



Left: Sammy and Jessie prepare for a white-water adventure

Right: Ely, Will and teacher Pip Scott in the outdoor classroom at 15 Mile Creek Campus

GREEN SCENE



A school away from school

Thanks to the Residential Outdoor Schools Association (ROSA), every public school student in Victoria has the chance to learn in the great outdoors. MEIKI APTED bunks in for the day.

“WE’RE going on an adventure!” is the jubilant catchcry that erupts from a group of Year 8–12 students who are about to set out for a day of navigation and white-water rafting through the idyllic King River rapids. These kids from Mansfield State High School are spending a week at 15 Mile Creek, a campus of the Residential Outdoor Schools Association (ROSA), nestled in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. They are learning leadership skills through hands-on activities like orienteering and gruelling physical challenges, including overnight hiking.

There are four schools in the ROSA network, spanning seven campuses across Victoria. Each offers different activities, from hiking in the 110 acres of pristine bushland at 15 Mile Creek, to surfing and watching baby sharks hatch at Somers on the Mornington Peninsula. All the staff at ROSA schools are qualified teachers and they teach visiting students in one-week blocks.

Principal liaison officer Steve McMurtrie describes ROSA as “an outdoor department” for every state school. “We see it as vital that every student has the opportunity to access a quality residential outdoor program,” he says.

Purposeful, curriculum-linked learning outcomes are embedded in each activity. While these vary depending on the program, they are mostly aimed at improving students’ skills in communication, leadership and outdoor education, whilst deepening their understanding of the natural world.

Students spend the week eating together, harvesting vegetables, emptying the compost and collecting eggs. “We really believe in the paddock to plate concept,” says Steve. “All of our schools emphasise fresh, healthy eating.”

15 Mile Creek teacher Pip Scott is accustomed to witnessing students transform throughout their time at the residential outdoor school. “Over the week you really notice how much calmer they become,” she says. “Part of that is the environment — it’s so quiet here — but it’s also spending a week without sugar, computer games, social media. Life slows down a bit.”

The Mansfield students notice the difference too. “I’d like to say I eat this well at home,” laughs Jessie Azzotardi, “but I’d be lying!” Jessie thinks outdoor schools provide a unique learning context. “You’re put in the deep end if you’re not used to the bush,” she observes. “And if you’re out of your depth, you look for leadership.”

Mansfield State High School Captain Ruby Lieber agrees. “Being outdoors, more unexpected things happen,” she explains. “Because it’s challenging for some people, you switch on your leadership skills. Opportunities come up because you’re in a different place.” ●

For more information on how to involve your school in the ROSA program, visit www.rosa.vic.edu.au.
