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WARLEIGH POINT WOOD NATURE RESERVE AND NATURE CENTRE, DEVON

In 1965 the Devon Trust for Nature Conservation was offered the lease of Warleigh Point Wood as a Nature Reserve. The wood, some 12.8 ha. in area is a triangular spur of deciduous woodland situated $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of the City of Plymouth on the confluence of the River Tamar and River Tavy. It is bounded on one side by the River Tavy and on the other by the Plymouth to Gunnislake railway branch line.

It was apparent from the outset that the area was of great ecological importance as it was divided into areas of different types and stages of deciduous woodland, illustrating clearly the effects of man's management.

During the preparation of the original management plan it was concluded that the Reserve contained sufficient variety of habitats to be of great educational value to all schools and colleges within the Plymouth area. It was decided therefore to develop the woodland for educational field studies, provide facilities for the teaching of elementary ecology and to establish a permanent Nature Trail.

Close co-operation between the Devon Trust and the staff of the Plymouth City Museum was initiated at an early stage and the latter prepared a report on the educational potential of Warleigh Point Wood. This report, among other things indicated the possibility of renting the disused Tamerton Foliot Railway Station a fine limestone building adjacent to the reserve.

After prolonged negotiations with British Rail the Plymouth City Museum, under the auspices of its Schools Museums Service was granted the lease of two rooms and toilet facilities on the ground floor of the disused station to establish a Nature Centre.

Using grant aid from the LEA work began on transforming and equipping the rooms. One room (the old waiting room) was converted into a classroom with seating accommodation for 30 children, the other (the ticket office) became an exhibition room with displays demonstrating the flora and fauna of the Reserve.

A Nature Trail was planned and laid out around the Reserve to include as many ecological features as possible, clearance work being carried out by volunteers from a local Secondary School.

A trail booklet was also prepared to serve as a guide to school teachers bringing parties to the Reserve. It noted interesting points of field study which would suggest to the teacher possible schemes of work for their pupils. Descriptive boards were erected around the trail but these were soon defaced by vandals; a major problem, as the Reserve is situated near two large housing estates.

Just inside the entrance to the Reserve there is broad-leaved coppice which is being managed on a coppice regime. Here children can learn

about this ancient form of silvicultural management and study the effects of this management on wildlife.

Adjacent to the coppice is an area of scrub which was once woodland, clear-felled in 1964. This area is particularly useful as an example of plant succession and colonisation. Photographic records keep the children informed of its continuing development.

Along the northern boundary of the Reserve is a belt of mature broad-leaved woodland which demonstrates many features of ecological interest including a stream and a pond. These aquatic habitats provide an ideal opportunity to compare the adaptations which organisms adopt to survive in flowing and still water.

As the Reserve is situated at the confluence of two major rivers it provides an ideal situation in which to study the ecology of a boundary zone between a purely terrestrial environment and that of the river and sea.

The first school party visited the Nature Centre in September 1967, a standard procedure for using the facilities being worked out in advance. The walk around the Nature Trail is preceded by a talk from the Guide Naturalist on the features one would expect to see. Time is also spent on viewing the exhibits at the Centre.

The majority of visits are made by local Primary Schools who after a preliminary visit usually carry out simple project work such as quadrats, pond study, tree study, shore study etc. To cope with the large influx of school visits during the summer months a qualified teacher has been employed as a Guide Naturalist. Teachers' courses are also organised in conjunction with the local Teachers Centre.

Despite large numbers visiting the Reserve during the summer term there is little sign of damage to animal and plant populations. This is undoubtedly due to the close supervision of the children and the instruction they receive on biological conservation before entering the Reserve.

After three years it was found necessary to expand the Nature Centre facilities. To this end a further lease was taken on the two remaining rooms on the ground floor of the station which were converted into an office and a workshop and tool store.

The Nature Reserve is leased and managed by the Devon Trust for Nature Conservation with the Keeper of Natural History at Plymouth City Museum acting as Warden. The Reserve is not open to the public (except by appointment) but school parties can visit at any time of the year. Management of the reserve (carried out by local Secondary School pupils and by the Plymouth Polytechnic Branch of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, under the supervision of the warden) seeks

- a) To conserve examples of all the main types of woodland habitat and animal populations represented in the Reserve.
- b) To set aside certain areas for long-term study.
- c) To encourage the establishment of a diverse broad-leaved woodland through the management of the existing species and by introductions.
- d) To carry out maintenance of the permanent Nature Trail.

The administration of the adjoining Nature Centre is carried out by the Keeper of Natural History at the Plymouth City Museum with financial assistance being provided by the Schools Museums Service of the Devon County Education Authority.

This venture has achieved more than was originally hoped. Quite apart from the undoubted educational success it has demonstrated what can be achieved by mutual understanding and co-operation between various bodies and organisations. It has provided and will continue to provide not only a mental and instructional outlet, but also physical appreciation of all that is involved in the conservation and interpretation of our countryside.

David Curry
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