

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: Kielder Water and Forest Park, Northumberland

Kielder Water and Forest Park is England's largest forest, and really does contain something for every group and every learner. Those wishing to spend several days in the area can try walking, horse riding, mountain biking, wildlife watching, star gazing, canoeing, fishing and sailing.

For those after a more traditional one-day school trip to the forest, we recommend starting your visit at Kielder Castle Visitor Centre, with its play area, picnic site, Minotaur Maze sculpture and squirrel hide.

Kielder 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.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – birds and mammals at Kielder – osprey camera, red squirrel exhibition, bird viewing platform and squirrel hide
- **Primary school** – Art / Design Technology – a look at the art installations, followed by planning and making sculpture and structures from natural materials
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other and working as teams on the junior orienteering course
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography fieldwork – land use conflict and investigation into the human use of the local environment eg why Kielder Forest was planted here; why the reservoir was created; how the forest has changed as a result of changes in policy for land use management eg when the FC first acquired the land, the policy was to grow conifers (which were the only trees that would grow in such a landscape), whereas modern policy has more emphasis on conservation, which is why the blanket bog is being re-created
- **Any age** – Astronomy projects – Kielder Water and Forest Park is designated a Dark Sky Park and has some of the darkest skies in England. Kielder Observatory is a unique venue that can be booked for daytime solar or night-time star watching activities.

Site [webpage](#)

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

On-site facilities at Kielder Castle Visitor Centre

- Café, play area, ample parking for cars (charges apply) and coaches (free parking), toilets, classroom for hire, picnic tables, squirrel hide, exhibition (wildlife, dark skies and local history), Minotaur Maze, cycle hire
- The mobile phone signal at Kielder is poor; there is a payphone in the Castle and another opposite the village shop; in addition, the café provides free WiFi for customers

Surrounding woodland

- Kielder Castle Visitor Centre is situated overlooking Kielder village near the head of Kielder Water. Within five minutes walk is a variety of mixed woodland – different species and ages of trees and open spaces; further afield are 250 square miles of coniferous woodland, open water and environmentally valuable blanket bog.
- Waymarked walking trails start from the castle grounds, varying in distance from 1.5 miles to 6 miles. A wide network of mountain bike trails start from a trailhead in the main car park.

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats, shelterbuilding (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – [cycling](#), walking, sailing, canoeing and other outdoor and adventurous activities are available in [Kielder Forest Water and Forest Park](#).
- Dark Skies at [Kielder Observatory](#)
- Art and architecture installations

Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- We have two partner learning providers at Kielder Castle. For primary school visits, [NEST](#) can organise tailored visits based around the concept of Earth Education as well as arts and crafts, shelter building and minibeasts, while [Albion Outdoors](#) lead ecological and geography fieldwork sessions for secondary schools.

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is in Bellingham; reception is staffed 9am-5pm Monday to Friday – [email](#) or telephone 01434 220242
- The local FC ranger team is based at Kielder Castle – [email](#) or telephone 01434 250209.

Planning your visit (self-led)

- **Contact the [FC ranger team](#)** at Kielder Castle – 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 from the café.
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around Kielder Castle 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 Kielder Forest, please let the ranger team know as soon as possible;

Accessibility

- A full [access statement](#) is available on FC website

After your visit

- **Feedback** – we'd like to know how you get on with your self-led visit to Kielder Water and Forest Park 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