



Moors Valley Country Park is a very popular attraction welcoming more than 750,000 visitors a year. Ranked in the top 20 national attractions Moors Valley is deemed the 'model country park' offering 750 acres of outdoor fun for all the family. Jointly managed by East Dorset District Council and the Forestry Commission, Moors Valley provides visitors with formal recreational opportunities with a distinct parkland feel – a visitor centre, golf course, mini railway, fishing and 'Go-Ape' – complemented by natural play in a forest setting. In 1988 10 wooden play structures were installed to create a play trail that snakes through the forest. The first of its kind in the country the play trail was seen as innovative and very forward-thinking.

objectives

- To provide recreation and natural play opportunities for children visiting Moors Valley Country Park by installing a play trail and innovative wooden structures in the forest.

actions

- Creation of a trail and wildlife-themed wooden play structures in the forest, conceived and built by a local artist.
- Creation of an adventure area for older children with play features including a zip slide, space net, pyramid towers and fortress.
- A castle and sandworks area with gentle slides, springy animals and swings for younger children.
- Installation of eight unique pieces of wooden play equipment around a three quarters of a mile walk - a wood ants' nest complete with giant wood ants; towers and tunnels; a snake pit with two intertwined wooden snakes; wooden mushrooms; snakes and ladders; a spider's web; crocodile crossing; pond maze.
- Installation of a 200 metre-long tree-top trail five metres above the forest floor.
- Totem poles at the entrance of the Play Trail hand carved from New Forest Oak, depicting some of the wildlife that has been found in the Moors Valley area, including deer, lizards and snakes.

achievements

- Moors Valley Country Park is one of the most popular attractions in the South East with more than 750,000 visitors each year and 30,000 season ticket holders.
- 90% of young visitors to Moors Valley Country Park use the play trail.
- Sport England's South West Regional Plan Bulletin: Active Play and Informal Sport features the play trail as an example of regional good practice.

background

In 1984 East Dorset District Council purchased Kings Farm (82 acres) in the Moors River Valley, with a view to creating a modern community country park for local residents to use. Work began to develop a nine-hole 'pay and play' golf course, a narrow-gauge steam railway, play area, lake and Visitor Centre. The first phase of Moors Valley was officially opened in 1988. The park was much more popular than had originally been envisaged with a half a million visitors by 1990. An additional 170 acres were purchased, the golf course expanded, a second lake built, the Visitor Centre was extended to make way for a country shop and new toilets were installed. At the same time the tree top trail, and play trail, were constructed in the forest - a mature pine plantation, sandy, undulating and robust - ideal for adventure play.

Active play is widely recognised as having an important role in increasing physical activity levels in children. 'Choosing Activity,' the Department of Health's Physical Activity Action Plan, and 'Getting Serious About Play: A Review of Children's Play' (DCMS, 2004), recommend the provision of spaces where children and young people can play freely and safely. The Moors Valley play trail offers a safe natural environment in which children can play freely, explore their surroundings and boundaries, experience a sense of adventure contributing towards their physical fitness and good health. The trail has provided inspiration for similar play equipment elsewhere in the country.

The Forestry Commission is currently looking at a long-term vision for play provision at Moors Valley to include more natural play and a rolling replacement of the structures that, after twenty years, are coming to the end of their life.

quotes

"One of the top reasons for the park's popularity is the play trail."
Sport England South West Regional Plan Bulletin: Active Play and Sport 2006.

"Love the place – always fun – Kids love it especially the play trail and tree top trail."
A Visitor.

"Kiddy area was the best and I loved the wooden statues in the Forest." A Visitor.

partners

East Dorset District Council
Forestry Commission

funding

Total c. £100,000
Forestry Commission
approx £10,000 (per structure)

lessons learnt

- Need rolling investment to replace the structures. A new structure each year can greatly boost repeat visits. Finding external funding for replacement of facilities can be challenging especially in areas that are not close to deprived communities.
- Play has become risk averse. There is a need to reintroduce adventure and natural play, allowing children to explore their physical capabilities.
- Need to maintain an evolving vision for play, incorporating formal and natural play provision.
- The challenge is managing and maintaining such a huge infrastructure.