

Forest Fest UK 2023

Forest Fest UK is a UK-based international camp which took place between 28th July-1st August, aimed at members of WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts) and WOSM (World Organisation of the Scout Movement). The camp was located at Walesby Forest, an international activity centre near Nottingham. 1st Ormskirk Rangers and 4th Ormskirk Guides attended this camp, and this is my experience of it!

We set off from our Guide Hut on Friday, arriving at the camp in the afternoon. Together, we set up the campsite and settled into our new 'home' for the next week. We had plenty of fairy lights, bunting, and even balloons to decorate the campsite with. As well as our tents, we had a gazebo, food tent, and the leaders even surprised us with our very own bell tent for drinking hot chocolate in the evening! It also didn't take us very long to discover we were camping right next to a massive field of chickens, which would wander into our camp often and grow fonder of us every day. After setting up camp, we were split into three random groups and given duties for each day. This involved cooking/preparing meals, washing up plates/cutlery/equipment after meals, and basic campsite management (checking tent pegs, filling up water containers, emptying bins). For meals, we had a different array of food each day. For breakfast, we were always provided cereal alongside other traditional breakfast foods (eggy bread, pancakes, waffles, bacon...). Lunch was more picnic-type food, such as sandwiches, and sausage rolls. Evening meals took more preparation. Three of these meals were tacos, fajitas, and pasta. On our last night, we got some pizza as a takeaway treat. On Sunday night, we decided to prepare a traditional British Sunday Dinner. Although the potatoes struggle to cook and ended up being more of an awkward 'clump' than a mash, it was quite delicious!

During the day, plenty of activities took place. A lot of these activities took place in the air, including tree climbing, Jacob's ladder, leap of faith, and a zip wire. Some of these activities took place on the lake, such as kayaking, rafting, and canoeing. Most of these activities decided to challenge us physically, including low ropes and an obstacle course. However, more relaxing activities were

provided alongside these. One of these was the big craft tent. There was a huge variety of crafts, like paracord woggles, painting, creating pin badges out of small beads, and pyrography. Some of the crafts were switched around as time went on, so there were always new things to try! On the main stage during the day, movies were played. I often found myself catching small parts of *The Lion King*, *Moana*, *Matilda the Musical*, and *The Greatest Showman* in-between activities. For the last two days, they also brought in a simulator, which displayed an aircraft and Isle of Man motorbike racing. On the very last day, they also had some emergency service vehicles in. We got the opportunity to chat with police officers, who allowed us to explore various police vehicles, be locked up in a cell, and try out some handcuffs. During these activities, we got the opportunity to earn some of Girlguiding's new adventure badges: Land, Water, and Height!

Each evening at Forest Fest had a different theme. The Friday night was Superheroes. Our leaders had previously tie-dyed giant cloths for us to cut out and design using fabric pens. With this, we hand-made capes! Saturday night was Neon/80s. We put on some glowsticks, neon face paint, vibrant fake hair extensions, and tutus. Sunday night was Birthday-themed. This is due to Walesby Forest celebrating their 85th birthday. We got extremely creative with this theme, dressing up as 85-year-olds instead of going for basic party hats like lots of other groups. Monday night was a beach theme, where we all had pretty garlands made of fake flowers. The final night was 'Around the World'. Other than face paint, it was up to us to decide how we wanted to represent this!

Personally, I put on my Union Jack t-shirt and my Eurovision hoodie. The evenings also came with lots of entertainment on the main stage. There were tribute acts for popular artists such as Katy Perry and ABBA, as well as a rave taking place later on every night. Also near the main stage and open during the night were Waltzers and Bumper Cars, both of which we all went on as much as we could! A silent disco and traditional fairground treats such as candy floss and doughnuts were further made available. On the first night, a number was put on social media for us to send messages to, and these messages would then appear on the stage's screen. Some of these messages were nice messages, simply wishing troops and units they knew a great time at camp. Other messages

included sayings like ‘*insert unit here* are the best!’ or ‘*insert troop here* , supper is at half 10!’. All activities stopped at 10:30 pm every night, with campsites expected to be quiet after 11 pm.

And of course, an international Scout and Guide camp wouldn't be complete without meeting international Scouts and Guides! This is where a very interesting trend arose within the campgrounds. Different units would buy wooden pegs, write their unit onto them, and then secretly clip these onto people's clothing for them to find later. Near the end of the camp, people were wandering around with tons of different pegs they had collected. A Scout leader ended up distracting me by asking about my badges whilst one of her Scouts put a peg on my hood! Another trend that arose was flag signing. Lots of people walked around with different flags (mainly from their country or for pride). They would stop others and ask them to sign their flags. It was wonderful to meet so many different people from across the globe!

Unfortunately, every camp must come to a close at some point. After a wonderful firework display on Tuesday night, we packed up and said our goodbyes to Walesby Forest the next day. We all arrived safely back in the North West with happy but tired smiles on our faces. Forest Fest was the biggest and longest camp I have ever done, and I feel like I have gained a lot from the experience. I'd like to say a big thank you to all the amazing staff and volunteers who made the event as great as it was! I'd also like to say a huge thank you to the 1st Ormskirk Ranger and 4th Ormskirk Guide leaders for everything you have done for our unit! This is the second big adventure we have been on since the pandemic, with last year being our trip to the Isle of Man (which you can read here if you enjoyed reading this blog:

<https://www.girlguidingnwe.org.uk/news/adventures-on-the-isle-of-man/>)