

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: Hamsterley Forest, County Durham

In 1927, the Forestry Commission purchased what was formerly an estate managed for agriculture and shooting, and planted what is now Hamsterley Forest. Since then, it has also been a work camp set up by the Ministry of Labour in 1934, where the unemployed undertook forestry work, and later, during the second world war, a PoW camp, where Italian and German prisoners 'enjoyed' the tranquil forest surroundings!

Today, you can explore 2000 hectares of Hamsterley Forest, comprising a wide variety of tree species, open spaces, streams and hills, and being home to a variety of woodland wildlife.

Hamsterley Forest 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.

As one of Durham's most popular visitor destinations, the main car park at Hamsterley can be busy in the summer months. However, the four mile forest drive allows access to a number of other parking places and points of access into different types of woodland.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts, discussing where they live and why – compare open grassy meadow, with shady areas under the trees, within ten minutes walk of the main car park
- **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 complete the 28 point permanent orienteering course
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography / Science fieldwork – river studies; human impact on the environment; uses of the forest in the past, for example, different parts of the forest were planted to commemorate different dates in history, and the meadows by the river were once the forest nursery, and are now SSSI due to their botanical value; how the forest is managed to produce timber, and to be a tourist destination, at the same time as being a valuable and varied wildlife habitat

Site [webpage](#)

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

On-site facilities

- Café, play area, ample parking for cars and coaches (charges apply), toilets, two classrooms for hire, picnic tables, orienteering, visitor information point, cycle hire, start of the forest drive, waymarked trails
- Mobile reception is poor throughout the forest. A pay phone is available outside the visitor information point.

Surrounding woodland

- The visitor hub, with café, cycle hire, toilets, information, play area and hard-standing coach and car parking is located through the main Bedburn access road. Three waymarked walking trails, including the all ability Riverside Trail start from here, as do several cycle trails and the orienteering course.
- The spectacular Forest Drive is four miles long and follows the valley through the woods, providing plenty of other places to stop, explore, picnic and play; two other waymarked trails, and the Green Man sculpture can be found at signed locations along the Forest Drive.

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats, shelterbuilding (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – cycling, [cycle hire](#), walking, orienteering

Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- Our partner learning provider 'OASES Northeast' offers learning activities and sessions for schools and other groups at Hamsterley – phone 03000 260535 or visit the [website](#)

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC ranger team is based at Hamsterley Forest – [email](#) or telephone 01388 488312

Planning your visit

- **Contact the FC ranger team at Hamsterley (above)** – 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 pick up free trail leaflets and maps
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the trails and area around Hamsterley visitor hub 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 Hamsterley, please let the ranger team know as soon as possible.

Accessibility

- A full [access statement](#) is available on the FC website
- The car park is 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
- Café and information point are accessed via decked ramp. Entrances are level with ramp and have no steps.
- Forest classrooms are accessed via decked ramp
- 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 Hamsterley 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