EXARC JOURNAL 2015/4
17 Articles | Open Access

The content is published under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0).

Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Making Butser Ancient Farm More Accessible

Persistent Identifier: https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10213

EXARC Journal Issue 2015/4 | **Publication Date:** 2015-11-30

Author(s): Maureen Page [1] ✉

[1] Buster Ancient Farm, Chalton Ln, Chalton, Waterlooville PO8 0BG, United Kingdom.

At Butser Ancient Farm our aim is to help visitors understand more about life in Britain in the distant past. We are also determined to give all our visitors a good experience when they visit. To promote this for every visitor, we need to be aware of the needs of our visitors, whatever they may be. Our visitors come from a wide range of backgrounds and have a wide range of needs that must be addressed if they are to get the most from their visit.

Some needs are relatively easy to cope with, such as additional parking which is close by, or a facility for hot drinks. Others require far more planning and expense. However, if these

> We are also very aware that access issues do not just apply to those in wheelchairs. Visitors may have difficulties with steps and uneven ground as well as other potential problems such as being able to read information boards, having enough seating for rest stops amongst the houses, and understanding information that may be a foreign language for them.

requirements are thought about at the beginning of a project, they can be incorporated with less disruption. For example, building slopes instead of steps.

Staff at Butser Ancient Farm strive to engage all our visitors. We have found that the personal touch is most effective. Talking to visitors enables staff to ask about any particular needs and we can ensure that they are aware of our purpose here. It also makes all our visitors feel welcome, which we feel is most important.

Three years ago, when our visitor centre was being planned, we were very clear that we wanted our site to be as accessible as possible for as many different people as possible. We wanted to make sure that everyone who wanted to visit was able to, and that there were no barriers here that we could have avoided. As a result, our visitor centre is accessible to everyone! There are automatically opening doors that operate at the touch of a pad. Both the entrance and exit have decking and a slope to enable wheelchairs and pushchairs to move freely. There is a disabled toilet in the building, designed for wheelchair access. The disabled toilet also has an emergency pull cable to alert staff in the shop to any difficulties. We also have a motorised mobility buggy, which is available for visitors who find the farm too difficult to traverse.

We then turned our attention to the part of the farm that visitors come to see. Our houses are reconstructed using archaeological evidence. The evidence is carefully followed to lead to the construction of a building, which we believe is as close as possible to the original build. It became very clear that our ancestors did not think of the needs of those with reduced mobility, or those who used wheelchairs. Not wanting to change our representation of the buildings to any great extent, we have made some small amendments. The entrance to one of the Iron Age roundhouses has been made into a gradual slope to allow wheeled vehicles to enter, and the doorway has been made slightly wider to accommodate a wheelchair.

Our Roman villa, based on evidence from Sparsholt just outside Winchester, has proven to be less accessible for wheelchairs. This building is more difficult to alter, as the walls are constructed with flints and lime mortar. The plan for this winter is to widen two of the doorways to ensure full accessibility to every room.

This year we have been constructing a Saxon house based on evidence from Chalton, the village closest to the farm. The evidence is good and clear, showing post holes which would have held the door frame. This space was not very wide at 800 mm. The Equality Act 2010 (EA)

and the Disability Discrimination Acts (DDA) of 1995 to 2005 give disabled people important rights of access to everyday services. We have followed government advice that doorways should be a minimum of 813 mm wide to allow access for wheelchairs. So, in order to accommodate everyone we have widened the doorway slightly to conform to government guidelines, but this has altered the resulting structure too little to be noticeable. We feel that making that small change is essential to ensure all our visitors can enjoy a good experience.

This small consideration has led us to re-examine our access plan - our policy which aims to ensure equal access to all our visitors. We are now looking at all areas of our site to check that we are not impeding access for any particular group.

The paths at the farm have been constructed with hoggin and gravel so they don't look too out of place or modern, but still offer a reasonably even, firm surface for walking and more especially for wheelchairs and buggies. We now have plans to extend these paths for visitors to reach our new Saxon area too.

We are also very aware that access issues do not just apply to those in wheelchairs. Visitors may have difficulties with steps and uneven ground as well as other potential problems such as being able to read information boards, having enough seating for rest stops amongst the houses, and understanding information that may be a foreign language for them. Our information boards around the site are designed for a variety of reading abilities, and most importantly they are positioned at a level that is accessible for those in wheelchairs and smaller children. Children might not be able to read all the information, but are able to understand the pictures, as can those who find the English difficult to understand.

There are now plans afoot for an audio guide, which would make the information more accessible to sight impaired visitors.

We welcome school groups with pupils who have special needs. Teachers are always invited for a planning visit before they bring their pupils. For autistic pupils we plan the programme for their visit in advance and send their teacher a plan and photographs to help to prepare the pupils. This enables them to have a more relaxed and meaningful experience.

These considerations are now a regular part of any proposal for research or development and we hope that these measures will increase our visitors' understanding and appreciation of what we are trying to achieve. We are now so much more aware of making Butser Ancient Farm a place for everyone whatever their needs.

Keywords accesibility
archaeological open-air museum
visitors

Country United Kingdom

Share This Page

Corresponding Author

Maureen Page
Buster Ancient Farm
Chalton Ln, Chalton
Waterlooville PO8 0BG
United Kingdom
E-mail Contact

Gallery Image

FIG 1. DISABLED PARKING SIGN, MADE HERE WITH RECYCLED COKACOLA CANS, CLOSE TO OUR VISITOR CENTRE.

FIG 2. OUR RAMP FOR WHEELCHAIRS AND BUGGIES.

FIG 3. ONE OF OUR INFORMATION SIGNS, AT A GOOD HEIGHT FOR WHEELCHAIRS

FIG 4. THE NARROW DOORWAY IN THE ROMAN VILLA.

FIG 5. OUR NEW SAXON HOUSE, SHOWING THE DOORWAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BUILDING.