

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: Great Wood, Somerset

Great Wood in the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a fantastic place to bring a class of children to explore the forest, away from the crowds and hustle and bustle of some of our busier visitor sites.

Near Bridgwater, Ramscombe in Great Wood, with its majestic Douglas fir, is the perfect place to start your day. From the circular 2 mile waymarked trail you can spend the day exploring the forest and looking out for wildlife. Or if you prefer, the large public picnic field makes a great spot for outdoor activities and games.

Great Wood 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.

The variety of habitats at Great Wood attracts a diverse range of wildlife: from the UK's largest land mammal, the red deer, to the industrious wood ant. Forestry provides a unique environment for several species of birds from raptors such as goshawks and long-eared owls, to smaller species that can almost go unnoticed e.g. crossbills, redpolls, goldcrest and woodcock. However one species, whose fortunes can be directly linked to forestry practices, is the nightjar. This summer migrant has significantly increased in population over the past three decades and this can, in part, be attributed to major stands of conifer trees reaching majority and being felled, creating the ideal habitat for nightjars.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts, and discussing where different creatures live.
- **Primary school** – Design technology – using sticks and other forest materials to build structures such as towers, shelters and bridges; Art – be inspired by the work of artist Andy Goldsworthy, and use natural materials to create sculptures and ground pictures.
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other – teambuilding activities – follow a map to explore the forest – on a pre-visit, teachers could produce a list of questions and challenges based on features of the site, and then ask the pupils to find the answers by following the map
- **GCSE / A-level** – Woodland ecology (including comparisons of evergreen and deciduous areas, and stream studies) and the management of multi-purpose forestry sites.

Site [webpage](#)

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

On-site facilities

- Parking for cars and coaches (charges apply), toilets, BBQs, picnic tables
- Mobile phone signal is very poor on site
- Small events room available for hire

Surrounding woodland

- On arriving at Great Wood, you will enjoy a 2 mile drive along the forest tracks to reach three parking areas located around the one way loop.
- If you are doing a stream study, you need to park at the top car park (Ramscombe) and walk into the picnic field to find a suitable area to work.
- Within minutes' walk of the car parks is a variety of mixed woodland – different species and ages of trees and open spaces.
- The red waymarked [walk](#) starts from the first car park at Seven Wells or the top car park known as Ramscombe – it is 2 miles long and follows a route past majestic conifers, ancient oak woodland and shallow streams.

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats, shelterbuilding (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – navigation, sports on the field
- Hire a 'Ranger in a Bag' at Great Wood
 - o Ranger in a Bag (RIAB) is the Forestry Commission's bookable self-led activity pack for school groups
 - o RIAB contains all the equipment and instructions needed to lead learning activities in the forest (no experience necessary!), as well as introductory and plenary activities
 - o RIAB is suitable for a group of up to 35 children aged 4-11
 - o RIAB topics available at Great Wood include amazing animals and fantastic forests
 - o For more information, contact the district [FC learning team](#)
- Teachers can also download learning activities from the Quantock Hills AONB Service's [website](#), including a teacher's pack of science-based activities [here](#).

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is in Cockercombe, Great Wood – phone 01278 732319 or [email](#), with admin support in Exeter – [email](#)
- The district FC learning team is based at Wyre Forest – [email](#)

Planning your visit

- Contact the FC – phone the local office on 01278 732319 or [email](#) the local admin team – ideally at least 6 weeks before your visit – 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.

Health and safety – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around the car park and of the waymarked trail; 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 Great Wood, you are responsible for administering first aid, but please let the local FC team know as soon as possible

Accessibility

- The site and car park are relatively flat, with dedicated parking and toilets for disabled visitors. There are three main parking areas around the one way loop and the toilet block is located next to the second car park.
- The circular walking [trail](#) uses forest roads and, apart from two short sections, it is free from traffic other than the occasional forestry vehicle.
- The trail is designed for family use although in some places the gradient is quite steep. During periods of heavy rain the trail can get a little muddy in places.

After your visit

- **Feedback** – we'd like to know how you get on with your self-led visit to Great Wood 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

A short history of Great Wood

Great Wood was part of the Royal Hunting Forests of Quantock and North Petherton in Norman times, and later passed into private ownership. There are records of planting of Scot's pine, beech, larch and sycamore as early as 1797 – at this time, the older oak and elm timbers were used for shipbuilding, while the traditional woodland management technique of coppicing was practised.

Between 1857 and 1860, the last Lord of Taunton had Quantock Lodge built and the woodland provided the sporting venue for the Lord of the manor. After a gradual decline, the house and forestry land were put up for auction and many parts of the forest were clearfelled during the 1914-1918 war. The woodland then passed into the hands of Somerset County Council in 1920, to be managed by the Forestry Commission. In April 2012, the Forestry Commission purchased the forest from Somerset County Council.

Great Wood is an excellent example of modern day multi-purpose forestry that has created the stunning and continually changing landscape of not only conifer plantation but also heathland, scrub and mature ancient oak woodland.

Since 1919, when the Forestry Commission was set up to provide a strategic reserve of timber for any future war effort, the business of growing trees has become much more mechanised and this is reflected by how much the staffing levels have changed. In 1922 in Great Wood alone, 108 people were employed while today five members of staff cover the Quantock forests and Exmoor.