



PRESS RELEASE

July 2024

Project opens the outdoors to Forest of Bowland communities

Hundreds of people of all ages and backgrounds, from toddlers to community leaders, have been enjoying activities and outreach organised by the Connecting People and Nature project (CPAN), based in and around the Forest of Bowland.

In the project's first year, more than 40 families joined in the free outdoor toddler group, Little Saplings; around 300 youngsters took part in HAF – Holiday, Activity and Food programme – sessions; 33 People Enjoying Nature sessions were held; and 9 community groups were introduced to the Bowland countryside; school pupils planted trees; and teachers have been learning how to make use of the outdoors as part of the National Curriculum.

The three-year Connecting People and Nature project is being delivered by UK educational charity The Ernest Cook Trust and the Forest of Bowland National Landscape, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust.

The project's focus is on promoting nature, wellbeing, and Outdoor Learning. It has three elements: offering health and wellbeing sessions connecting people and nature; helping schools with Outdoor Learning; and training community leaders in how to plan and run their own outdoor activities.

Alison Cross, one of The Ernest Cook Trust's Outdoor Learning Officers said: "Since we started, we have been very busy providing nature-based wellbeing sessions for early years, family support groups and youth groups. This provision has been amplified by partnership work, with borough councils' green spaces teams, landowners like Forest of Bowland farmers and community networks and groups. This partnership work allows the legacy of the project to continue with our support and advice."

Cathy Hopley, of Forest of Bowland National Landscape, added: "It has been proven over and over again how spending time in nature can boost our wellbeing, particularly for people dealing with mental health issues. Our sessions offer free transport to participants, overcoming a major barrier to enjoying the countryside, but we also provide them with a supportive and knowledgeable leader who can inspire a love of nature and wildlife which lasts a lifetime."

(continues...)

Since its launch, CPAN activities have included:

- More than 660 people taking part in free Little Saplings sessions at Pendle's Victoria Park and Burnley's Scott Park. The programme is designed to parents and carers of toddlers who wouldn't normally attend outdoor play sessions or spend time in nature independently.
- 12 HAF (Holiday Activity & Food sessions), with most of the young people attending coming from the Burnley and Pendle areas. The sessions took place in green spaces, like parks.
- More than 30 people from an Asian British Pakistani community group joining in activities at Lisburn Forest, where people took part in den-building, minibeast hunting and a nature trail.
- Mental health and wellbeing nature sessions, which saw over 400 participants learning about geology and fossils in Langden Valley, taking part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch from Beacon Fell, and making fat ball feeders.

A course was run for community leaders, to have the confidence to organise outdoor activities. And to help them take what they learnt back to their groups.

Alison and the team also reached out to schools to promote Outdoor Learning activities.

Four Burnley schools - Barden Primary, Holly Grove Primary, Broadfield Specialist School and Shuttleworth College – learnt about plants and planted trees.

Six schools (Colne's Park Primary, Holly Grove Primary, West Street Primary, Barden Primary, Padiham Primary and Ightenhill Primary) signed up to Foundations for Outdoor Learning. Alison is now supporting teachers in how to take some lessons outdoors for the summer term, including local history, river studies, compass skills, and farm trips into the Forest of Bowland National Landscape.

Comments from those taking part included:

"It really engaged all of the class, especially a few children who are usually difficult to engage. It was brilliant bringing their learning to life. We are going to try and recreate all of the activities when we go to Ingleton on our residential trip. I will then look to repeat these activities going forward when possible. A brilliant afternoon! Alison was fantastic and put loads of effort and preparation in. Thank you!"

"Activities don't have to be complicated, or cost a lot, to be effective."

"I think it's just made me appreciate being outdoors more...Just even seeing the different shades of greens on the trees. So, it's made me want to incorporate more of that in our own daily life here."

For more information about CPAN, visit [Connecting People and Nature | Forest of Bowland AONB](#)



Notes to editors

The Ernest Cook Trust

[The Ernest Cook Trust](#) offers children and young people, their families and communities, the chance to learn from the land through hands-on Outdoor Learning activities.

The Ernest Cook Trust is a charity limited by guarantee with the sole charitable objective of education.

The Trust places Learning at its very heart by offering children and young people a chance to connect with nature and to take action on the environment in a meaningful and positive way. The Trust awards around £2m per year in grants based on relevance and impact against organisational objectives. Grants are given to schools or charitable organisations for activities in the UK with a particular focus on areas where there are fewer opportunities to experience the outdoors.

For more information about The Ernest Cook Trust visit www.ernestcooktrust.org.uk or contact press officer Jo Smyth – email media@ernestcooktrust.org.uk.

The Forest of Bowland National Landscape

The Forest of Bowland National Landscape is one of 46 National Landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/>

The Forest of Bowland was designated as an AONB in 1964. The AONB legislation (National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) was designed to protect areas of unspoiled natural beauty for future generations.

13% of the AONB is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its extensive habitats of wet and dry heathland, particularly heather moor and blanket bog. A major part of the AONB's fells is designated as a Special Protection Area under the European Birds Directive.

The Connecting People & Nature project is one of the ways in which the AONB Partnership enables people to enjoy, learn, and give back to the outstanding landscape and heritage on their doorstep.

For more information, please contact cathy.hopley@lancashire.gov.uk or visit www.forestofbowland.com.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033.

Over the next ten years, the Heritage Fund aims to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

The Heritage Fund helps protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are.

The Heritage Fund is passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.

Follow [@HeritageFundUK](#) on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use [#NationalLotteryHeritageFund](#) www.heritagefund.org.uk.