



Newsletter

Spring 2011

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Welcome

to the Spring 2011 newsletter for the Ayrshire Forest Cluster, to keep you updated on recent developments.

FOREST SCHOOL TRAINING

After some considerable time in the planning, we were delighted that forest school training started in Ayrshire for the first time. The level 3 leader training, which is a recognised OCN qualification, equivalent to an A level.

12 people started with the intensive week at Craufurdland Estate near Fenwick in March, with an interim assignment due before the 3 day practical skills assessment in mid May. To become a qualified forest school leader will involve running a 6 week programme with a group, which will also be assessed and completion of a portfolio, hopefully by early 2012.

Local schools and nurseries have taken up the 16 places on the level 1 taster course, also in mid May at Craufurdland, which will be the next step in us establishing a network of sustainable forest schools around East, South, North Ayrshire and Arran.



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FOREST SCHOOL LEVEL 1 TRAINING

The two day level 1 forest school course took place in mid May with all 16 places filled. The level 1 course does not allow people to run a forest school but gives a very good introduction to the whole concept and hopefully stirs some enthusiasm for future involvement. It is also very important for networking and allows further opportunities to create links with others who are working towards being fully qualified level 3 leaders.



FOREST SCHOOL SITE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

As part of developing a network of forest schools throughout Ayrshire, it is important that the schools that have showed the commitment and have signed up to the level 1 training, have both access to one or more qualified leaders and also a suitable site to develop for forest school activities, ideally within walking distance.

We have been successful in securing about 90% of the funding required to progress this part of the project and are hopeful that the rest can be secured in the near future.

Funding for the forest school training has come from the Forests 4 People fund and participant contributions with the Big Lottery providing funding towards the site development project.

Some schools and nurseries participating in Level 1 training;

Onthank Nursery Mount Carmel Primary Hillbank Nursery Hillhead Primary Darvel Nursery
New Cumnock Nursery Mauchline Primary Cumnock Academy Teacher Access Programme



Some organisations working towards Level 3 leader training;

East Ayrshire Woodlands
ACE, Girvan
BTCV Scotland
Onthank Nursery
National Trust for Scotland
Roots of Arran

Onthank has shown a real commitment to Forest school, with several members involved in both the level 1 and level 3 courses. East Ayrshire Woodlands and the Forest Cluster will be working with those involved to significantly upgrade the community woodland and develop it as a forest school site. The first phase of the project will involve resurfacing of the path network and developing green paths to make the woodlands, hedgerows and wildlife more accessible.

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MORE FOREST SCHOOLS UPDATES



Chris Saunders and Rachel Greuter have started the first of four forest school groups to be held at Pinclanty woodland this year. It comprises of Pinwherry primary and Colmonel primary P1-4 students. There are ten children all together and they have undertaken two sessions of six so far. This is a great opportunity for the children of Pinwherry primary to mix with the Colmonel children as the Pinwherry school closes in June and the children will transfer to Colmonel primary. They have been making the most of the sessions even though it has rained on both occasions. They have been exploring their forest school area, playing games, learning about the environment and being creative.

As well as this they have been getting to know each other. It has been great to see that they have become friends in such a short space of time. Pinclanty is a great place for the forest school with the earlier development of the learning trail by East Ayrshire Woodlands..... We look forward to running our future sessions with the children from Dailly and Barr primaries.

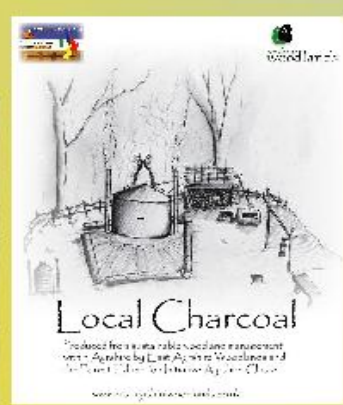
3 members plan to run a 6 week course with Fenwick Primary at Craufurdland in September.

