

Forest School Escot Park - September 2008



The aims of forest school are best summed up as 'learning by doing in a natural environment'. It is a primary aim to establish cross-curricula links in environmental activity. The idea of Forest Schools started in Scandinavia about 20 years ago. It was seen as a way of developing personal skills, building confidence and encouraging cooperative teamwork and learning. As a teacher of geography it is my hope that we teach our students to value the planet. Much of what we teach in Year 7 focuses on citizenship, and individual responsibility for the local environment and sustainable lifestyles. Forest school has proved very successful with all age groups and has been particularly supportive of pupils with emotional difficulties. However, the aims of forest school benefit all.

Sidmouth College pupils have certainly gained considerably from their experience. Over the first three weeks of term five groups, totalling 148 Year 7 pupils went through the school. Tutors were involved along with other teachers and support staff. We also involved a number of sixth formers, whose assistance was greatly appreciated by all staff. Year 12 pupils gained a good deal from working with young children. (We are considering extending the Forest School to all new Year 12 students next year. It could be part of an induction course for them).

During two days at Escot, pupils got to know each other better along with their tutor. They discussed safety on site, and how they would avoid accidents and use tools safely. They then made name badges using saws and tree branches (see photo). In the afternoon, the groups retreated into the depths of Escot's woodland to build shelters for overnight. These were constructed of branches and tarpaulins. During one night it rained continuously and flooded the site. There were very few grumbles. Pupils survived in a situation I expect most could never have imagined they could cope with.



The following morning pupils tidied the site and enjoyed a cooked breakfast around a camp fire. In the afternoon, pupils visited Woodbury Castle and were taught about the Common, and its management. Pupils arrived back at school, in time for homeward buses. The response of both pupils and parents was overwhelmingly positive. We feel pupils gained socially and have now a better understanding of our natural environment. During lessons, we continue to build, on the experiences of Forest School, in all subjects. The College intends to go on with Forest School, with our new intake in September 2009.

Roger White, Head of Geography