

She did not mention that her evenings were taken up attending lectures and presentations, which Bob le Vaillant sees as crucial to the real understanding of what needs to be done.

We thank young people like Victoria who are willing to have a go. . . and if any young Wychwood people would like to spend a gap year working at Toynbee Hall, we could probably find a way of helping them.

## GILWELL PARK

By Victoria Schofield

**T**HERE IS A SECTION in my Gold Duke of Edinburgh's award that requires me to take part in a five-day residential activity entitled "Service to the Community". With the kind help of Jane and Peter Hills, and through the David Hills Trust, I did this at Gilwell Park.

Bob le Vaillant of the Stepney Children's Fund (linked to the Toynbee Hall charity in east London) runs an adventure workshop there for deprived children from Tower Hamlets over a period of two weeks.

I spent one week camping in the grounds of Gilwell Park, 20 minutes from the centre of London, with a group of other young people from schools and universities. Our task was to give the children the best day out we possibly could. Every day from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. we were wrapped up in a magical world of fantasy and laughter.

Our instructions every morning, before the buses brought a new school of children, were never to stop smiling and to make sure that the children didn't either. Before I started I imagined the children would be quiet and a little solemn and I therefore thought my job to make them smile would be very difficult. The truth was that the children, who had waited for their one day at Gilwell Park with so much enthusiasm and excitement, were the ones making us laugh!

If you want to be a part of these two amazing weeks, whether for one day or the whole fortnight, you have to be prepared to get very wet and extremely exhausted! You take part in activities such as swimming (freezing!), archery, singing, the "Gilwell Trail", bouncy castle and canoeing, and the only catch is that you have to run everywhere, shouting at the top of your voice, and laugh continually.

This may seem easy enough, but believe me, at 3.30 p.m. I was fit to do nothing but lie down and sleep!

People have asked me if just one day at Gilwell Park benefits the children. Well, to watch them running around, smiles glued to their faces and problems left on the coach, and to hear Bob's stories of how so many of these children benefit I would have to ask, how could these Gilwell days fail to work?

Many go on to join the Scouts and Guides as a result of the fun and challenges at Gilwell. This helps them to stay out of trouble and to develop in a positive way.

I had a rewarding, if tiring, time and enjoyed every minute.

Whoever said laughter was infectious must have visited Gilwell Park for a Stepney Children's Fund event!!