TRADITIONAL SKILLS UPDATE

CHARCOAL BURNING

We have continued to do charcoal burning on a small scale until we can develop a secure, working site that will allow us to increase both kiln size and level of production.

The small kilns fabricated by Kilmarnock college are still performing well, using branchwood and small firewood from the result of our essential woodland management. The vast majority of local stockists sell charcoal imported from the far east and whilst these are from fsc badged woodlands, they are still not from a result of sustainable woodland management in the UK and Scotland in particular. In the short to medium term, we would like to produce enough to have one or two local outlets to supply a truly local and high quality product on a small scale as well as being educational too. We plan to have a more permanent site in place for the autumn when we will resume hazel coppicing to provide future materials for charcoal burning and other crafts. As part of the ongoing development, we are trialling small sales of barbecue charcoal & horticultural chardust at forthcoming events, starting with Celebrate Ayrshire, at Culzean on the 19th June.



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WILLOW CROP UPDATE

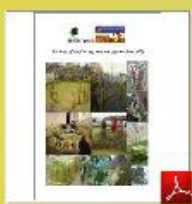
It has been a very busy willow season for 2010/11, which ran between mid November and the end of March.

Numerous willow structures were installed around the region, at schools and nurseries and we also had several large orders for willow supply and kits.

We have started to plan and develop things for the next season, with improved facilities



We plan to offer more willow products suitable as florist & craft supplies and to introduce new willow crafts and features for education & events for the coming season.



New willow torches & website downloads

*** The new harvest season is expected to start end October / early November 2011 ***

OTHER NEWS AND SNIPPETS

Ayrshire FEI cluster member, Rosie Mapplebeck

The FEI Networking Event took place in Pitlochry at Atholl Palace at the end of May. Cluster member Rosie Mapplebeck attended. Activities included a cook-out in the evening and an attempt to build a bio-dome.



"Galloway area held a practical kids camp on 6-8th May and the kids had a ball despite the wet weather. When you are tracking newts in the pond and sailing a coracle you expect to be wet anyway. Rosie attended and told environmental stories in the big tent, while clothes steamed over the fire pit and rice pudding bubbled away in a huge pot. While marking out an earth timeline we really appreciated how little time humans had been on the planet, especially when agriculture was represented by the width of a blade of grass yet the time line had climbed a hillside forest track. There will be another camp in September at Taliesin community woods."

Forest schooling was introduced to school teachers and social workers on Rosie's Naturally Inspired workshop at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in March. Participants played and worked outdoors with natural materials and clay after hearing a creation story. A full day version of this is planned in association with fellow teller and artist Claire Hewitt, where participants will exchange workshops and stories and extend them together to explore the elements of earth and air. For more on any of these: info@rosiemapplebeck.co.uk



Onthank Nursery at the press release of the start of 'The Foxes' community woodland improvements project and forest school area development.



Forest School level 1 participants on the recent course at Craufurdland Estate

AND FINALLY.....

THE FUTURE OF WOODLAND EDUCATION AND FOREST SCHOOL IN AYRSHIRE?

In these uncertain times, it is a shame that the great strides that we have made recently in woodland education and in developing a network of sustainable, vibrant and worthwhile forest schools throughout Ayrshire and on Arran inevitably have an uncertain future. This newsletter is just the very tip of the organisation, facilitation and development work that goes on to take things forward, improving habitats, access and opportunities for learning new skills and enhancing old ones. Forest School in particular has been proven to aid both physical and mental health and wellbeing, motor, literacy, numeracy and creative skills and concentrating on particular strengths of individuals. The Forest Cluster in Ayrshire is essentially facilitated by people on a voluntary basis as none of us are specifically employed to develop forest school, training opportunities and woodland education, which is a huge commitment along with all the other commitments and needs to be done correctly for the benefit of us all for the future. We would welcome your views on the opportunities, concerns and potential of our cluster group for the future. Thanks for reading our newsletter.

Mark Davies, Secretary, Ayrshire FEI cluster.