

Cookworthy Forest: an emerald nestling in the heart of Ruby Country, Devon.



Situated on the A3079 between Holsworthy and Okehampton and just to the north of Halwill Junction, most people drive past Cookworthy Forest towards their coastal destination without a second thought. However, even a brief stop can refresh the spirits and enliven the senses.

On first impression, Cookworthy Forest is a conifer plantation. Closer inspection shows this woodland is a pleasant mix of conifer planted by the Forestry Commission for timber, native trees and shrubs, open grassland and scrub, ponds, wet flashes and ditches. With well surfaced and maintained tracks to help with timber extraction, it is possible to take a walk around Cookworthy Forest without getting too wet and muddy, whilst experiencing a cornucopia of sights and sounds whatever the season.

This large working woodland, owned by Forestry Commission has a constantly changing landscape, with cut and stacked timber paying sculptural testament to our recent forestry history. Recent cleared areas soon fill with oak, birch, gorse and brambles ensuring a source of food and shelter for insects, reptiles and small mammals. The wide woodland rides allow good photographic opportunities and glimpses of the landscape and its wildlife beyond.

Culm grassland, a tough yet increasingly rare habitat is an important component of Cookworthy Forest. The ground is covered with rushes, heather, gorse and



other tough grasses typical of culm grassland, along with acidic loving flowers including tormentil and heather. At the Halwill Junction end of Cookworthy Forest it is possible to walk or cycle through Halwill Nature Reserve with a variety of wet and

dry grassland habitats. Owned and managed by Devon Wildlife Trust the reserve is a contrast to Cookworthy Forest and can further enrich a visit to the area.

From their perches on high or whilst soaring on thermal currents, buzzards catch glimpses of Dartmoor in the distance and the surrounding green and pleasant land.

Kestrel,
sparrowhawk,
raven and the
occasional
hobby in
summer can
also be seen
along with
smaller birds
including reed
bunting, siskin
and goldcrest.
Crossbills
flock in
healthy
numbers, the
males resplendent in pink, whilst the females a demure olive green.



Deer can also be seen if one is quiet and patient, sometimes in the mature plantations, grazing in areas cleared of trees, or perhaps drinking from one of the many ponds. Dragonflies emerge briefly in summer months, spending their time defending their territory from other dragonflies or invading butterflies. Grass snakes are also abundant and easy to identify with the bright yellow stripe across the eyes, swimming in ponds or basking in sunlight. The biodiversity of Cookworthy Forest abounds and rewards at every turning. It can be seen, heard and marvelled.

There are no better ways to enjoy the bounty and beauty of nature than by visiting on horseback, bike or on foot. Access around Cookworthy Forest is encouraged and horse riding is allowed without permit. There is a two mile loop to follow and although it is not way marked, is easy to follow from the main car park. The many tracks within the forest are open to explore, unless



signed otherwise. The bed of the disused railway line linking Okehampton to Bude forms the spine of the Ruby Way that will link Cookworthy Forest with Holsworthy and Hatherleigh, and the Pegasus Way that will link Cookworthy Forest with the Granite Way and Dartmoor. As work progresses and the routes develop further this part of Devon will become linked with many places further afield, making it possible to visit this part of Ruby Country without needing to use a car, with Cookworthy Forest acting as a hub.

For those looking for a more physical challenge, there are permanent orienteering courses set up by Forestry Commission in conjunction with Devon Orienteering Club. Maps can be downloaded from a variety of places including the Ruby Country website, or can be purchased from Cookworthy Forest Centre. A great family activity, orienteering is another great way to explore the forest and get close to its nature.



More intrepid explorers may decide to venture further afield to Halwill Junction in search of refreshment at the local village stores, Junction Inn pub, or fish and chip shop.



Halwill Junction also hosts a post office and gift shop. Those more prepared will have brought a picnic with them and can take advantage of the benches in Cookworthy Forest provided by the Forestry Commission, on a fallen tree or in a sunny woodland glade.

It is possible to spend a whole day in Cookworthy Forest and will be an inspiration to further explore the local area. With its

varied landscape, views to afar, natural sights and sounds and ease of access, Cookworthy Forest, in Ruby Country Devon is an ideal place to visit with family, friends, dog or alone. Come and visit Cookworthy Forest as part of your holiday or trip to Ruby Country. You will without doubt be handsomely rewarded for your endeavours and want to return again.