



THE ART OF NATURAL FOREST PRACTICE

Picnic in the Woods

Planning Group Visits

(Incorporating risk assessment and visitor code)

A few hours spent exploring the natural forest, sitting round the campfire toasting and talking, playing, is a spiritually refreshing and healing experience that rarely fails to bring great pleasure. Iliff likes to meet at the gate explaining how the forest works and who lives there, engendering appreciation and understanding for the countryside. There are many dangers in the natural forest and in this way children learn respect and play safely. You should study this document and the separate notes to prepare your group for their visit so that they come aware that Coed Nant Gai is a very special place (see page 2). Please wear warm clothing suitable for outdoors, strong footwear with a good tread, etc. There must sufficient adults to care for and be responsible for the children. Access is only by prior arrangement with Iliff.

Please enjoy your visit !

TIME OF YEAR

All times of year are beautiful with their own associated interest and drawbacks. The seasons are becoming upset with the extremes we are experiencing, too wet and too dry and the flowers, fungi, etc are suffering.

SPRING- The days can be rather chilly for sitting round the campfire until about April. The first wild flowers add spots of colour from about late February into April and peak in early May and the bluebells in late May into June. The birds are singing their heads off; nest building is in full swing. There is work stocking-up on logs for the stove following the winter felling.

SUMMER- The forest becomes dark and mysterious, everything is growing, the young are being reared, it's dense and opaque, providing good cover for animals to hide and observe us. There is a myriad of insects and the midges come out to feed on us !

AUTUMN- The evenings are warm, the fruits and berries are ripe, everyone is getting ready for winter, storing food and, sorry to say, pushing out the youngsters to find new territory.

WINTER- Forest work commences giving nature a helping hand to accelerate natural processes of healing. You will see glades being created and seedling trees transplanted. September to about April it's too cold to sit outside and the bunkhouse with woodstove is available for small groups. The trees can be coated with frost which at sunrise is very beautiful. In snow (rare these days) there are footprints to follow and identify- rabbit, fox, birds, and if you're fortunate on rare occasions there may be larger mammals including gruffalo! January and signs appear that the forest is preparing for spring- twigs colour, winter fungi blossom, the first celandine flower, wild animals are rutting, birds start singing to establish territory and the woodpecker is hammering.

COED NANT GAIN IS VERY SPECIAL

The forest of Coed Nant Gain has been here since the ice age which Iliff regards as *Old-Growth Ancient Forest*. Coed Nant Gain is special for this and because the forest community has survived more or less intact. Iliff does not regard himself as 'owning' the forest, but rather as responsible for its well-being and protecting it from the outside world. As guests we do not have the right to take or damage anything, it's all very special and belongs to the forest. Visitors are asked to respect this and the forest community- the animals, birds, plants, flowers, mosses, etc. Some are scarce, confined just to this part of Wales and many are very precious.

Iliff is pioneering experimental *Natural Forest Practice* restoring the health of the forest. His work is slowly gaining international recognition. Coed Nant Gain is designated a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), is part of the Clwydian Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and much more.

Your visit can be a wonderful educational opportunity as well as promoting respect for the countryside.

COME WITH AN OPEN MIND, OBSERVE AND LEARN AND IT WILL BE A GREAT VISIT.

PLEASE WATCH OUT FOR

AT THE GATE-

Please park outside the gate (or over the stone bridge). Adult supervision is essential for children; watch out for passing traffic. The river next to us is a potential hazard for children, you must keep an eye on them. Please disarm boys of sticks as they have a tendency to whack the plants. On entering, please keep together as a group to ensure no-one is lost and Iliff can explain how the forest works.

DISABLED ACCESS-

Iliff has little or no experience of access for disabled people but is aware that the forest has much to offer people of all ages and disabilities. The forest is not suitable for wheelchairs and a 4 wheel drive vehicle would be required to transport people to the amphitheatre. People with disabilities may well benefit;- visually impaired; hearing impairment; learning difficulties; mental health problems, etc. Iliff would be pleased to discuss how such people could be made welcome.

DOGS-

Dogs are not harmonious with the wildlife of the forest. If you have no option but to bring your dog please consult Iliff first.

FIRST AID PROVISION-

Iliff has a few basics, but these are rarely used so mostly out of date. First aid needs may include- cuts and bruises, insect bites, burnt fingers (campfire), getting wet in the stream or rain. If bringing a group you are advised to bring your own first aid kit.

