

Farm Visit Report

Lowe Farm

Prepared for Farm Stay by B.Hainsworth on behalf of
Farming and Countryside Education (FACE)



Part of the 'Wake Up to the Heart of the Countryside'
Project.

Farm Visit Report.

Farm Contact Details

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Brief Farm profile and on farm provision.

The property has been in the Williams family since 1939, farmland covering in the region of 200 acres. The farmhouse itself dates back some 600 years. Lowe Farm is a working farm focusing on arable production-wheat, potatoes in the past, oil seed rape in the future, along with pasture for grazing. The farm has good access to see traditional buildings, farmland and woodland. There is a particularly easy and tranquil walk cutting across farmland to Pembridge. Juliet Williams works on a system of continuous improvement regarding the bed and breakfast business, which has been operating since 1998. Lowe Farm has received many prestigious awards for its accommodation including Visit Britain's Gold Award. This report aims to highlight some possible areas of development for the future regarding the farm.



Particular Points of interest. *Features that would be of particular interest to visitors.*

The farm has a number of features that might be of specific interest to visitors.

These might include:

- The possible walks around the farm
- The wildlife on the farm
- Opportunity to learn about farming practices
- Making the most of opportunities to engage with animals on the farm, currently chickens
- The vegetable gardens and how this is incorporated into meals offered



Pembridge.

Sometimes described as 'The Jewel in the Crown of north Herefordshire's Black and White Village Trail', Pembridge has an ancient history. Occupied since before Magna Carta, It is also mentioned in the Domesday Book. It was a bustling community of over 2,000 people in the Middle Ages and has potential to attract visitors into the area. Lowe farm is well placed for visitors to Pembridge.

Possible activities that might be offered.
(observation,demonstration,involvement)

Observation. *What can be accessed around the farm?*

Easily

- A chance to see around the farm buildings with interpretations of how used traditionally. For example the cobbled floor in the barn, which was a traditional way of providing hard standing and was very sustainable as most likely the stones were gathered from nearby fields.
- A simple opportunity to walk by crops learning a little about each-how cultivated and managed.
- Opportunities to engage with nature around the farm.



A little More Effort required

- Produce simple maps with routes across the farm, with identified points of interest on it, with regard to farming, researched or gathered local history or the countryside flora and fauna.
- Provide opportunities to observe wildlife species found on the farm, conveying this either by written word or time allowing, by taking visitors on walks. These could be led by enthusiasts from e.g. wildlife trusts or with carefully selected information on boards or leaflets.



Quite a lot More Effort

- The farm already has hens that visitors can observe and undertake activities with, but increasing stock on the farm in a manageable way to allow visitors to get up close to a wider range of animals would be advantageous.

Why Farm Margins?

There are enormous wildlife benefits by leaving the edges of fields either uncultivated or actually sown differently. The margins of cereal fields can be managed in ways which benefit wildlife, without having serious detrimental effects on the remaining cropped area. Cereal field margins provide nesting and feeding sites for game birds and some passerines. Many species of butterflies, grasshoppers, and plant bugs are associated with such sites. Many polyphagous invertebrates (i. e. feeders on a range of foods) breed in crops, spending the winter in grassy banks and at the interface of crops, hedges and other features. Arable wild flowers are of conservation concern because of enormous national declines in their distribution and abundance. Overall, some 300 species of plants can occur in arable fields.

- Arrange accompanied tours of certain countryside routes around and across farmland, offering interpretation of the farming that is occurring.
- It might be possible to arrange to network with other farmers doing something particularly interesting and learn a little about this, e.g. hop growing, micro-brewery, specialist growers.



Did you know?

Cereals account for 51% of the total area of arable land in Great Britain. Some 2000 species of invertebrate are commonly found in cereal fields

Interpreting what we see.

Helping visitors (particularly from urban areas) to understand what they're looking at and its importance within farming and nature, brings extra appreciation during a visit to the countryside.

Demonstrations. What might the farm be able to offer in terms of demonstrating farming and countryside practices?

Easily

- A 'woodland day' to demonstrate coppicing or other simple day-to-day management including species identification and uses. Observe methods of improvement of woodland.



- A chance to see and meet the family hens, see them being fed and watered and learn about their care and maintenance, e.g. wing clipping demonstrations.

