



Introduction to Forestry

**Summary report on a pilot 5 day work placement
The Forest of Falkland, 8th-12th November 2010**



Background

Falkland Centre for Stewardship carried out this project under contract to the Forestry Commission, who wished to pilot a five-day work placement Introduction to Forestry Course. The aim was to promote opportunities to work outdoors with trees and forests to young people, inspire them to consider a future career in forestry, and give them a sense of achievement.

First steps: learning from the experience of others

The course was modelled on Rural Skills <http://www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/curriculum/skills-for-work/rural-skills.html>. The emphasis is on experiential learning and practical experience, incorporating review and reflection throughout. These courses develop the five core skills (communication, numeracy, information technology, problem solving and working with others). The primary target group is S3 and S4 school pupils.

Rural Skills courses aim to introduce the pupils to land-based industries and jobs, offering practical experience of an outdoor working environment with awareness of health and safety, technical knowledge and information on future training, learning and employment opportunities. Support material specifically for forestry is available for Intermediate 1 level. The courses also enhance the skills and attitudes required for employability, including understanding of the workplace, self-evaluation skills, flexible approaches to problem solving, adaptability and confidence to set goals, reflect and learn from experience.

Rural Skills courses run elsewhere in Scotland have identified several success factors, particularly the importance of partnership working (including potential future employers) in providing hands-on learning opportunities, shaping the design and delivery of the courses and helping to maintain a high level of achievement for pupils. A useful report on several case studies is available on the Forest Education Initiative website http://www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/rural_skills_vocational_training/

These courses also contribute to the delivery of *A Curriculum for Excellence*, which aims to offer all young people the chance to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. They support the three main cross-curricular experiences and outcomes of health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp>

Another useful resource is a short video on forestry available at <http://vimeo.com/14958829>

Planning the project: Seed to sawmill

Falkland Centre for Stewardship approached Bell Baxter High School staff and pupils, who were keen to take part. The school was already working with Elmwood College to offer Rural Skills in Horticulture, and had an active conservation volunteers group. Planning took several months, from July to October. The school decided it would be best to run the course over five consecutive days rather than one day a week, for S3-6 (age 13-17), particularly encouraging girls to take part (we ended up with one-third girls). The twelve places were quickly filled, with a waiting list.

Meetings were held with key delivery partners to finalise the programme (**Appendix A**) and risk assessments (**Appendix B**); with partners, staff and volunteers to run through roles and responsibilities, health and safety; and with pupils to give them an opportunity to ask questions, check they all had completed parental consent forms and ensure they would arrive at the start of the week fully prepared and equipped. Other meetings were held with those delivering individual sessions, to agree timings, content, location, requirements for tools, equipment and materials, and to carry out risk assessments.



Health and safety

Health and safety was of course a primary concern in planning and delivering the course. A detailed Risk Assessment was prepared, including Child Protection policy, accident and emergency procedure. Everyone in the delivery team was disclosure checked. In addition the team had a list of everyone's mobile phone numbers. All those delivering practical sessions had Public Liability Insurance; all power equipment used was PAT tested.

At the start of Day One, the pupils were asked to prepare their own risk assessment for the week, identifying risks and how to reduce them. This was a useful preparatory exercise that provided a good opportunity to discuss potential hazards and agree a code of behaviour. In addition, before each session in which they would be using tools and equipment, they had a safety briefing. Any mishandling or inappropriate behaviour was immediately dealt with. During the week the pupils handled saws, loppers, spades, power sanders, large pieces of wood and made fires; there was not a single injury or incident to cause concern.

Feedback and evaluation

Asking for feedback was integral to the programme. Each morning, we started with an active review of the previous day. The technique that worked best was a simple show of thumbs up, horizontal or down. This is allowed everyone to see what everyone else felt. We also used a rope line on the floor, where participants could step forwards or backwards (or stay on the line) to indicate how much they had enjoyed or not enjoyed particular sessions. The pupils were also very forthcoming with verbal comments.

