

TEACHERS' NOTES & SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

I hope this pack gives an idea of our farm and its activities. Please come and have a look round before a school visit. By riding on the farm quad and trailer it is easy to see the whole farm quite quickly. Gumboots are essential, as is a warm jacket of some sort. In the spring and autumn, young children particularly need warm clothing. With a little planning, some activities like sheep shearing, and crayfish catching can be organised. During the winter when cattle and sheep are housed, children need to be quiet when first approaching animals as they can get a shock from sudden noises.

HEALTH & SAFETY

- 1 Perhaps most important is general hygiene particularly with younger children at lambing time. Hot water and soap is available in the farm buildings and farm house. Staggered use can avoid long, queues.
- 2 Pregnant women should avoid visiting the farm at lambing time.
- 3 The river has steep banks by the bottom meadows particularly. The ponds are good for pond dipping but the depth of water changes through the seasons.
- 4 Electric fences will be switched off but children need to be aware.
- 5 Ewes can be protective to newly born lambs and care should be taken around all livestock.

GENERAL FIELD STUDIES

Children should use their eyes and observe the physical features and the wildlife. They could also record, draw or photograph things of particular interest in their natural state, which will add interest. With small groups the chance to badger watch in the summer may be possible. Close observation of plant leaves, flowers, butterflies or listening to bird and animal calls are valuable experiences which may precipitate a desire to know more.

WALKS & TRAILS

Many different walks can be done round the farm and Mr Eaton will be very happy to help. They can be tailored to different groups.

SKETCHING, PAINTING & PHOTOGRAPHY

There are many opportunities for drawing, painting and photography. The old buildings, the views across to Stowe, the river bridge or small details like a single flower.

MAPWORK

The farm provides opportunities for mapping exercises on a large or small scale. For example, farm maps of the whole site showing all the different things of interest or a simple plan showing the layout of the old buildings, where the animals were kept and feed was stored.

TAKING TIME TO SIMPLY 'BE'

It is not easy in this modern life and with large groups or classes, to simply 'be'. It is easy to forget that as adults we are more likely to have experienced many moments of wonder. The first time we saw the intricate and colourful design of a dragonfly or butterfly, the speed of running muntjac, the brightness of rosehips in a hedge, a lamb being born or simply the vastness of space looking across the valley. I hope the farm can provide some of these experiences for your students.

LIVESTOCK

There are many opportunities for close contact with animals, particularly cows and sheep. Lambs being, born, lambs feeding, seeing how animals grow as some obvious studies about life and death processes.

BUILDINGS

Please feel free to use both sets of buildings for studying materials, structures, design etc. There may be a chance for some students to help with hedge planting or a similar activity.

MACHINERY

There are opportunities to take a closer look at agricultural machinery, as a basis for design or as an introduction to levers and hydraulics. The sheep weigh crate and the mobile drafting race would be useful tools for putting across the importance of safety.

THE RIVER

There are over 2.5km of the River Great Ouse running through the farm. These upper reaches are fast flowing and not very deep. There are fast runs over stone, more like an upland river. Flanked by water meadows and touching the railway at one point where there is a newly planted Osier bed (very fast growing). There are also good examples of obstacles restricting the river's flow (fallen trees, branches etc).

Just after the railway is a fenced off area of bank with a newly planted spinney and an artificial otter holt. There is also a good example of a large unpollarded willow tree. In the next section of the water meadow, the nature of the river begins to change. The flow becomes slower (because of Tingewick Mill further downstream) and more sluggish, more typical of a lowland river. There is a great deal of aquatic plant growth in this stretch, including water lilies.

There are wonderful chances to study plant and insect life such as damselflies, dragonflies, and at times a good mayfly hatch. There are fish in the river and also crayfish (traps could be set prior to the visit). Signs of Otters are regularly.

IDEAS & POSSIBLE PROJECTS

- 1 Quiz.
- 2 General questions to prompt younger children.
- 3 Design a poster to advertise Rectory Farm for education visits.
- 4 Plan a nature trail through the farm (especially along the disused railway line), possibly with numbered stops at interesting points. This could be backed up by notes in a leaflet form.
- 5 Bird boxes could be numbered/named and school or individuals could keep box records.

Over to you (the teacher) and I hope the farm can help you.

***'In the end we will conserve only what we love,
We love only what we understand.
We understand only what we are taught.'***