

## **Birchmere Report, 2012/13**

### **Birchmere – “A proper little campsite”**

**Feedback** is so important in all projects. The term “A proper little campsite” came from such an idea. Now other quotes are being made that show what Birchmere has achieved. Perhaps “It just gets better and better” may be the one that comes to mind but there are others such as “The best thing about camping at Birchmere was the campfire. The worst, the noise from the next tent!”

It was such feedback, from a questionnaire given to past users and after camping conversations about Birchmere, that initiated the many recent changes at the campsite. The refurbishment of the boys and girls toilets and shower area is now well known and has recently been described as “The best toilet area in any scout campsite I know”

But it’s not only these changes that make the site. There are on-going upgrades of the site’s activities from pioneering, orienteering and geocaching to trails and the enthusiastic support that we receive from the local Surrey Wildlife Rangers and indeed the recent interest shown to the campsite from the officers of Woking Borough Council.

Over the last year campsite improvements have continued to be made. The building of the toilet facilities now turns to repairs and maintenance. (We are constantly amazed how muddy boot prints can manage to get so high up walls and doors and taps damaged so frequently). The Management Committee is now turning its attention to the last part of the proposed trilogy of improvements, the replacement of the DRT Activity Building, for which we have successfully gained planning consent. Other improvement tasks, namely better campsite field drainage, a dedicated dishwashing area and the construction of new paths to reduce mud finding its way into all buildings on wet days, are also being actively pursued.

With these tasks in mind Birchmere has hosted Ray Morgan, Chief Executive of Woking Borough Council together with other civic officers. Grant applications have been made to Woking Borough Council for a Community Award

(regrettably unsuccessful) and recently an application made for a Reaching Communities Award from the National Lottery. We await the outcome of this application but perhaps again, we are not totally confident of a successful outcome. The cost of the new building however is £130,000, and we continue to seek other forms of funding or support for this project.

The members of the Birchmere Management Committee, once again, deserve acknowledgement and praise. Over the year we were very pleased to hear that Tony Knight had been granted a Silver Acorn Award and possibly more so, that he wished to have this presented at Birchmere. Duncan Flack, Deputy Warden, gained the bar to his Award of Merit and Ivor Morgan the Chief Scouts Commendation for Good Service. Also Jean Smith was presented with the Gold Award as The Volunteer of the Year for the NHS Southeast area.

It may be that perhaps all the Birchmere Committee are the stars of the show for all the work that they do to make the campsite run so smoothly! From Terry Oakley, Birchmere Campsite Warden and Duncan, Deputy Warden, to Judi Oakley who keeps our very busy appointments diary and the committee meeting minutes under control. It would though, perhaps, be not the place to thank all the committee individually for all they do, but to say their real enthusiasm and great support for Birchmere is very much appreciated, especially by all who use the site.

So what of the future? The campsite cannot really accommodate any more bookings with the existing activity building arrangements. If, however, we are successful in our planned changes we imagine then perhaps the numbers of camping groups can be increased by at least a third over the year! It certainly may not an easy task to achieve the funding for this project, but the Campsite Management Committee are enthusiastically working toward this with the aim of making Scouting in the great outdoors around Wisley and Ockham Common available to very many more young people.

Richard Mackie

14.5.2013