

Understanding Wye

Using Traditional Timber to Connect Young People with the Wye Valley



Biblins Youth Campsite lies on the banks of the River Wye between Symonds Yat and Monmouth, close to the Forest of Dean. Nestled in a beautiful stretch of the heavily wooded valley the site offers young people a unique opportunity to experience outdoor pursuits in a spectacular setting. Understanding Wye will install three new campsite buildings using locally grown timber, built by young people attending residential woodworking courses. Involving aspiring craftspeople this project will contribute towards the preservation of the Wye Valley's heritage by passing on countryside crafts to future generations.

objectives

- To make Biblins Youth Campsite accessible to groups from all backgrounds and abilities by improving facilities and providing group shelter for use during bad weather.
- To impart traditional building skills and raise the level of understanding of countryside crafts.
- To demonstrate the use of locally-grown sustainably produced timber.
- To foster an understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of the Wye Valley.
- To reduce visitor impact on the site and surrounding woodland by encouraging walkers and campers to behave responsibly.

actions

- Residential courses in traditional building skills run by qualified and experienced instructors resulting in construction of the timber buildings by the students themselves.
- Construction of a timber-framed camping barn, assembly shelter and information panel, built with oak grown in the Wye Valley.
- Provision of a new solar-powered toilet and shower block with a separate toilet cubicle for public use.
- Installation of high quality interpretation that explains the significance of the traditional timber structures as well as explaining the natural and cultural heritage of the Wye Valley.

achievements

- In 2006 and 2007 Henry Russell of 'What the Romans Did For Us' fame, led the traditional carpentry courses.
- Students, who lived on site throughout the week-long courses, successfully constructed sections of the assembly shelter. The structure was completed in December 2006 and has been available for campers during 2007.
- The second series of courses, were held in August 2007 and a unique camping barn has been constructed.
- Solar powered toilets and shower facilities will be installed before the end of 2007 and opened in March 2008.
- A great deal of interest was generated by the activities from both passing walkers and youth campers with positive coverage in the local press.

background

Biblins Youth Campsite is located in the Wye Valley AONB flanked by a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Regarded as one of the best places in the South for young people to participate in outdoor pursuits, Biblins is the ideal location for young people to experience life in the natural environment. Aimed at youths up to 25 years of age, Biblins is regularly used by schools, further education colleges and universities, scouts, canoe clubs, Duke of Edinburgh Award groups, young offenders, the Armed Forces' Cadets and other youth groups. The campsite accommodates up to 450 campers and in one season (March to Oct) provides 17,000 bed-nights. The adjacent Log Cabin Bunkhouse accommodates 32 young people and four leaders.

This two-year project is a response to a keen interest in courses that teach traditional building skills as well as a demand for new structures by campsite users. The campsite facilities require a complete overhaul if they are to maintain the same standard of provision, and extend access to other user groups, such as groups of people with disabilities.

At the same time, the site renovations present a good opportunity for people to get involved and learn new skills by attending residential woodworking courses and helping to construct the new buildings. The legacy of the project is the provision of high quality, locally-crafted structures for a more diverse range of youth groups to enjoy, future educational opportunities available to visitors through onsite information and interpretation, and the woodcraft skills that course participants will be able to utilise in future employment.

quotes

"I enjoyed sitting at the feet of a real expert and Henry Russell is such an enthusiastic teacher, I gained confidence in the techniques and have since been inspired to build my own summerhouse from oak timber."

Paul Whiteman, course participant.

"During the wet summer of 2007 the assembly shelter has really come into its own. Groups camping in small tents have used it to meet and plan their activities."

Sally Harvey, campsite manager.

partners

Forestry Commission
Herefordshire Rivers Leader +
Herefordshire County Council
Wye Valley AONB

funding

Total: £191,673

AONB	£39,895
FC	£18,635
LEADER+	£128,343
Participants	£4,800

lessons learnt

- A dedicated fundraiser is required to put together funding bids together.
- Funding may not be secured for all elements in the first place, but further funding tends to follow for successful projects.
- Joined-up thinking is essential between FC staff, stakeholders and outside agencies.