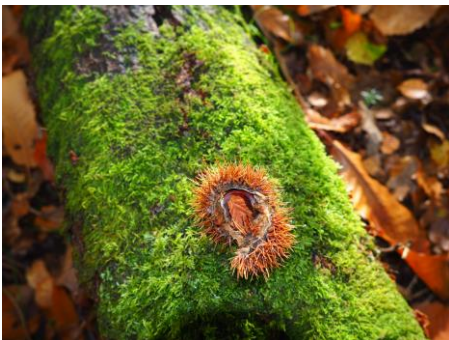


Cameron's Cottage Residential Summary

Leaside Returns for another New Forest Adventure

During the autumn half-term (**Monday 28th to Thursday 31st October 2024**), Leaside Trust organised a four-day residential trip to Cameron's Cottage in the stunning New Forest. This marked our second dry-land residential, generously funded by the **Cameron Bepolka Trust** to provide Hackney's young people with transformative experiences. Daily activities were expertly led by the RSPB, and we are deeply grateful to both organisations for making this opportunity possible.

This year, the trip was offered to young people eligible for free school meals as well as Leaside Youth Members. Eight children (7 boys and 1 girl, aged 9–15) attended, accompanied by two adult supervisors. The trip was a perfect blend of fun, education, and outdoor adventure, with Cameron's Cottage providing a truly off-grid experience. The cottages well-equipped facilities, including games and art supplies, were especially appreciated during evening free time. The cottage aligns beautifully with Leaside's vision of combining environmental education with adventure.



Here's a day-by-day summary of the trip

Day 1 - Monday 28 October

The group set off early and arrived at the New Forest by lunchtime, where they were greeted by RSPB staff. After settling into the cottage and preparing lunch, the children participated in team-building activities like slacklining, blindfold trails, and spider-web games. Later, they learned to make fires and boiled water for hot chocolate.

To foster a sense of responsibility, the group created shared ground rules centered on respect for nature, the cottage, and each other. It was heartwarming to see these values embraced throughout the trip, with participants offering spontaneous teamwork and support, saying things like, *"Teamwork makes the dream work"* and *"Do you need any help?"*



Day 2 - Tuesday 29 October

The morning began with a communal breakfast, followed by a conservation workshop led by RSPB staff. After lunch, the group ventured into the woods to build shelters and create natural art. Evening activities included a nighttime nature walk with bat detectors, sparking excitement as they searched for these elusive nocturnal creatures.

Cooking and eating meals together—many prepared over open fires—became a memorable and rewarding part of the day.



Day 3 - Wednesday 30 October

Our last full day of adventures. After breakfast the group enjoyed a wood-whittling workshop. A clear highlight for many participants who continued with crafting their pieces long after the session had finished. The afternoon was spent learning how to cook outdoors. And later we spent time soaking in and enjoying the peaceful beautiful surroundings.

