

## Virtual forest tours for children

14 January 2020



Virtual tours of the UK's forests have been launched to teach children about the work and jobs of the forestry industry.

The tours will also teach youngsters about issues such as the benefits of forests, different types of woodland habitats and wildlife and the importance of trees to the environment, according to the Forestry Commission.

It is working with Google Expeditions - an app which uses virtual reality - to create a series of forest-based experiences.

### Renewable

The first two tours, which take place in UK forests, cover issues such as sustainable timber production, how woodlands are designed to create habitats for wildlife, machines used in forestry and the importance of trees.

They also include different people working in forests, such as ecologists, tree health officers and machine operators talking about their jobs.

Sarah Wood, learning manager at Forestry England, which looks after the nation's 1,500 forests, said: "We want to inspire the next generation about our work and the variety of career opportunities in the forest.

"These new tools will also help to inform how forestry has huge benefits for both people and wildlife. It is too often assumed that felling trees in any way is damaging for nature, which is simply untrue.

"As well as providing a renewable resource and jobs in our communities, sustainable forest management provides wildlife with the diverse habitats it needs to thrive."

## **Learning**

The tours have been made with a 360-degree camera, and children can view them - in or out of the classroom - using smartphones and tablets, and, if possible, virtual reality headsets.

The Forestry Commission said that panoramas and 3D images used in the "expeditions" are controlled by a tablet, which a teacher can use to point out interesting sights. The tours can be accessed by anyone, but are primarily aimed at seven to 11-year-olds.

It added that these are not intended as a replacement for visits to the UK's forests, but as interactive activities for classrooms, adding it is hoped that they are also followed up with field trips.

Around 16,000 people in the UK work in forestry, the commission said, and 27,000 work in wood processing industries such as sawmilling, pulp and paper. Google Expeditions allow teachers to take pupils on virtual trips.

Jen Holland, program manager at Google Expeditions, said: "Expeditions is a powerful learning tool. It provides a unique opportunity for supplemental learning by giving students new ways of exploring the concepts and places they are studying."

Source: <https://theecologist.org/2020/jan/14/virtual-forest-tours-children>