During the week the pupils made a photographic record of the week, which was completed back at school and presented as a power point to fellow pupils and staff. Four of the pupils also bravely gave the presentation at a seminar organised by Falkland Centre for Stewardship in January on 'Working with children and young people in the woods' to an audience of teachers, rangers and other outdoor educators.

The participants wanted to be outdoors all the time, no matter what the weather, so we shortened the indoor sessions wherever possible. Their concentration was much better outside, and whatever the activity, they remained engaged for longer. The week was cold (average 5-8 degrees C), with wind, rain and sleet. The forest offered some shelter, but everyone had warm clothing and overalls so the programme was not modified at all due to weather conditions. The pupils proved to be a hardworking and effective workforce for all the practical tasks they were set.

Bushcraft and survival skills was the most popular activity of the week. This session was run by three rangers from Fife Coast and Countryside Trust. After a briefing on safe handling of tools the pupils were shown how to make a fire safely, then cut and collected wood to make their own fires in groups of 3-4. Everything was very wet and it took determination and persistence to get the fires going; all succeeded, and they were then shown how to safely extinguish their fires. After lunch cooked over a fire it was time for building shelters. They would happily have spent much longer on this than the hour available.



The **woodworking** session with two skilled craftsmen was also highly rated. The pupils learnt about the appearance and properties of different kinds of wood, saw a demonstration of wood being cut and planed, had the chance to use an electric sander and oil a breadboard, and to assemble a small wooden box with a drawer.



Equally popular was the demonstration of **felling and milling** a tree. The forester, from Scottish Native Woods, felled a mature Scots pine with a chainsaw and showed how it could be extracted using an all-terrain, low-impact mini-forwarder. He then operated a portable sawmill to produce planks, and the group was shown how the timber is first air dried then placed in a wood drying kiln.

Time spent **pruning and brashing** was also enjoyed. They worked in pairs with a saw and loppers, were completely absorbed for the whole session and requested longer (they had two sessions of about an hour each). They found **Rhododendron clearance** almost equally absorbing, using two methods: cutting near the base then hammering the stumps, and lever and mulch.



The **tree planting** session was enjoyed by most, despite being out in very cold wind and sleet. About 150 broadleaved native tree seedlings were planted, with stakes and guards, in 1.5 hours, working in pairs, on a challenging site. Seeds were collected and sown for the school to start their own tree nursery.

Less popular but still rated 'ok' were the sessions on **forest planning, tree identification, risk assessments** and the briefings on **safe handling of tools**. This reflected the overall experience of the week that the participants were happiest and most fully engaged while outside and doing practical tasks. As this was such a short course, we decided collectively that we would go with where the young people's energies and interests led, and not put pressure on them to complete course work or projects. However in a longer course over an extended period of time, the expectation would be that the participants would be required to complete course work required for progress and assessment.



Key elements to the success of the course were:

- An estate with appropriate forest resources and staff keen to deliver this project
- Funding from the Forestry Commission
- A local school with enthusiastic staff, already doing Rural Skills with a local college
- One teacher available for the whole week, who knew all the pupils well, was used to working with them outdoors and could drive the school minibus
- Delivery partners keen to be involved, who understood what was needed and had appropriate skills and experience
- A group of young people eager to take part and willing to participate in a range of activities
- Agreement of all involved to be flexible so the programme could be adapted and amended as required, according to the response of the participants.
- Several staff and volunteers would be available to help throughout the week. For most of the sessions we had a ratio of one adult to three young people.

Other factors that contributed to the success were:

- Plenty of planning time, and allowing adequate time for the school to get all necessary permissions from staff and parents;
- Participants and volunteers having adequate PPE to work outside in any weather;
- Being able to borrow all the tools and equipment needed (for an extended one day a week course, it would be necessary to buy these);
- A diverse forest resource which made it possible to carry out all aspects of the course on one site, minimising travel time;
- Commitment from both the school and organisers to find ways to offer the participants further opportunities to develop these skills and interests following the course.

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