

## **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: West Walk, Forest of Bere, near Fareham, Hampshire**

West Walk is the largest remaining fragment of woodland from the ancient Forest of Bere in southeast Hampshire. Bere is now a mixture of woodland, open space, heathland, farmland and downland. As well as 19<sup>th</sup> century oak woods, there are modern conifer plantations, and areas of scrub, coppice, streams and ponds.

The Forestry Commission provide three car parks from which to begin a school visit, the main one being West Walk car park. Here, there are picnic tables, toilets and a play area, as well as access to trails leading further into the forest. West Walk is the only car park suitable for coaches.

West Walk 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.

West Walk is very popular with visitors during school holidays and at weekends. During the week in term time the site is much less busy and trails leading into the surrounding woodland allow you to leave the majority of visitors behind within a few minutes' walk.

### Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts, listening to the sounds of the forest, exploring the different textures of bark, leaves and stones; collecting materials from the forest floor to make pictures or create mini dens
- **Primary school** – Design technology – using sticks and other forest materials to build structures such as towers, shelters and bridges
- **Secondary school** – Land use studies – annotating a map to show features; stream studies making use of small streams to learn about river processes and features; comparative ecosystem studies involving data collection from contrasting areas within the forest
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography fieldwork – human impact on the environment; conflicts in land use (balancing needs of forest for timber, people and wildlife); understanding the financial aspect of sustainability to facilitate environmental sustainability e.g. paying to park and sale of timber to provide income for maintenance.

### Site [webpage](#)

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

### On-site facilities

- Catering van– this should not be relied upon for refreshments as its presence on site is weather dependent. It is normally on site all summer.
- Play areas
- Parking for cars and coaches (charges apply)
- Toilets are open all the time, including an accessible toilet.
- BBQs for hire (prior booking essential)
- There is usually a mobile phone signal in the West Walk car park. It is variable in other parts of the forest.

### Surrounding woodland

- There are two waymarked trails from the West Walk car park – the Forest of Bere trail passes the ponds (old bomb craters from the second world war, now home to rare amphibians) and the Old Oak trail visits oaks planted in Napoleonic times, which now provide a habitat for moths, bats and rare lichens. There are also numerous other tracks and trails, on which you can plan your own route.
- The woodland has a variety of species, both deciduous and conifer. There are also open spaces, and small glades under the trees which lend themselves to a wide range of activities.

### Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats, shelterbuilding (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Cycling is permitted but there is no specific cycle trail
- There are walking trails allowing access for learning activities.
- Horse riding is permitted but riders must have a permit

### Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- Woodland Adventurers offer a range of guided visits for schools and groups. For more information contact Woodland Adventurers on 01225 819714 or visit the [website](#).

### Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is at Alice Holt Forest; reception is staffed 8.30am-5pm Monday to Thursday and to 4.30 on Fridays – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4800
- The local FC learning team is based at Alice Holt Forest – [email](#) or telephone 0300 067 4451
- In emergencies the Ranger can be contacted on 07778 110349

### Planning your visit

- **Contact** the Learning Manager on 0300 067 4451 or [Amy Howells](#) for a permission form– 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 be able to pick up trail leaflets and maps on site.
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around the car parks 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 West Walk, please let the Ranger know on 07778 110349 know as soon as possible.

### Accessibility

- The car park is relatively flat, but once you leave the car park there is a slope which can be difficult for some people to walk up.
- At the car park, there are toilets for disabled visitors.
- Some of the trails into the woods are quite muddy, but there are more easily accessible options – please ask for advice
- Disabled parking spaces are provided
- Information about accessibility of trails is available in the site leaflet
- 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 West Walk 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