

Coláiste Acla

The trip labelled as an adventure became an opportunity.

As I'm sure the majority are aware of Holy Family's transition years ventured off to Coláiste Acla on the 29th of August. The trip was previously described as exciting and adventurous due to the many engaging activities it consisted of and definitely lived up to its reputation while also granting us with many other aspects to take with us into our fourth year and after many frantic questions and over packing, we were ready to go.

Roughly a hundred students were waiting in the dining area at half seven on the Monday morning, with anticipation smothering between the conversation of those-around about their enthusiasm and excitement for the trip. After sharing a few mints and exchanging pillows, teddies and even jumpers, we organised ourselves and lugged our heavy bags out to the bus.

The bus ride on paper sounds long and draining due to its four-hour duration and how early it was spaced in the day with the no phone rule however, with the eager atmosphere and company of friends the journey alone definitely contributed to the experience due to the exchanging of snacks and flowing conversation all around with a *sing-song* here and there.

Arriving at the Coláiste everyone carried a puzzled expression on their face whether it was as noticeable as others or not, although with an unfamiliar and more rural environment and on top of new ground to explore, that is easy to understand. Thankfully once we were all collected into the hall, had the rules and timetable of events explained to us and we were separated into the houses we'd be sleeping in, all nerves were relaxed.

We then found out about our first activity of the trip. Not all houses were doing the same activities at the same time. Other houses were going cliff diving, kayaking and some bog snorkelling. My house, Teach Cathriona however, was invited to go surfing for the first activity.

Our house clamouring into the changing room with our given wetsuits which the majority had never worn before, we all shrieked and laughed trying to squeeze and slip into our suits making it quite the activity on its own.

Once calm and collected we hopped onto the bus where we were taught the safety rules and hand signals to indicate what to do in the water if needed. That's one major thing I'd commend Coláiste Acla for, they made sure we were safe, stable and in a good mind-set no matter the weather.

Arriving at the beach we were welcomed by the most beautiful crystal-clear waters which met an almost snow-white shore.

When we were done gawking at the awesome view, we took to pairs to lift a surfboard in each arm to take down towards the waterside, we placed them on the sand and listened to a quick tutorial on how to catch a wave, balance on the board and build up to a stance. Then came the time to hit the waves.

Personally, I found that trying to walk against the waves to get further out towards the horizon quite the struggle, for my ankle was strapped to my board and my board got very easily dragged along the longshore drift. Got there in the end.

Sliding onto our boards and paddling 1...2...3... and a fourth time before *ssSSWOOosh* we were carried gracefully along the waves building up to a stance and crashing into the water below.

I remember at one point; our instructor gave me a push along making the waves carry me up to shore.

Although we were having the best time, we eventually had to wrap it up, downhearted at first but exhilarated upon realisation that we now had the chance for more fun back at our houses that we were proceeding to.

Upon arrival, Cathriona our Bean an Tí assigned us to our rooms and explained where to find any facilities we made need.

This is where most people got changed into their pyjamas to go to the céilí because comfort over all, right?

The céilí had amazing atmosphere, people telling stories from their own activities and houses, and dancing and singing with each other, and over all having a great laugh and making memories.

The evening generally consisted of talking to all housemates and making new friends really making us understand why Coláiste Acla is defined as our “*bonding trip*” by many past participants.

The following morning my group went cliff diving, which personally, wouldn't be my cup of tea, but again the water was beautiful and relaxing and cleansed the mind, and the shrieks of students as they jumped into the water was entertainment in itself.

We were then given soup and ham and cheese toasties for lunch at the Coláiste which pleased everyone and was a good way to warm up the body after the cooling temperatures of the sea. Although in saying that our year group was granted amazing weather throughout the whole trip, not a drop in the sky and sun rays from heaven.

That night all of my house mates gathered into mine and my bunk mates' room as it was the biggest and engaged in group conversation, this is where the headline comes into play.

Coláiste Acla wasn't just an adventure it was an opportunity to spark new friendships and advanced us to try new things and not be afraid of new possibilities which generally is a really important trait to follow through in transition year.

On the last morning we made a group effort to leave the house spotless and as we found it and packed up our belongings and headed to the Coláiste for our final activity. Ours was bog snorkelling. What a fine way to wake up in the morning, right?

This was definitely my favourite out of all the activities.

The playful cries of disgust, the girly screams of '*drama queens*' the laughs from the friends of those who fell or got fully submerged or splashed by the bog water and insane tricks, flips and dives shown by our instructors was easily peak entertainment. Even getting out of the wetsuits and getting into

civil arguments with friends over showers, braiding people's hair and saying goodbye to the sea was the perfect way to end our experience at Coláiste Acla.

The bus ride home was the same as the first but I found that people were sitting with different people, talking about different subjects, finding new common interest and to me, that really highlighted the school motto for TY this year *"what you put into this year, you get out of this year."* The comparison between the bus ride there and the one back really proved that motto and I for one definitely gained a different mind-set about the school year ahead of me this year and so did other students as a result of what we had put into our time at Coláiste Acla.

To finish I asked for the input of some fellow students and their feedback on the trip.

- *How did Acla make you feel?*

"It was great, there was lots of laughter and it was great craic. It was a great experience having a big sleepover with my friends."-E.M.

"Achill made me feel independent in a sense but a bit lost, I'm not comfortable away from home and it was a bit overwhelming to stay in someone else's house however, I liked the adventure and had a great time."-R.O.

- *Describe your Acla experience in three words*

"Exciting, scenic and fun"-N.B.

"Refreshing, exhilarating and sensational"-E.C.

- *What opportunities do you think Acla has granted you with?*

"I think it gave me the opportunity to try things I haven't done before and build friendships with classmates I wouldn't have been close with from 1st to 3rd year"-K.C.

“I think Acla granted me the opportunity to take risks and try new things such as surfing and cliff jumping and to experience life in a Gaeltacht area and witnessing how people still live their everyday life so close to Irish heritage”- C.W.

Thank you so much for your time and I hope you enjoyed my thoughts on Holy Family’s trip to Coláiste Acla 2022.

Clara Deegan.