



# THE WAY















**DUKE OF EDINBURGH: BRONZE**

Through the rain, mud and the river, Year 9 experienced it all on their first hike through the Blue Mountains.

Over the long weekend 32 Year 9 students braved a very wet and cold couple of days to complete their Duke of Ed practice hike. Starting at Winmalee and finishing at Grose Vale in the lower Blue Mountains, these Bronze participants trekked steep up hills, through lush fern-filled tracks and camped in a cleared bush field. It was nothing short of an adventure!

This first hike acts as a practice before the test hike in Term 3. Some of the skills that are learnt in the training previous to the hike and then practised on this hike include: route planning and navigation, camp craft, preparation of food and cooking in the bush, environmental awareness, care, team building and leadership skills. Students took turns leading their peers through the bush using only a route map and a compass - quite a task! - and did so with careful consideration and skill. Students were also required to prepare all their food for the hike and cook dinner at the camp site using a Trangia stove. Some of the food looked particularly impressive! One student made nachos from scratch! At night we had a (very wet) camp fire and debrief. Students reflected on the day's highlights, challenges and how they were overcome. It was of great encouragement to hear of students helping each other through the bush, from encouragement to singing to carrying another student's gear if were struggling.

There are things as a Dukes Co-ordinator that I experience with students on hikes that I rarely see in the classroom. On this hike I began to see the ANZAC spirit amongst the students. That of mateship, sacrifice and courage. The first hike is hard enough for many, let alone trekking it in the rain! But the students put their rain jackets on, heads down and powered on while cracking jokes and laughing all along the way. These Bronze participants are well on their way to discovering the beauty and harshness of the bush and what it means to be a team and a family out on the track. One highlight was the river crossing on Day 2. Pants rolled up and boots came off and were carried as students navigated through a very, very cold flowing river. It is the kind of cold where feet go red, numbness sets in and you want to move very quickly. It's safe to say we were very happy to reach the other side and students did so with skill and big smiles.

These Duke of Ed participants are to be congratulated on their hard work and resiliency. It's no small feat - well done Bronzies! A big thank you to Mr Nguyen and Dr Gawthorne for coming and trekking with the students. Onwards to the test hike in September!

**Niamh Friel**

Duke of Edinburgh Co-ordinator.

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