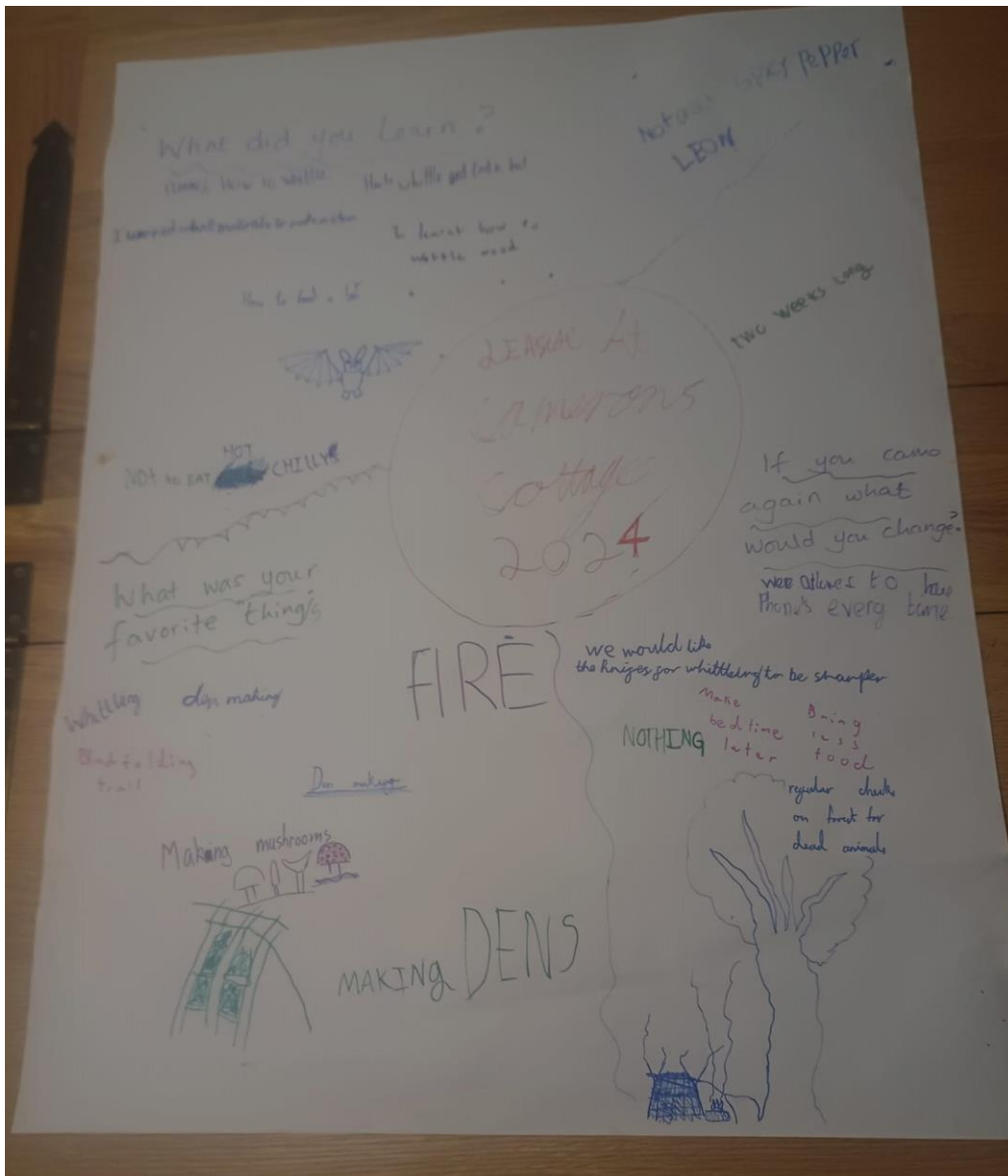


Day 4 - Thursday 31 October

Reluctantly, the group packed up and left the New Forest, taking with them not just their belongings but cherished memories and newfound skills. The morning was spent cleaning the cottage and loading the bus, marking the end of an unforgettable experience.

A massive thank you to Corrine and [@cameronbespolkatrust](#) and [@rspb](#) for hosting us and making the trip magical and memorable. We look forward to the next time we are able to visit your magical place in the woods. .

Feedback and Learning Opportunities



Teamwork and Independence

The children took on responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, and tidying the cottage, which fostered a sense of teamwork and independence. Despite initial hesitation, every participant engaged wholeheartedly, gaining practical life skills and confidence along the way.

Resilience and Perseverance

Many activities challenged the children to push their limits, teaching resilience. One child, for example, struggled to whittle a mallet after several failed attempts. Though frustrated, he eventually succeeded on his fifth try—a proud moment of perseverance. Similarly, lighting fires with flint proved challenging, but with encouragement and determination, even the most disheartened participants succeeded. For one child, the experience was entirely new and transformative and they fully engaged in every activity.

Building Confidence and Friendships

The trip brought together young people who initially didn't know each other. Over four days, they developed friendships, resolved tensions, and learned to work collaboratively. Activities like den building, blindfold guiding, and communal meals helped improve communication and foster trust.

Physical and Mental Wellbeing

With eight hours of outdoor activities daily, the trip promoted physical health, while the off-grid environment encouraged mindfulness and digital detox. Fresh, homemade meals provided a nutritious balance, and the absence of phones inspired creative play and deeper engagement with nature.

Skills for Life and Employability

Participants gained valuable skills such as listening, problem-solving, and working in teams—qualities essential for future education and employment. The structured activities also encouraged focus, patience, and responsibility.

Looking Ahead

This trip reinforced the immense value of outdoor learning and the importance of providing equitable access to such experiences. While older participants expressed concerns about the age gap, the involvement of an unofficial young leader, Marcus Brade, helped bridge the divide and enhance group dynamics.

We're committed to offering more opportunities like this in the future and ensuring more Hackney families can benefit from the life-changing experiences Cameron's Cottage provides.

Thank you once again to the **Cameron Bespolka Trust** and the **RSPB**—your support continues to create lasting memories and inspire the next generation of nature enthusiasts.

