

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: Leigh Woods, Bristol

Leigh Woods is managed by the Forestry Commission, in partnership with the National Trust. The main Forestry Commission car park is approached along an avenue of majestic copper beech trees, planted to commemorate the Queen's Coronation in 1953. Being within such easy reach of Bristol, this site has much potential for educational visits

Adjoining Leigh Woods is Paradise Bottom – an arboretum with some interesting and unusual trees, and a rather magical place to explore.

Leigh Woods itself consists of a special mixture of habitats – ancient woodland with remnants of previous coppice management (that continues in some areas today), interspersed with 20th century plantation that is managed for timber. Bristol whitebeam, a tree species found only in the Avon Gorge, grows in Leigh Woods, along with the rare Bristol rockcress, and other ancient woodland plants such as wild garlic, wood spurge and bluebells. Large parts of Leigh Woods are designated SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Leigh Woods 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.

Recent investment in cycle trails means that the site attracts a number of mountain bikers, especially at weekends, but school groups visiting during the week will easily find quiet areas within easy reach of the car park.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Physical development and Understanding the world – natural play – explore some of the smaller paths through the woods, trying simple challenges such as building stick piles, balancing on fallen logs, hiding under and behind trees, exploring hollows, discovering different textures and splashing in puddles.
- **Primary school** – Living things and their habitats – explore and compare the varied habitats of Leigh Woods, investigating which minibeasts live in each, and looking for evidence of larger animals including mammals (such as dormice and squirrels) and birds.
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other – working in teams to follow a map of the red trail, completing various challenges along the way. Fallen branches and other forest materials provide ample opportunity for denbuilding and creating structures such as towers, shelters and bridges.
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography fieldwork – human impact on the environment; conflicts in land use (balancing the needs of the forest for timber, people and wildlife, alongside the requirements for managing an area that is a SSSI); comparing different areas of Leigh Woods – the National Trust and Forestry Commission each manage parts of the site, and there is also the contrasting area of Paradise Bottom – investigate the needs of each area, and examine the management methods used.

Site webpages

- have information about trails, site facilities, opening times, directions and events
- [Leigh Woods](#)
- [Paradise Bottom](#)

On-site facilities

- Free parking for cars and coaches, picnic tables; there will hopefully be a catering van on site in the near future
- The mobile phone signal is fairly good

Surrounding woodland

- The Forestry Commission car park at Leigh Woods is surrounded by mixed woodland.
- Two waymarked walking trails start from the car park, including the red trail (0.7 mile) which passes through ancient woodland and 20th century plantations, and the purple trail (1.5 miles), which crosses from Forestry Commission land to the National Trust part of the site and back again.
- The Yer Tiz mountain biking trail also starts from the FC car park and is 2.2 miles long, graded moderate.

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats, shelterbuilding (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – [cycling](#), walking
- A map and leaflet about the site is available [here](#)
- Hire a 'Ranger in a Bag' at Leigh Woods
 - Ranger in a Bag (RIAB) is the Forestry Commission's bookable self-led activity pack for school groups
 - 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
 - RIAB is suitable for a group of up to 35 children aged 4-11
 - RIAB topics available at Leigh Woods include Amazing Animals and Fantastic Forests
 - For more information, and to book RIAB, contact Nikki Morgans, recreation Ranger on 07775 012033 or via [email](#)

Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- The National Trust manage part of Leigh Woods, adjacent to the Forestry Commission land, and offer a small programme of led learning events. Visit their [website](#) for further information.

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- There is a small Forestry Commission office on site, but it is not always staffed. The local ranger can be contacted on 07775 012033 or via [email](#)
- The main FC office is in Coleford, where reception is staffed 9am-3pm Monday to Friday – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4800
- The FC's West England district FC learning team is based at Wyre Forest – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4855

Planning your visit

- [Contact the local FC Ranger](#) – 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 and how you will carry out your activities and 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 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 Leigh Woods, please let the [ranger](#) know as soon as possible.

Accessibility

- The car park is flat and well surfaced.
- The purple trail consists of mostly level trails, and is relatively easily accessible.
- The red trail is shorter, but has some gentle slopes.
- 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 Leigh Woods 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