

Scenes from the Forest

Filming on Location



The use of Forestry Commission forests for filming locations has provided the television and film industry with stunning backdrops to a fascinating range of worldwide productions. With most UK filming taking place within 50 miles of London, South East England's forests are sought after locations. Almost 300 shoots have been hosted in the region alone, ranging from award-winning movies, such as *Gladiator*, to television dramas, commercials, documentaries, children's programmes, music promos and fashion shoots.

objectives

- To make forest locations available to the UK Film Industry, giving productions the option of using UK-based crew and technical facilities.
- To manage and identify a number of suitable forest locations without compromising the environment.

actions

- Networking, making contacts and forming solid partnerships with independent location managers, location agencies and production companies within the film industry.
- Providing location agencies with continuously updated images of seasonally changing forest locations.
- Providing a personal level of co-operation and advice to directors and producers to resolve difficult shooting requirements in the forest environment.

achievements

- **National and local economies:** UK-based forest locations provide good alternatives to overseas locations in this competitive market. Shooting the opening scenes of *Gladiator* in South East forests, (instead of Eastern Europe) is estimated to have contributed more than £5 million to the UK economy. Filming in forest locations has boosted the rural economy and benefited local businesses - shops, hotels, B & B's, and contractors.
- **Revenue:** The revenue from location fees benefits and contributes to the management of UK forests. In addition to a six figure location fee for *Gladiator*, the production company paid for children's play furniture at Alice Holt Woodland Park as a gesture of thanks to the local community.
- **Media:** The media interest in filming, and public fascination with celebrities, has opened up a new avenue for the Forestry Commission to promote a modern image through television, radio and magazine interviews.
- **Community:** communities are supportive and proud when production companies film in their local forests. There has been a significant increase in visitors to some forests where filming has taken place.
- **Environment:** The Forestry Commission has successfully balanced the needs of filming and environmental protection of forests and wildlife.
- **Publication:** A wealth of knowledge and advice is available to forest managers across the UK in the Forestry Commission guidance booklet '*Preparing to use Forests as Filming Locations*'.

background

As the country's largest land manager, the Forestry Commission can provide locations for nearly every type of forest landscape, while the UK Film Industry is constantly seeking out wooded areas as filming locations. Initially, interest in UK forests was confined to occasional television commercials or low budget productions. In 1998 a request came in from Dreamworks for a location for a battle scene set in a pine forest. Filming for *Gladiator* took place at Bourne Wood, in Surrey. An area of trees that had already been felled was chosen as the battle area, camp and amphitheatre. With more than 300 crew and 1,000 extras, the Hollywood blockbuster used one of the largest crews on any film ever made in the UK. It took four months to build the set, and shoot the scenes, and a month to reinstate the location. Care was taken to ensure minimal impact on the environment, and there is little trace that a major Hollywood movie ever filmed there. Today it is a fully re-naturalised grass and heather site.

The massive success of *Gladiator* acted as a catalyst. With most studios based in and around London, both the Commission and production companies realised the potential for using South East forests, and an enterprising partnership evolved. In recent years the following productions have been filmed at forests in the region:

Movies: *Gladiator* – Russell Crowe/Richard Harris; *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* – Kate Blanchett; *The Golden Compass* – Nicole Kidman; *Inkheart* – Helen Mirren; *Children of Men* – Michael Caine/Clive Owen.

Television: *Band of Brothers* – David Schwimmer, Daniel Lewis; *Blackadder* – Rowan Atkinson; *Henry VIII* – Ray Winstone; *Ultimate Force* – Ross Kemp; *Midsomer Murders* – John Nettles; *Lorna Doone*; *Goodbye Mr Chips* – Martin Clunes; *Eastenders*; *Primeval*.

Music Promos: Coldplay - *The Scientist*, filmed at Alice Holt and Bourne Wood, won an MTV award for best video in 2002; Embrace; Kasabian

Photo shoots: Levi's; Harrods; John Lewis; Sainsbury's; Mercedes; Ford

quotes

"Location Managers are often faced with having to approach locations with very difficult requests to make something work. The Forest Commission's professionalism, patience and co-operation has been truly outstanding."

Simon Crook, Location Manager, *Children of Men*, *Ultimate Force*

"When Forestry Commission land became available to Productions and Film Makers, the UK gained a fantastic asset. With its diverse and accessible range of forest scenery they have helped the UK and the South East secure large parts of major movie productions."

Jenny Cooper, Film Commissioner, Screen South Pinewood Studios

partners

The Forestry Commission is one of over 70 location providers in the London Filming Partnership and has worked with Screen South, Pinewood Studios.

lessons learnt

- Not all sites are suitable – noise and visual disturbances need to be considered.
- Forests are extremely robust and cope well as film locations. By working closely with art directors and set builders filming can have minimal impact on forest locations.
- Scene credibility is crucial. The Forestry Commission has the knowledge and expertise to advise production companies working with forest locations. This may involve advising on a specific tree species to match a region or historical period. For example, well-informed viewing public would immediately spot an inconsistency such as medieval knights riding through a plantation of 20th century Sitka Spruce.