

Centre News

The Woodland Education Centre, Offwell, Honiton, Devon EX14 9SW. Tel 01404 831373



Centre Director's Report - Summer 2004



Three Million and Counting!

In the three months since the last newsletter, schools and other visitors have been flocking to the Centre. Once again the Centre was full and some schools have already booked their visit for the summer of 2005.

During this period, the website which is part of Britain's National Grid for Learning, has also seen staggering numbers of hits. Over three million hits have been recorded from individuals, schools and universities from more than 130 countries. The amount of continuous time which was spent online exceeded three years! The growth of the website reflects the great number of additions which have been made over the last two years.

The arrival of broadband will herald another significant step forward in the way Information Technology will become an everyday part of our



The Open University ran a mammal course at the Centre.

lives. There are several innovative ways in which broadband will enable us to communicate even more effectively.

Despite the merits of the Internet, there is no substitute for hand-on experience. At the Centre practical activities have included the study of the ecology of woodland, heathland and freshwater, as well as biological sampling and map work.

The Trust's photographer, Dougal Syers, records each group as they undertake their activities at the Centre. He takes up to 200 digital photographs every day. Each one shows an important part of the activities and will be used for follow-up studies and project work back at the school, college or university.

After each visit, the images are sorted and processed on a computer. About 150 of the best images are then included on a CD-ROM disk which is sent to the school or college within 48 hours of their visit. Most of the disks are actually sent out by 6 p.m. of the day of the visit. To achieve this level of service takes a considerable amount of work and organisation. The CD is packed full of information, as it also contains a complete copy of the Trust's website along with extra material such as videos.

The educational value of this CD-ROM is immense. It maximises the value of a visit to the Centre and enables IT to be used in an interesting way to learn more about the natural world.

Dougal has received numerous glowing reports from teachers of the benefits that this CD provides. "The teachers who visit the Centre tell me that they use the CD extensively" says Dougal. The CD's are used in

science, geography, art and English lessons. This is often for a period of several weeks after their visit to the Centre. The students use the pictures and information in their own work. Many schools print out the images for display on school notice boards.

Some schools also keep their CD's until the following year when they show it to another group prior to their visit to the Centre. This helps them prepare, so that they can make the most of their visit. Often the entire CD is made available on the school or college's intranet. Thus everyone in the school can benefit".

During this summer term, we received hundreds of letters and e-mails from those who had visited the Centre. The majority were from Primary school children and a unifying theme is that they all say not only how much they have learnt, but also that it was so enjoyable. Several even wrote to say it was 'the best day' of their life, although one pupil gave 'only nine out of ten because of the long walk'!

In addition to the Primary schools, a range of other visits took place. The Open University ran a mammal course and Bristol University held a fresh water ecology course for conservation professionals.

Local 'A' level colleges such as Axminster, Woodroffe and Exeter made a number of visits. GCSE students again included those from Gable Hall school from Essex.

Trust staff were also busy giving a number of talks to a wide range of disparate local adult groups. These included several branches of the Women's Institute, Probus Clubs, the Otter Valley Association and even a local Wine and Beer Society. Many of these talks

were followed by a visit to the Centre from the group. Other visits of note included one from our member of parliament Hugo Swire M.P. He took a keen interest in the Centre and has offered his assistance to try and locate those funds which are so necessary to run the charity.



Hugo Swire MP visited the Centre in July

The Centre is within the East Devon Area of Outstanding Beauty. East Devon District Council is furthering the aims of the AONB through an initiative which is known as the East Devon AONB partnership. In connection with this, the partnership Chairman, Councillor Reed and the AONB manager, Chris Woodruff visited towards the end of the term. The partnership is jointly funded through the EDDC as well as Devon County Council and the Countryside Agency.

The end of term does not signify a quiet spell. Far from it. Fund raising has to take priority and there is a whole range of practical tasks to get done. Visits continue with a range of events for the Young Rangers Club and numerous Family Activity days.

The Family Activity days take place on Wednesdays. In August, they start on the 4th with **Rock Pooling** at Lyme Regis. On 11th August, there is a day looking at '**Tracks and signs of Woodland life**'. Come and explore the many freshwater habitats at the Centre as '**Wet and wild!**' is the theme for the event on 18th August. The final Family Activity day is a countryside **Treasure Hunt** on 25th August.

For further information about Family Activity days or the Young Rangers' Club please telephone the Trust on 01404 831373 or email offwell1@aol.com. Please note that booking is essential and that children under the age of 8 years old must be accompanied by an adult.



A slowworm fascinates Young Rangers' Club members