Be aware: A demonstration is a way of showing an activity up close without the added complications of physical involvement. Nevertheless, ensure visitors are observing demonstrations at safe distances from viewing areas particularly if allowing access near moving machinery.

- Demonstrate cultivations, e.g. the drilling of a crop or the harvesting of a crop depending on the time of year. Even demonstrating the various linkages on tractors, for example, how three point linkages work, can be of interest to visitors who are unfamiliar with farming. Such an opportunity allows visitors to engage and learn from farmers directly.

A little More Effort required

- Develop the garden area to allow tastings of a variety of either fruits-a number of different types of edible plant, e.g. different types of salad leaf, raspberries for compotes. A taste trail around the garden allotment could be established with chance to try a variety of plants-from herbs to fruits and vegetables. This can be quite novel and successful when a few 'fascinating facts' are offered.

Fascinating Facts: Raspberry leaf tea.

Traditional lore holds that raspberry leaf tea has medicinal properties, especially in late pregnancy as an aid in delivery. Vitamin C and Vitamin E are present in large amounts as well as Vitamin A and some B Complex vitamins. The red raspberry leaf also contains many essential minerals such as phosphorus, potassium, and an easily assimilated form of calcium. An increased availability of calcium is necessary in controlling nerve response to pain during childbirth and in aiding bone development in the foetus. It also contains an alkaloid, which helps tone the muscles of the pelvic region including the uterus. This allows the uterus to contract more powerfully and effectively during labour.

Quite a lot More Effort

- Offer periodic opportunity to observe countryside practices on farm, for example wattle and daub, wood turning, shearing of sheep, corn dollies, willow craft. Inviting craftspeople to come and demonstrate a skill could do this.
- Invite guests to see hedge planting and maintenance, even hedge laying. Set up opportunities to demonstrate repairs to hedges, planting gaps, explaining the species used and the reason for mixes. Include facts, for instance, that blackthorn is the only food source for some butterflies.

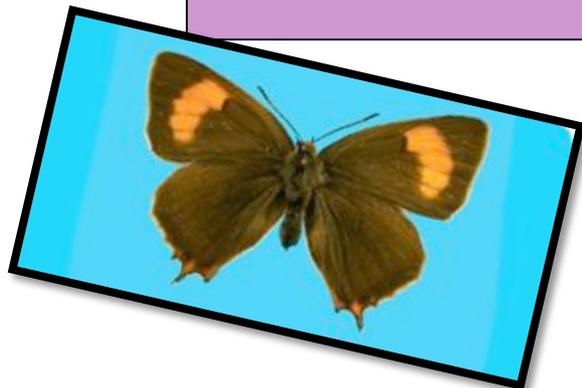


Hedgerows:

Hedgerows are important habitats in their own right. They are a primary habitat for at least 47 species of conservation concern in the UK, including 13 globally threatened or rapidly declining ones, more than for most other key habitats. They are especially important for butterflies and moths, farmland birds, bats and dormice. Over 600 plant species, 1500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammals have been recorded at some time living or feeding in hedgerows.

Brown Hairstreak butterfly.

The main threat facing this species is the destruction and inappropriate management of hedgerows. A brown hairstreak colony needs a long length of bushy hedgerow or woodland edge, and at least a third of this needs to be uncut in any one year to provide suitable habitat for laying eggs. Nowadays hedges are often cut every year by flail machines, which means that there is a lack of old blackthorn for the females to lay eggs on.



Involvement. *What might visitors be able to actually engage with practically?*

Easily

- Assist simple identification of a number of species typically found in the countryside with a selection of identification keys. E.g. Learn to identify e.g. 4 woodland species, 4 trees and their uses and 4 hedgerow plants. Such activity can help to make a walk more interesting for those unfamiliar with what they are looking at. There are some excellent guides and notes available, for example from the Wildlife Trusts and Field Studies Council.



A little More Effort required

- Produce a simple 'country diary' to collect samples, e.g. leaf types with selected information on their place in country lore.
- Get visitors to be involved in 'green finger' activities using and developing your own skills. Perhaps learning how to do cuttings, create a hanging basket or propagate vegetables. It would depend on the interest of visitors and their level of interest and skills. This might be particularly attractive to visitors with children if the farm wished to expand into this area.

Quite a lot More Effort

- Offer farm-led activities, for example nature hunts and trails of various kinds. Allow groups camping on 'made-safe' areas of the farm, or there are possibilities of 'bunkhouse' accommodation. Charges can be made for prepared food, packed lunches or even an outdoor cooking experience, e.g. BBQ.

