

## Volunteer Guide

Westonbirt, the National Arboretum is internationally renowned both for its extraordinary tree collection and Grade 1 historic landscape. Today, it is cared for by the Forestry England with the Mission *‘to connect people with trees to improve the quality of life’*. Key to this Mission is supporting visitors to enjoy our magnificent Collection. Volunteer guides are pivotal in enabling visitors to explore Westonbirt, the National Arboretum. By sharing their passion, knowledge and experience they support people in understanding and connection with the significance of the tree collection, its history and its seasonal delights.

## Key Responsibilities

1. Work as part of the guided walk team and with wider Forestry England staff / volunteers to ensure the success of the walk programme
2. Lead / assist the delivery of guided walks ensuring that visitors...
  - feel welcome and included
  - have a safe, enjoyable experience and as a result feel more connected to Westonbirt
  - better understand and appreciate the key Forestry England messages
3. Represent Forestry England values and support specific communication lines where appropriate
4. Maintain their skills and knowledge

Please note that we are specifically looking for volunteers who will be able to **lead walks on weekends** (which is when we have the most gaps in our rota). As such the new recruits must be available at weekends.

## Key tasks:

Design an interesting, cohesive and personal walk that...

- Incorporates Westonbirt key messages and encourages visitors to actively participate in an interactive experience
- Takes advantage of seasonal highlights
- Advertises opportunities for visitors to deepen their relationship with Westonbirt, such as through membership, donation, volunteering or repeat visits

Ensure the wellbeing and safety of your visitors during the walk by...

- Adapting your walk to consider visitor needs, ensuring an inclusive experience for all
- Undertaking a pre-walk recce and completing record
- Providing visitors with a safety briefing and monitoring the group during the walk

Enable ongoing refinement / improvement of walks (and Westonbirt) through...

- Encouraging visitor feedback via feedback form
- Recording numbers
- Undertaking ongoing personal development such as attending training and sharing in constructive ‘debrief’ sessions

There are also optional activities that guides can choose to become involved with. These include:

- Developing a themed ‘discovery walk’ focused on a specific aspect of Westonbirt
- Supporting our Sensing Nature guided walks by becoming a sighted assistant
- Supporting the development and delivery of the guided walk programme by taking up an additional role within the Guided Walk Support Team or training sub-group. These roles support vital areas of work behind-the-scenes that keep the programme running effectively
  - Supporting administration of programme
  - Supporting training and CPD sessions

## Length of role and commitment:

This is a permanent volunteering role.

## Training commitment

To qualify as a Westonbirt Arboretum Guide, you are required to complete the New Guides Training Programme as outlined in Appendix 1.

## Guiding commitment

There is an expectation that a guide will

- lead two guided walks/month (approx. 3 hours per day split between walk itself / preparation) - **the majority of which will be at weekends**
- support two guided walks as Assistant Guide sessions/month - **the majority of which will be at weekends**

In addition, we encourage guides to attend formal guide meetings (currently 4/year) and at least 3 of the monthly CPD sessions and participate in the guide family.

## Who are we looking for...?

Personal qualities (essential)	Experience (desirable)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in the environment / Westonbirt and desire to share this with others</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Outgoing, relaxed and approachable</li> <li>• Good interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Team player</li> <li>• Comfortable operating remotely away from immediate support</li> <li>• Comfortable using email and internet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting to and managing groups</li> <li>• Confident in dealing with visitors/clients</li> <li>• Balancing knowledge, skills and engagement</li> <li>• Working in and leading a team</li> </ul>

We recognise the importance of having guides with a wide variety of skills and life experiences and the value that such diversity brings to our guided walks programme and to Westonbirt. As such we actively encourage people regardless of background to consider becoming a guide. While it is true that being a guide involves a certain level of fitness to deliver walks in all weathers in a variable



outdoor environment, we are always happy to discuss how we can accommodate different needs and we are very keen to ensure that the guide volunteer role is open to all. Please contact us to discuss any adjustments you may need to take part.

## Appendix 1: New Guides Training Programme 2026

Before volunteers can lead guided walks, they are required to complete the guide training. This consists of three elements.

### 1. Initial training programme

Training starts with an initial taught course consisting of five full days onsite + four 2-hour online theory sessions. In addition, trainees will be expected to complete tasks to prepare themselves for the following onsite session. This provides a structured introduction to the guided walks programme and aims to ensure new trainees have an awareness of the key skills and knowledge required to become a guide. All on-site sessions include a walk (whatever the weather). Trainees will contribute to these walks from session 2 onwards.

Theme	Onsite Session	Virtual Pre-Session
The Big Picture	Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Jan 9.30am - 4.30pm	
History and Landscape	Sat 7 <sup>th</sup> Feb 10am - 4pm	Wed 21 <sup>st</sup> Jan 6pm - 8pm
The Wonder of Trees	Sat 28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 10am - 4pm	Wed 11 <sup>th</sup> Feb 6pm - 8pm
Managing our Collection	Sat 21 <sup>st</sup> Mar 10am - 4pm	Wed 4 <sup>th</sup> Mar 6pm - 8pm
Putting it all together	Sat 11 <sup>th</sup> Apr 10am - 4pm	Wed 25 <sup>th</sup> Mar 6 - 8pm

**Note:** the 5 onsite sessions and the final virtual session are **mandatory**.

Participants should attend the other virtual sessions 'live' if possible; if you are unable to do so, they will be available online, and you will be expected to view them in advance of the related onsite session.

### 2. Mentoring phase

At the end of formal training, trainees are assigned mentors, who support them to gain experience, grow confidence and prepare for final assessment. You will be encouraged to participate in onsite guided walks and record them in your reflective Walk Log. The time taken to progress to final assessment will depend upon the individual, but we encourage new guides to seek qualification within 12 months of completion of formal training element. A programme of further sessions is provided by the Mentor team. Whilst not mandatory, these provide an opportunity to share learning experiences and raise issues.

### 3. Sign-off

When the trainee is deemed ready, they take their qualification assessment. This includes a review of their training record and an assessment of their first public guided walk with visitors, as lead guide.