GROUP SIZE-

There must always be enough adults to supervise and be responsible for the children, you are responsible for them throughout the visit. Families groups work well in groups of about ten or twelve. Larger groups of adults are welcome but should stick together so that Iliff can explain what we see.

INSURANCE-

You should make your own arrangements as you see necessary.

MOBILE PHONES-

Mobile phones do not work in the valley so there is no contact during the visit. Some phones sometimes work at the gate on entering the forest.

PATHS, RIDES AND BRIDGES-

Please keep to the paths and rides to protect the plants and for your own safety. There is a footbridge, it has a handrail on one side- please give children a helping hand.

PLANTS-

There are many precious plants, some, such as ferns, surviving from the ice age. Never pick the flowers nor damage the plants- they are all protected by law. Watch where you put your feet to avoid treading on any.

Some plants will do their best to trap you- brambles scratch, decaying sticks are slippery (like banana skins), nettles sting. Don't eat berries or fruits- they are needed by the forest, never eat the fungi (they have work to do in the forest);

STREAM, PONDS AND POOLS -

There is running water in the stream, not always at bottom end of the valley but always higher up. Children may play in the stream with their parent's OK and adult supervision. There are pools and ponds around the valley where the mammals drink. Pond life is fascinating to all ages, please keep a careful eye especially with small children;

STEEP SIDED VALLEY-

The valley sides can be very slippery with leaves, fallen twigs, stones, etc. Escarpments, vertical sides, caves, etc are out of bounds to us. Please keep to the paths and rides.

TREES-

Trees shed branches at any time, even on still days but especially with strong wind. On entering the wood this sign is on the drive side-

**This OLD - GROWTH ANCIENT WOODLAND
with its associated decaying wood is being restored to its
natural state and the trees are liable to shed branches at any time
The public should not enter unless accompanied by
the caretaker - tel 01352 741 039**

For safety keep to the paths and rides.

WEATHER-

In our unpredictable climate it can rain, blow, snow, freeze- bring raincoats and warm clothing, strong footwear with a good tread (preferably boots/ Wellingtons). The only shelter is the bunk House by the amphitheatre (see Woodland Amphitheatre). Visit may have to be postponed if the weather is rough. Telephone Iliff to check (he may not have your phone number).

WILD ANIMALS, PETS, TRESPASSERS-

We are under observation and our presence reported (by the birds). Wild creatures tend to retreat out of sight when there are strangers, the more noise we make, the less chance of seeing anything. You may be fortunate to meet the fox, badger, even a gruffalo! It's as well to wear a soft hat when the squirrels are cropping the fir comes for, like monkeys, their aim is deadly accurate! Visitors rarely if ever meet a trespasser, but bear in mind that there are people about in the countryside, some very occasionally up to no good. Please- NO DOGS or pets. Summer and autumn you may need insect repellent and bite cream.

WOODLAND AMPHITHEATRE-

The amphitheatre is available in the warmer weather, say April to September. There's tiered seating, a central campfire, swing, tree climbing and bunk house with woodstove, for all ages. Sat round the **CAMPFIRE BRAZIER** with sandwiches and a thermos toasting marshmallows can be the best part of the visit. You are invited to bring barbecue food- sausages, marshmallows, etc (grill provided). People with long hair, especially small children, should tie it back away from the fire. The **AMPHITHEATRE** is intended for theatre, music, poetry, story telling, monthly meetings, etc. The **SWING** has much greater reach than previously, producing squeals of pleasure, but requires supervision of youngsters. You use the swing entirely at your own risk. Please **STAY WITHIN THE USED AREAS** of the amphitheatre as it is important not to extend the trampled area or to damage the surrounding forest to retain its feel of the wild forest. As appropriate, Iliff can provide a **QUIZ** (age related) based on what you have seen during the visit.

There is also a **BUNK HOUSE** intended for smaller groups of up to 6 or 7 when the weather is inclement. It is equipped with a woodstove, stools, etc. **WATER** is carried from Iliff's house; **FIREWOOD** will be provided by Iliff (not from the surrounding area), and all **WASTE AND RUBBISH** must be removed by you. There is a simple bucket **TOILET** and **WASHING** facility available by prior arrangement.

Finally, for everyone's pleasure and not impinge on the scents of the forest- better to leave your cigarettes at home. The peace and tranquillity is sufficient.

If in doubt about anything or to check on the weather suitability
please telephone iliff - 01352 741 039

A PASSION FOR RESTORING NATURAL FORESTS

This paper was inspired the residents of the Bryn Gwela Estate, Mold and the interest of local Home Start volunteers
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