



Photo by Mark Tatam

Kenan Bailey reaches for a handhold on the climbing wall at the Jessie Vesey Gymnasium during team and personal challenge before setting off on expedition for his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award.

173 teenagers participate in Duke of Edinburgh's Award BANX 2011

By Stacee Smith

The BANX BLAST off!

Inspiring, fun and challenging — all of these words fittingly describe the experience of BANX 2011.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award first Island-wide Bronze-qualifying journey was held this weekend.

One hundred and seventy-three teenagers, representing a variety of schools and backgrounds, completed the journey simultaneously.

Participants were given the opportunity to hike throughout the Island on March 5 and 6, and on the Saturday night they engaged in a youth and community development programme while camping on beautiful Port's Island.

Now mix those juicy elements with their youthful sense of enthusiasm and the humbling flavours of Chewstick, and you have one awesome weekend!

It all started at the pre-expedition kick-off event on Friday, March 4.

Held at the Jessie Vesey Gymnasium at the Bermuda High School, it enabled groups of rucksack-toting participants to meet with their assessors (both senior and trainee) who ensured they were adequately prepared for the venture ahead.

It is the assessors who ultimately determine whether or not a student has successfully fulfilled the requirements necessary to obtain the Bronze Award.

Fast forward to the Saturday morning when the hikers set out on their various routes which trailed along the east and western parts of the Island.

Although assessors checked up on each group at least once during both days, the participants had no choice but to rely on one another and the resources they brought with them.

The members of the 'CAMP & Crew' group felt that conquering the hills was the hardest part of their journey — particularly Harrington Hundreds Road.

However they all chuckled as they told of one of their group members who helped them get through the rough patches by singing away the blues.

After arriving at Port's Island the participants set up their tents and began cooking supper in their groups.

This was the most enjoyable part according to Alida Ratteray, because many of them weren't used to cooking by themselves.

She said, "It's kind of difficult and some funny things happen, like food falling on the ground, so that's fun."

She also said the expedition taught her how to persevere: "Normal people don't just walk around with giant bags on their back, and usually you could stop and just give up, but we had to keep going forward."

At 7pm everyone gathered under a tent to be entertained for hours by the Chewstick gang.

They set the creative pace by singing, rapping and reading original poetry — the words to which were encouraging and geared specifically to Bermuda or the Duke of Edinburgh experience.

Gavin Smith played guitar and had the students sing: "Victory, victory. We will succeed...we will achieve..."

The impact of those words floated through the air. Chewstick then divided the participants into three groups, giving them each an opportunity to mingle and tell their stories about the hike that day.

Mr Smith's group then huddled together and performed a song created with the combined tales. It was touching to see them full of laughter as they produced something from scratch.

By the end of the night many Award participants had loosened up so they were able to showcase their talents on the open mic. Some played pop songs on the keyboard — along to which the audience sang enthusiastically.

The others excited the crowd with a freestyle rap battle, danced, played guitar and sang soulful ballads like 'Aint no Sunshine' by Bill Withers. The energy and talents of the participants was awesome and could best be summed up in the word "WOW!"

One couldn't help but be moved to see them encouraging one another and screaming with approval as their peers performed.

Although spurts of rain impeded the opportunity for a campfire, the night ended with both students and assessors dancing and jumping to some of the latest hits!

"The singing and dancing was the best part", said participant Jordan Dill.

Both he and Marcus Smith plan to go for their Silver and Gold Awards.

"I really enjoyed it when Chewstick came because everybody got to showcase their talents," said Marcus who broke the ice with a song that night. "And I thought it was a lot more fun with other schools there because you got to meet new people as well as have fun."

Participant and performer Emma Keane agreed, stating that it was "a really healthy and friendly atmosphere".

They were all pumped to fight through the aches and blisters as they finished the last leg of the journey the next day.

"A big thank you to everyone involved in the planning and executing which made the weekend a success," said Duke of Edinburgh's Award chairman Kenneth Bartram.

Look out for BANX 2012 when both Bronze and Silver participants will conquer Bermuda!