

Background Information for Student Projects



Background to Country Parks

National Parks set up in 1949 to protect these special areas and to cater for an increased interest in the countryside and wild places.

By the 1960s people's disposable income and available leisure time increased and visitor numbers to National Parks, nature reserves, common land increased considerably.

The 1968 Countryside Act allowed local authorities to create country parks to help relieve pressure on the national Parks etc. they had the power to buy land to do this and government money was available to help subsidise the cost.

In the past 35 years over 250 country parks have been created. They range from 20 hectares to over 200 hectares, from simple picnic areas to highly developed parks like Moors Valley.

Brief history of Moors Valley Country Park

East Dorset District Council had wanted to set up a Country Park and municipal golf course since the late 1970s but did not have suitable land available. It was not until 1984 that an 82-acre farm already with planning permission for a 9-hole golf course came on the market. Work began to build the golf course, lake, play area, Visitor Centre and railway. This opened to the public in 1987 with a team of 3 Wardens working at Park.

The park proved popular beyond all expectations and expansion was soon required. In 1988 a farm to the north of the first farm was purchased, a second lake and another 9 holes of golf were built.

In 1990 the Visitor Centre was extended to include a larger tearoom and a Country Shop. The Forestry Commission became involved in the park creating the Play Trail which opened in 1991.

Since then there has been continual improvements and alterations to basic structure of the park e.g. new toilet and kitchen in 1997, improvements to the golf centre, ongoing replacement of play equipment,

Moors Valley Country Park - the present day

Today Moors Valley is one of the popular visitor attractions in the south of England, attracting 800,000 visitors each year (based on car count figures with an occupancy rate of 3.4). A park leaflet details the different facilities available. The basic aim is to provide a year round countryside recreation facility of the highest standard, available to residents and visitor to East Dorset alike.

Although starting off very much as an East Dorset District Council venture it is now a joint venture with the Forestry Commission. Staff are employed separately with the Forestry Commission taking charge of the Forest and East Dorset District Council Rangers responsible for the park side of things. Other outlets on the site e.g. the restaurant, country shop, ice cream etc are all run by private businesses on site. They all pay a percentage of their profit to the District Council or Forestry Commission.

On a busy day over 60 people may be employed at the park. The council has a team of 12 Rangers who manage Moors Valley, provide an events and education service and also manage 20 other sites in East Dorset.

Frequently Asked Questions

How large is the park?

Moors Valley is 1000 acres all together, with 750 acres of Forest and 250 acres on the Country Park side (golf course, lakes, rivers, lakeside picnic area etc.)

How many people come on an average summer school holiday day?

The current maximum number of cars that can be parked in the car park is 1500. On a busy day during the summer holidays most of these parking spaces will be filled. The average number of people in a car is estimated to be 3.4 people per car.

What time is the most popular for people to arrive and how long does each visitor (or group of visitors together) on average spend at the park?

During school holidays, this is usually between 11am and 1pm. The average visit length during the school holidays is thought to be around 2 or 3 hours.

What type of people visit Moors Valley and what are thje most popular attractions?

We have a huge range of types of visitors. During the school holidays visitors are usually family groups of varying sizes both from the local area and tourists on holiday. On mid-week days during term-time the majority of our visitors are retired adults and parents with pre-school children. For children, the play trail, play areas and railway are most popular. For adults it is cycle hire and Go Ape.

How do you maintain the Country Park?

Examples of upkeep include: grass cutting, cutting back overgrowing vegetation, fence repairs, boardwalk repairs, resurfacing car park, resurfacing footpaths and cycle trails, replacing play equipment... but there's plenty more!