New Forest Centre branches out thanks to the Heritage Lottery

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What better way to teach families with children about the natural habitat of the New Forest than by using a tree? Not just any tree but a purpose-built two-storey tree 18 feet in diameter and crammed full of hands-on, interactive teaching aids.

The Family Tree is to be the new focus of the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst, thanks to a grant of £49,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The project, which aims for completion this November to tie in with National Tree Week, will update the information available for visitors in the Centre and responds to feedback from visitors who asked for information that was more visual and interactive and less based on lines of text. The Centre has also held a number of successful family learning activity days and it was decided to build on this by creating a new focal point.

The Family Tree will be two-storeys high accessible from both ground and first floor levels. Surrounded by large panels depicting a forest image on one side and heathland on the other it will be full of audio, visual and hands-on displays. Visitors will be able to link leaves to tree species, work out food chains, identify different habitats and match animals to their footprints and droppings! Other information will cover forest history and the importance of commoning in preserving the landscape.

Creating the Family Tree will allow other exhibits to be re-located and enhanced. For example, a new D-Day exhibit will create the impression of military personnel talking inside a tent in an army camp on the eve of the Normandy invasion in 1944.

The centre, which also houses a museum and library is a key attraction for residents and visitors to the Forest which was designated a National Park four years ago. The 150 square miles of forest and heathland contain no fewer than 20 sites of special scientific interest (SSSI's) the largest of which covers nearly 29,000 hectares.

As well as the Family Tree, the centre will also develop a group of volunteer stewards drawn from the local community. Their task will be to tell visitors about different activities and to provide information about forest life drawn from their own experiences.

For the New Forest Centre, Manager Hilary Marshall, said: "This is a very exciting time for the New Forest Centre. We really want to show people what a fascinating and special place the New Forest National Park is and the Family Tree is the perfect way to do that."

Commenting for the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England, Stuart McLeod, said: "This project will inform adults and children alike about the varied natural history, biodiversity and human heritage of a unique landscape that has survived for well over a thousand years."

Notes to editors

The Ninth Centenary Trust, which owns and runs the New Forest Centre, was founded in 1979 so as to create a lasting

memorial to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the founding of the New Forest.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks and beauty spots or recording and celebrating traditions, customs and history, HLF grants open up our nation's heritage for everyone to enjoy. Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded over £378 million to more than 2,660 projects in South East England.

Further information

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