

Woodlarks Camp Site Trust

Charity 306148
woodlarks.org.uk

Woodlarks Campsite is a unique facility, based on the edge of Farnham in Surrey, which creates accessible camping opportunities. Nearly 100 years of experience, the right specialised equipment and bands of enthusiastic volunteers ensure that mobility issues, physical and cognitive disabilities and sensory impairments need not be barriers to the sense of adventure, improved well-being, and great good fun that so many people find through camping.



In 2024, more than 1,000 people camped at Woodlarks, enjoying the thrills and fellowship of activity holidays spent on a glorious woodland campsite which boasts an outdoor heated swimming pool, an accessible zip-wire that spans a shallow valley, a bird hide, and a wheelchair accessible swing. Many of the paths through the woodland have been laid to tarmac, such that folk who use power wheelchairs can set out independently to explore. A recent project created accessible orienteering trails across the site and through the woodland, once again, encouraging independent adventures.

Woodlarks welcomed eight local school and college camps during the 2024 camping season. These camps enable teachers to engage with their pupils in a very different setting, encouraging independence and drawing out strengths that may not be apparent in the classroom environment.

There is an annual swimming gala camp, run by NASCH (a national association of swimming clubs for disabled people), which invites four or five people from each club across the UK. The 'open camps' at Woodlarks can be accessed by individuals not belonging to any particular schools or organisations. So, there are camps open to girls and young women under 18, and another is set up for boys and young men under 18. There are also camps for women over 18, men over 18, and camps that welcome mixed gender groups, so the adventure of a week spent under canvas is open to all.

Woodlarks – where disabled people and volunteers get together to create adventure

Woodlarks – the lure of the great outdoors on a small scale

Woodlarks – canvas camping with indoor alternatives for the not-so-hardy

Woodlarks – the charity dedicated to making camping accessible



Each of our 'open camps' weaves together a whole new group of returning campers and new recruits each year, to take on the challenge of living simpler lives together, closer to nature. Life-long friendships are forged on these fields, and many folk talk about counting down 'the fifty-one weeks until we meet again'. Most of the 'open camps' rely heavily on non-disabled young people, who volunteer their time and energies to work one-to-one with their disabled peers, enabling them to play a full part in these camping holidays. The opportunity to develop real, lasting and inclusive friendships has a massive impact on all who attend, and young non-disabled volunteers can gain valuable life-skills and work experience, as a great form of 'added value', whilst enjoying activity-based outdoor adventures. Many of the 'open camps' offer assessment for the Gold Residential section of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and are also happy to provide references and/or volunteering logs, for young attendees who may be applying for medical school, nursing or teaching etc.

Even during the closed season, Woodlarks does not sleep. We host working parties in spring and autumn, where groups of volunteers invest their time, energy and skills in working to maintain and improve the campsite and facilities in readiness for the next high season. This helps us to keep camp fees as low as possible, making camp affordable to those with limited means. And for 16 years now, Woodlarks has created an annual 'Winter Wonderland' onsite, for children from local hospices, and schools for children with profound disabilities. This is provided free of charge, and each child goes away with a gift from Santa. This is a magical experience and again supports families on low incomes.



Disabled Campers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chance to try canvas camping with support provided • Opportunities for adventure that lead to greater confidence • A chance to challenge beliefs about 'things I'll never be able to do' • The possibility of making life-long friendships with their non-disabled peers
Winter Wonderland Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bespoke multi-sensory experience designed for children with profound disabilities • A chance for children with complex needs to connect with a sense of awe and wonder • An outreach option for local SEND schools unable to travel to Woodlarks
Parents & Carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chance for their own holiday, with peace of mind that their relative is in safe hands • Sharing in the excitement as their relative relates stories from their week at camp
Volunteer Helpers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The satisfaction of knowing that they've helped to make the magic happen • Useful work experience and a great entry to record on a CV • Qualifying Gold Residential for DofE Award • Reference on request for university or job applications
School Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncovering hidden strengths not obvious in the school environment • Nurturing positive attitudes about what individual pupils can do • The well-documented improved well-being gained by spending time close to nature
Society as a Whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of the barriers disabled people face • Opportunities to break down some of those barriers • Increased understanding and inclusion • An understanding that we <u>all</u> have abilities

Figure 1: Who benefits from Woodlarks



Figure 2: Woodlarks visitors in 2024