

SPORT+ RECREATION ALLIANCE

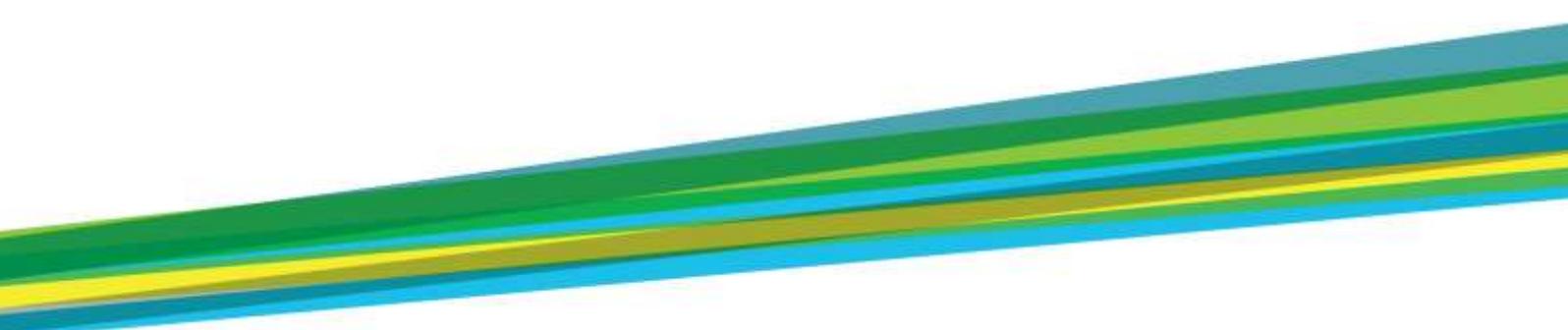
Coed Llandegla – commercial forestry and mountain biking on a grand scale



Objectives	Coed Llandegla is, first and foremost, an upland spruce forest, managed sustainably and has to produce commercially-competitive timber products. In order to do this, industry standard best practice (i.e. UK WAS) is used in all operations. In this way, amenity, recreation, biodiversity and water quality interests are safeguarded.
Background	<p>The forest is owned and managed by UPM Tilhill and extends to 650 ha of predominantly coniferous trees. It was planted in the early 1970s as almost as a single block, meaning it has relatively little age diversity.</p> <p>Despite the uniformity of tree cover, it is important for biodiversity. For example, 50% of the Welsh black grouse population lives within one mile of the forest. Other birds, such as nightjar and golden plover nest in the woodlands. The forest is closely monitored by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Countryside Council for Wales.</p> <p>The forest area also provides a catchment for a drinking water reservoir, so water quality is an important consideration when planning forest operations.</p>

	<p>Coed Llandegla is an important asset for recreation. Its easy accessibility from Wrexham, Chester, Manchester and Liverpool means it has a potentially huge catchment. Offa's Dyke National Trail crosses the forest and there is a well-used permissive bridleway. The forest was used, informally at first, by mountain bikers' right from the start of its emergence as an outdoor pursuit. Rather than try to stop or restrict it, UPM recognised its significance as a growing sport with participants willing to travel large distances, and decided to capture the potential as an income stream by developing suitable facilities.</p>
<p>Actions and achievements</p>	<p>From a commercial forestry perspective, Llandegla has much to shout about. It was the first privately-owned forest in Wales to be recognised as a source of sustainable timber and to carry the Forest Stewardship Council logo. The renewable resource of Llandegla's timber is increasingly being used in building products such as roof trusses, pallets, fencing and chipboard. The forest grows at a rate that allows the harvesting of 7,000m³ of timber per year without affecting the total volume of timber in the forest. This is part of a programme of felling designed to improve the forest's age diversity and so improve its long-term sustainability.</p> <p>Inevitably, this improvement programme involves felling and this, more than any other forest operation, has the potential to disrupt recreation. It is common for foresters to propose 'clunky' diversions which are unattractive and so often not used, with people defaulting onto the affected route anyway. In contrast, UPM Tilhill have been able to manage this well, by careful planning and agreeing work schedules with contractors, to the extent that it is necessary to close trails on only 10-20% of occasions when felling is underway. This is done, for example, by making sure work is done mid-week and at the fringes of the day (4.00am – 9.00am and 6.00pm to 9.00pm). This may add to harvesting costs, the cost is still below the target of 50p per tonne, although it may be difficult to achieve this for anyone operating on a smaller scale.</p> <p>From the mountain biking perspective, the centre has exceeded initial expectations, with around 200,000 visitors per year. They come to experience the 21km (13 miles) of cycling trails and 22km (13.5 miles) of walking routes of varying standards. One of the walks has a 'black grouse' theme, taking the user to a RSPB hide. For <i>après cycle/walk</i>, there is a café and visitor centre and a bike shop able to meet all the equipment needs of cyclists, together with training facilities. The whole of the recreation enterprise at</p>

