

CLOtC accredited forests for self-led learning visits

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom ([CLOtC](#)) is the national voice for learning outside the classroom. The Forestry Commission is proud to be working with the CLOtC to create and improve opportunities for self-led learning on the public forest estate.

We are working towards [CLOtC Site Provider Awards](#) for Forestry Commission sites across England. This award recognises organisations which actively welcome schools onto their site/s for self-led visits and ensure that the sites and any other services provided meet the needs of schools.

CLOtC accredited site: Beechenhurst Lodge, Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire

Beechenhurst Lodge in the heart of the Forest of Dean, with its internationally renowned Sculpture Trail and rich industrial heritage, is an ideal place to bring your class or any other group for a learning visit.

The Forest of Dean is part of the public forest estate, which is made up of more than 1500 woods and forests in England that are cared for by the Forestry Commission. We practise multi-purpose sustainable forestry: multi-purpose means that our forests are managed, not just to supply timber, but also as valuable wildlife habitats and places for visitors to enjoy; sustainable means that we follow long term forest design plans, so that the public forest estate continues to provide timber, and benefits for people and wildlife into the future.

Beechenhurst is one of several visitor sites in the Forest of Dean, and attracts about 250 000 visitors per year. In the summer months, the site itself can be busy, but trails leading into the surrounding woodland allow you to leave the hustle and bustle behind within a few minutes walk.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts, discussing where they live and why
- **Primary school** – Design technology – using sticks and other forest materials to build structures such as towers, shelters and bridges
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other – working in teams to follow a map of the Sculpture Trail and share opinions about the sculptures, followed by planning and creating their own natural sculpture in the forest environment
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography fieldwork – human impact on the environment; conflicts in land use (balancing needs of forest for timber, people and wildlife); impact of the wild boar, and debate about whether and how their population should be managed

Site [webpage](#)

- has information about trails, site facilities, opening times, parking charges, directions and events

On-site facilities

- Café, shop, play area, ample parking for cars and coaches (charges apply), toilets, BBQs for hire, 'Loft' (indoor space for hire), picnic tables. 'The Glade' (an open grassy space with gas BBQ ideal for events)
- The mobile phone signal at Beechenhurst is poor – there is a payphone at the Lodge, outside the shop

Surrounding woodland

- Beechenhurst Lodge is situated right in the middle of the forest – within five minutes walk is a variety of mixed woodland – different species and ages of trees and open spaces
- There are waymarked walking trails from the site, including the Sculpture Trail; the family cycle trail passes close to the site

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibests, habitats, shelterbuilding (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – [cycling](#), walking, mapreading
- History – the Forest of Dean has a rich industrial [history](#)
- Art – [Sculpture Trail](#)

Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- Our partner learning provider 'A Breath of Fresh Air' offers learning activities and sessions for schools and other groups at Beechenhurst – [email](#), phone 07970 972271 or visit the [website](#)
- Other site activities (archery and climbing tower) are provided by [Forest of Dean Adventure](#)

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is in Coleford; reception is staffed 9am-3pm Monday to Friday – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4800
- The local FC learning team is based at Wyre Forest – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4855

Planning your visit

- [Contact the FC learning team](#) – we'd like to know you are coming and, depending on your plans, there may be a booking form to complete
- **Pre-visit** – we strongly recommend that you make a pre-visit to the site before bringing your group – you'll need to know where to park, where the toilets are, where and how you will carry out your activities; you'll need to be able to write your risk assessment and will also be able to purchase trail leaflets and maps
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around Beechenhurst Lodge and of the waymarked trails; we do not however, check every path and every part of the forest; if you are bringing a group to the forest, it is your responsibility to carry out a pre-visit and write your own risk assessment; we cannot provide you with a site risk assessment because the forest is a variable environment, which changes as a result of weather conditions, time of year, forest operations etc; we do offer a [sample risk assessment](#), which may be of use, when you are writing your own and a [guide to group leader responsibilities](#); if a member of your group has an accident while visiting Beechenhurst, please let the learning team know as soon as possible.

Accessibility

- The site and car park are relatively flat, with dedicated parking and toilets for disabled visitors. Some of the trails into the woods are quite steep, but there are more easily accessible options – please ask for advice
- Accessible toilet is available and clearly marked
- Disabled parking spaces are provided and linked to the building with a ramp
- Café and shop are at ground floor level with no steps, and have sliding doors to allow easy access when needed
- Loft (indoor bookable area) is above the café / shop and is accessed by a ramp
- Information about accessibility of trails is available in leaflets and from site (shop and café) staff
- With prior notice and for genuine access for less physically able learners, it may be possible to provide vehicular access to some areas of the forest

After your visit

- **Feedback** – we'd like to know how you get on with your self-led visit to Beechenhurst and have provided a short [online survey](#)
- **Further opportunities** – if you would like to find out more about learning opportunities on the public forest estate, please [email](#) and ask to be put onto our mailing list