

Exploring Conservation and the Outdoors

Tutor Steve Skirth of the Pathfinder Learning Centre in Barnstaple has run two taster sessions that looked at ways of using technology to investigate conservation charities and organizations and to find out how to make the most of nearby Exmoor.

Wonderwheel

The first course involved showing learners how to use a new Google search tool called Wonderwheel, specifically to research conservation charities and study endangered species. Steve says, 'quite often students struggle with how to get the best out of searches. This course tried to make sure they're as effective as possible.' Wonderwheel presents its results to an original query in a wheel-shaped display, so that the user can click on any link in the wheel to research related issues. In this way Wonderwheel seeks to emulate the way our thought patterns can lead us to unexpected conclusions, or can reach conclusions via unexpected routes.

New genre discovered

Learners all had their own work stations and followed the tutor's instructions on a white board, so they all carried out searches themselves. Their research was based on original queries about Dartmoor Wildlife Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Learner Colin Smith said 'using Wonderwheel opened up a whole genre to me, as I was able to discover things that were finely associated with my query. For example, research into the Dartmoor National Park led to related research about a national park in Tennessee, USA. Also, the course didn't half cause a lot of interaction and lively conversation between us!' Learners have reported that they've continued using Wonderwheel at home and have shown others how to research conservation issues with the tool.



A learner researches Exmoor on the Internet

Exploring Exmoor

The Pathfinder Centre also ran a taster course called Active Exmoor, which aimed to help learners get the best out of their local environment by using their computer skills to gain information about activities on the moor. In this workshop learners accessed the Active Exmoor website, which is updated each month with a schedule of activities, such as interactive walks. Steve hopes this course will help to reinforce the facility that lies on Barnstaple's doorstep by increasing attendance to planned events on the moor, as well as developing the computer skills of his students.

Thoroughly enjoyable

Unemployed learner Gwyn Dyer was fairly new to computers before attending the course but now reports that he is able to use short cuts and hyperlinks and can now 'explore Exmoor from my living room. Steve was a really good instructor'. Tutor Steve also came in for praise from learner Sara Curry, who said he was 'extremely interesting and kept my attention. I learnt a lot about using the website and thoroughly enjoyed learning about Exmoor. I'm a regular walker anyway and now I can discover new walks by printing off walking routes from the Active Exmoor website. It has also inspired me to go canoeing at the reservoir'.