	<p>Llandegla is managed by One Planet Adventure, through a joint venture with UPM Tilhill.</p> <p>The most important achievement is a forest that is sustainable and commercially-competitive, which provides a home for wildlife and a resource for mountain bikers and other visitors.</p>
Quotes	<p>A lot of visitors say how good they have found the mountain bike trails. One reviewer, on the 'ibike' website says about Coed Llandegla: <i>Good points: Great descents, lots of fun wood, jump heaven, never boring, beautiful surroundings, brilliant bike cafe, shop and facilities. Bad Points: None except I live so far away. Actually I think the only think [sic] is the long initial long fireroad climb could be tad more interesting and the final descent doesn't seem to make up for the incredibly never ending climb at the end but this is geography at fault really. But seriously I am nit picking it's awesome"</i></p> <p>Simon Miller, from Tilhill, says "<i>Recreation, and mountain biking in particular, is an integral part of the forest. It is a 'forest product' just like timber, biodiversity and other ecosystem services, not just an add-on."</i></p>
Partners	<p>Critical to the success of the recreation facility is the joint venture partnership with One Planet Adventure. Tilhill own the forest and buildings but these are rented out to One Planet Adventure who manage all the visitor facilities. Profits from the recreation business are shared between the parties on a pre-arranged formula that makes sure both benefit from its success.</p>
Funding	<p>Overall, the recreation facilities have cost between £1 and £1.5m to establish. Of this, Tilhill have provided around 60% with the remaining 40% coming from mainly public sector sources such as Adfwyio (a CCW-managed funding scheme), Forestry Commission (WGS) and 'Better Woodlands For Wales'. UPM found this support invaluable, easy to access and simple to administer – it worked well for them.</p>
Lessons learnt	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recreation and commercial forestry can co-exist – "<i>It's not a problem</i>" says Simon Miller. 2. Visitors tend to stick to paths and trails, so their impact on biodiversity is restricted to a narrow corridor through the forests. 3. Visitors have accepted the felling associated with the forest re-structuring better than expected and experienced by other foresters elsewhere. This may be because the visitors at Coed Llandegla are more focused on their



	<p>activity than their immediate surroundings!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Continuous cover and selective felling techniques are more suitable than clear felling when it comes to multi-purpose forestry.5. 'Zoning' (i.e. dividing the forest into different zones where different interests and priorities are at play) has worked well. This means that techniques can be used that best suit the zone, and so interests like water quality or biodiversity can be easily factored into plans.6. "<i>Build it bigger</i>". The initial designs were for a facility capable of dealing with 60,000 visitors per year. With over 200,000 to cater for, facilities have had to be expanded and this has proved harder and less elegant than if built bigger from scratch.7. If you can find a good facilities management operator, then it is better to place all operations with them. This means there need be only one point of contact, management is more consistent across the business and continuity is more likely.
Contact	<p>For further information about Coed Llandegla, go to: http://www.coedllandegla.com/.</p> <p>More information about One Planet Adventure is available on http://www.oneplanetadventure.com/ and about UPM Tillhill on http://www.upm-tilhill.com/.</p>