

Walden Countryside – Risk Assessments

There are separate risk assessments for different categories of visitors

- General Risk Assessment for unescorted visitors and open days
- Risk assessment for work parties and volunteer livestock carers,
- Risk assessment for children's events (Wild Child and Birthday Parties) under the management of Walden Countryside
- Children's groups under the control of the organising body (e.g. nursery forest school, scout and guide groups) are required to have their own risk assessments.

General Risk Assessment for unescorted visitors (which also apply to all other categories of users)

- Our land is all open countryside with mature trees, hedgerows, an orchard at one site, sheep pasture at two others, three ponds at our largest site and a pond and flowing brook at another. The inherent risks are therefore very similar to those applying to public footpaths across rural land in NW Essex but minus the risks associated with the use of toxic pesticides and other agricultural chemicals which are not used on our land.

General countryside risks

For most of these risks we do not feel the need to reduce them (which would be very costly and render the land very different to the traditional rural habitat we intend to maintain).

Examples of these risks are:

- Tripping as a result of an unseen rabbit hole or tree stump
- Eating an unidentified berry or fungus that turns out to be toxic
- Falling in the pond or brook
- Tick bites (and the risk of Lyme's disease)

Access for those with disabilities

As with most rural walks there is no specific provision of access: for those with disabilities: the public must make their own decision as to whether it is sensible to visit the land in the light of any specific disability affecting members of their group.

Risks we attempt to minimise

Falling branches or trees

We have the woodland and individual trees surveyed by a tree safety adviser at least every three years with more frequent inspections by our volunteers. Recommended tree surgery is carried out using professional contractors where it is too dangerous for volunteer labour.

Felled timber is stacked safely or burnt on specific bonfire sites.

Sheep

These are not normally any danger but we ask independent visitors not to enter the enclosed pastures when sheep are present

Our visitor leaflets advise anyone who is (or might be) pregnant to avoid direct contact with the sheep (to avoid the very low risk of contagious abortion)

Our volunteer helpers work initially with experienced volunteers and know how to react if surrounded by a large group of sheep anxious to get at the food trough and to keep at a safe distance from the ram when he is present.

Storage of tools and dangerous substances

Hand tools (and sometimes power tools) are stored in a locked barn together with containers of hazardous materials such as creosote.

The barn is always locked when volunteer workers are not present to supervise access but it is impossible to render such a building inaccessible to burglars.

Use of tools and dangerous substances is under the control of the work party leader.

Our power tools stored at our two main sites - these are kept locked by their own keys or locked inside a barn, to avoid unauthorised use.

Car Parking

Our largest nature reserve has a small car park onsite with gated but unlocked public access. Cars are parked at the owner's risk. At the other sites, vehicular access is not allowed to the general public and cars must be parked on nearby

roadside verges.

Visitor Guidance and facilities

The boundaries of our land are clearly marked by hedges or fences and leaflets provided for visitor use indicate the extent of the reserves and recommended walks. Where any doubt exists signs are erected to mark the boundary of land open to the public.

Our largest site has a composting toilet available for visitor use. Its design and access by steep steps render it unusable by those with disabilities. Hand-washing facilities are normally available but are dependent on rainfall maintaining water levels in the water-butt.

Work Parties

Work parties are led by experienced persons who train new volunteers in the safe use of the equipment.

The main work parties do not use power tools – these are restricted to small groups of experienced users who either use their own equipment or own equipment similar to that being used.

When using any wood treatments or other possibly dangerous materials, volunteers are required to follow the manufacturers advice and wear appropriate protective clothing.

There is always a first-aid kit and St Johns trained first-aider present together with mobilephone(s) to call for aid if needed.

Children's Groups

In all normal cases a parent of at least some of the children will be present throughout the event.

The oraniser will have phone number contact for the parent of any child attending alone.

Children's events usually involve two types of activity: organised activities (like spotting and identifying butterflies or pond-dipping) and freeplay allowing children alone or in small groups to explore the nature reserve on their own. Activitiies are always with parental approval and judged by the organisers to be within the

capabilities of the children.

Event organisers will hold a DBS certificate.