

## **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 in England.

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: Salcey Forest, Northamptonshire**

Salcey Forest is an oasis of nature – with a variety of rare wildlife habitats and species, part of the forest has been made a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). It also has a fascinating history – find out about features such as the Elephant Pond, 400 year old Druid Oaks, and medieval archaeological features. All this, together with its location (only 7 miles from the centre of Northampton) makes Salcey a great destination for educational visits for learners of all ages.

One of the main attractions is the Tree Top Way, an innovative structure made from oak grown in local woodlands, which allows you to walk high up among the tree tops, and also gives great views of the surrounding countryside.

Salcey 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 practice 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 – use your senses to explore the forest at ground level – what can you hear, see, smell and touch? Next, climb the Tree Top Way, and see what your senses discover when high up among the trees – listen for birds, and the leaves blowing in the wind, and enjoy the view
- **Primary school** – Environmental art – be inspired by the sculptures along the Woodpecker trail, investigate colour and texture in the woodland environment, then work in groups to create your own masterpieces from natural materials
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 – settling in and getting to know each other – work in teams to follow the site map to find particular points of interest in the forest – on a pre-visit, teachers could produce a list of questions about each feature, and then ask the pupils to find the answers
- **GCSE / A-level** – Fieldwork for geography, tourism studies and countryside management courses – the human impact on the environment; investigate potential conflicts in land use – the forest is managed for timber, recreation and wildlife, but the managers must also care for sites of special scientific interest, and features of archaeological and historical importance

### Site [webpage](#)

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

### On-site facilities

- Ample parking for cars and coaches (charges apply), toilets and picnic tables, café, sculptures, adventure play area (suitable for 5 years upwards)
- Tree Top Way (an elevated boardwalk, finishing at a viewing platform, 20m above ground-level)
- Mobile phone reception on site is variable

### Surrounding woodland

- The main car park is the best place to start your visit. Although the area immediately around the café and play area can be quite busy in the summer months, you can easily escape the crowds within a few minutes walk, into mixed ancient woodland with some stunning veteran oaks.
- The Elephant Walk is an easy access route, leading to the Elephant Pond (where these massive beasts used to cool off while taking a rest from extracting timber from the forest in the second world war) and to the Tree Top Way. The Church Path Walk is 1.5 miles long and passes Salcey Lawn (a remnant of medieval wood pasture), before passing one of the historically important 'fallen' oaks.
- There is also a family cycle trail and a horse riding trail, and several other paths and bridleways.

### Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – cycling, walking, horse riding, and of course, for anyone wanting an adrenaline rush, [Tree Ninja](#) is a must!
- [Linda Johns](#) has a series of sculptures along the Woodpecker Trail
- Hire a 'Ranger in a Bag' at Salcey
  - 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.
  - Five RIAB topics are available at Salcey. These are Woodland Art, Shelterbuilding, Minibeasting, Animal Detectives and Sensory Explorers.

### Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- Learning provider – [Acorn Forest Schools](#) – offer forest school sessions for local primary schools.

### Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is just opposite the main entrance to the site, but it isn't staffed permanently – telephone 01604 863830
- The local Forestry Commission learning team is based at Sherwood Pines Forest Park [email](#) or telephone 01623 821479

### Planning your visit

- **Please contact the FC learning team at Sherwood Pines** – 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 Salcey Forest Centre 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 Salcey, please contact the learning team.

### Accessibility

- The site and car park are relatively flat, with dedicated parking and toilets for disabled visitors
- The Elephant Walk and Church Path Walk are suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs, however the surfaces can still be uneven in places, and unsuitable for some wheelchair users (please contact us in advance to discuss your needs). The longer Woodpecker Trail is only partly surfaced, and can therefore get very wet and muddy, making some sections difficult to traverse.
- The Tree Top Way has a gentle incline suitable for wheelchair users up to 15m, where there is a flat viewing platform.
- Accessible toilet is clearly marked
- Café is at ground floor level with no steps
- Information about accessibility of trails is available in leaflets and from the website
- 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 Salcey 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