Bluebells are named after a Greek youth 'Endymion' with whom the Moon Goddess Selene fell in love. In folklore bluebells and bluebell woods have always been associated with the magical realm of faeries. In the Language of Flowers the bluebell represents Constancy and Solitude.



- Make the farm more capable of hosting families, schools, and young peoples groups. This does not mean they have to be actually staying at the bed and breakfast accommodation. Offer special days or weeks when families with children can access the countryside via the farm.
- Providing parties with local/organic packed lunch for them to take on guided hikes.
- Develop the walk to Pembridge using Lowe Farm as a start point (or why not finish point?), developing areas in or outdoors to serve refreshments or a place to rest after a rewarding walk. Expand the idea of a 'pit stop' for cyclists who are exploring the area, with information for safe and enjoyable cycle routes, particularly if these can be on tracks off main roads.

A bluebell walk in May as a special activity with refreshments to follow could be popular. Above: bluebells about to spring!

Farmer involvement. *In what ways can the farmer facilitate adding value to the Farm Stay experience?*

Adding the personal touch by giving of ones time to visitors is a great way to add value to the farm. Lowe Farm already does this in many ways as part of the bed and breakfast activities. Having time to be further engaged may be a challenge, so leaflet guides may be a way forward in some cases. These have the advantage of being produced in different formats to account for different audiences. For example, a family walking round the farm might have a series of tasks for children and young people to carry out en-route, such as various 'hunts'.

Farm Stay are developing some family/child-friendly generic sheets which when produced, could be used or adapted specifically for the farm should you wish to develop the business this way.

It would be advantageous to develop routes in areas of farmland that are safe, where visitors can go unaccompanied. Well-planned routes, made as interactive as possible could be recommended. The walk to Pembridge was lovely, but remote and some people may feel nervous to set off 'into the unknown' if that is a new experience for them. A guide with unobtrusive markers would help.



Simple seating/picnic benches around the farm/routes or other tranquil spot would encourage people to spend longer in these areas. Adults may like to sit a while, whilst others, maybe with children, could use this rest; have a drink from a thermos flask whilst children could forage in a small area to find items as part of an activity. The idea of arriving at the farm and having refreshments might be particularly attractive.

Developing interpretation. *A few examples of ideas for boards, leaflets and/ or trails.*

A bridge is a lovely feature to cross on a walk and a clear landmark on a route. Interpretation information here might include the name of this stream/brook, where it is from and where it is going. Wildlife associated with it and how farming practices protect it, perhaps historical information-how it was used in the past for stock, power and so on. Try to devise questions to get visitors thinking or provide information that answers the questions you have posed.



Finding out about different species, for example in woodland. Learning to spot species and their value to farms and biodiversity.

E.g. What tree is this? Why is it here? How long has it been here? What benefit does it bring to the wood? Has it other uses? Try and devise a creative opportunity.



Less than a quarter (24%) of UK adults are able to correctly identify the common UK sycamore tree. There is an ongoing dispute as to whether Sycamore is a native British tree, but is now by far our commonest species of maple. The seed is extremely fertile and not restricted in where it will germinate; everywhere from ancient woodlands to slag heaps.



Parallel Hedges.

Hedgerows facilitate movement through the landscape for a wide range of organisms. They are particularly important for flying insects like butterflies which need warm sheltered conditions to be able to gain, and retain, the heat necessary to fly. Green lanes, typically two hedgerows in parallel separated by a vegetated track, provide particularly favourable conditions.

Encourage visitors to walk further along the tracks, but give them a focus for walks by having points of interest marked out on a map/leaflet. Images at certain points showing what might be seen or heard would be useful.

Devising 'Frequently asked questions' that visitors might be asking themselves is a good exercise in preparing information to share. They will be interested in what they are looking at, how things work, how animals are supported. Each point needs to be a snippet of information rather than over-wordy.

Further local features and possible attractions.

Low Farm has already a good range of information, for example, circular walks and cycle routes available, as well as tourist information regarding the locality for visitors. Juliet is able to make useful suggestions and has kept up-to-date with possible attractions 'off-farm'. It is hoped that some elements highlighted in this document can be used to develop the farm for visitors so they wish to spend more time at the farm, visit more often or possibly attract new and different types of clientele.