from the ankle deep water we had run through and all parts of our clothes were drenched. We dove into our tents, which unfortunately had been left open and were now almost as wet as it was outside, and scrambled for a torch. We quickly changed out of our wet clothes and threw them into a pile at the back of the tent, along with all of the other content of our bags; a mistake we would realise in the morning. In pools of water, to the sound of the sky falling on us, deafening lightning and the fear of being washed away or our tents collapsing we fell asleep, exhausted.

We woke to the damp smell that clung to everything the following morning. We looked around our tent to discover a bomb site of clothes, food and gear, all soaked. We now had no dry clothes at all and scrambled out of the tent, immediately beginning to clean them up. After cramming all our clothes into the hiking bag, we stumbled out of our tents to one of the most tranquil views of the valley covered by a blanket of fog and morning mist where we sat and ate breakfast. Looking back that night made our camp memorable and we are very glad it happened. Thankfully, before we left for the qualifying journey we were given the opportunity to swap out some clothes for some from the practise hike. Leaving one hour late and mildly frustrated we embarked on the hardest day of the camp. The stand out part of this journey was the valley in the middle. It descended almost three hundred metres before ascending the same height again. We heard all different fort street groups throughout the valley and started a chant of “Fort what?” “FORT STREET” from across the ravine. The descent involved clambering between rocks down boulders and slippery mudslides all while carrying fifteen kilograms on our backs. We held hands and lower people and bags down small cliff faces with only one near-death experience involving cut pants and a bleeding leg. If the going down was not hard enough, we had to ascend a muddy, bull ant infested hill together. Here the most mistakes were made and leadership, resilience and compassion were learnt. This was a physically very challenging hike, however, everyone made it through and at the top of the hill we relaxed and ate lunch with some other groups, congratulating each other on the difficult journey we had just overcome. Upon arrival at our campsite that evening we set up our tents in record time and played games of Mafia around the fire. This night we all had our best sleep.

On the final day, we had a small five kilometre walk before being dropped back at base camp and driven back to school. We were all completely drained by the journey but we're all glad that we had taken part in this experience. Mr O'Neill had the privilege of hearing the most stories of “near-death” experiences ever to occur in three days, but also stories of friendship, teamwork and lots of laughs. Although challenging, it put us in situations where we depended on our friends and had to display patience and leadership and was a very rewarding and fun experience.