



SMALL CITY ACTION

by Andy Middleton

It's sometimes the little things that make a big difference; and the UK's smallest city, St. Davids, with a population of 1,500 nestled on the west coast of Wales, is a fine example. Despite its diminutive size, great things have taken shape around the cliffs, beaches, streets, and churches of this ancient community.

Named after the locally born Saint David, it became an important place of Catholic pilgrimage. Many still travel to the cathedral, but other types of pilgrims now arrive for eco-friendly pursuits on the coastline surrounding the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Sea kayaking, surfing, sailing, and walking attract those wanting to reconnect with nature.

Living and working in such a spiritually and physically stimulating environment leaves an indelible mark on the farmers, fishermen, artists, and surfers who live here. They prefer open spaces, light, and wind to the glitz and gloss of window shopping. This is a world close to cloud and sky, earth and heather, where nature dictates much of what happens each day.

The magic of St. Davids imprinted itself on the DNA of the TYF Group—the adventure, education, and sustainability consulting business I started here in 1984. Environmental concerns are inextricably joined to our work; we introduce clients to outdoor adventure and teach managers how to increase effectiveness by linking the needs of people, planet, and purpose. Through

A visitor turns "head over heels" in front of St. Davids Cathedral. Photo by Paul Villecourt

these efforts, we have taught thousands of customers how to make the connections between small steps and big change, today and tomorrow, and thought and action.

Eight years ago, one small idea—that of developing St. Davids into the world's first carbon-neutral city—started to generate big change. With the support of TYF staff and a grant from the UK's Big Lottery Fund, St. Davids is firmly on the path to meet this goal. A gas station using recycled vegetable oil keeps two dozen cars on the road, and solar electricity powers the primary school. Two citizens initiated a scheme that allows community members to recycle ninety-nine percent of their plastic. We plan to re-insulate every home on the Pembrokeshire Peninsula and retrofit each one for solar panels. When the two planned tidal turbines go live in 2011, the city could be getting all of its energy from the sea.

St. Davids's goal is to encourage the 500,000 tourists who travel here each year to change their behavior. Making the city an ecological leader may be a small step in the fight to protect the planet, but that's how all of the greatest journeys start.

Andy Middleton is a third-generation adventurer and community activist who runs the TYF Group in St. Davids, one of the UK's best examples of innovation, sustainability, and change in action.