



OPAL South West

Rediscover nature at Open Air Laboratories launch

28 November 2008

Discover the wonders of nature at the regional launch of an exciting new national environmental project

The University of Plymouth has teamed up with Moor Trees to lead the regional involvement in the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project which brings scientists and the community closer together, encouraging people to get back in touch with nature through exploring and studying their local environments. The University of Plymouth is one of nine regional universities which successfully bid for funding to deliver the initiative locally.

The launch event, *'Wild about Woods'* takes place in Plymouth's Central Park, 12-3pm on Saturday 6 December. This FREE event is open to everyone and offers woodland themed activities including walks, games, stands and crafts. Event organiser, OPAL Community Scientist, Bethan Stagg says there is lots to look forward to; ***"This will be a great family day out with plenty to see and do. You can have a go at weaving festive tree decorations, balls and wreaths, join a woodland tour and learn about tree planting, make bat and bird boxes, try your hand at Leaf Bingo and Mini Beast Trump Cards and discover the secret life of lichens."***

"The event is all about having fun and engaging as many people as possible so that they can join in our future events such as field trips, tree planting and environment surveys."

Dr Maria Donkin from the University of Plymouth led the successful bid to lead OPAL locally; ***"We are delighted that Devon and Cornwall can be a part of this exciting national project. We are very privileged to live in an area of outstanding natural beauty and we hope this project will encourage people of all ages to enjoy what the local environment has to offer and create a new generation of nature lovers."***

'Wild about Woods' will take place opposite the golf course on the main route through the park (between the train station and the Mayflower Centre). The event is under cover with refreshments including cakes and pastries, hot and cold drinks. To find out more about the event please contact Bethan Stagg on 07866149773 or email bethan@moortrees.org

Ends

Notes for editors

- Please direct any media enquiries to Karen Mason, University of Plymouth Senior Press Officer on 01752 588002.

- For more information on OPAL please visit www.OPALExploreNature.org

About the University of Plymouth

Consistently ranked one of the top modern universities in the UK, Plymouth has a strong record of excellence, enterprise and innovation across its teaching and research activities and is distinguished by its long-term engagement with employers.

With around 30,000 students, including those studying at its partner FE colleges throughout the South West, the university is one of the largest in the UK. With four government-funded Centres for Excellence in Teaching & Learning, the maximum awarded to any single institution, the university enjoys a high rate of graduate employment and has recently invested more than £110 million in state-of-the-art facilities to enhance the student experience.

Plymouth has a national and international research profile. In the Research Assessment Exercise 2001, 11 subject areas were graded '4' or '5' and for the RAE 2008 return the university has doubled the number of staff and increased the number of research outputs by 70%.

As *the* enterprise university, the University of Plymouth delivers outstanding economic, social and cultural return for business, the professions, the public sector and its wider community. For further information go to www.plymouth.ac.uk

About OPAL

The Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) network is a new nation-wide partnership initiative that will inspire communities to discover, enjoy and protect their local environments. It aims to create a new generation of nature-lovers by stimulating interest through local and national projects which are accessible, fun and relevant to anyone who wants to take part

OPAL will provide the skills and materials needed for the first community-led study of the world around us.

For more information, please visit www.OPALExplorenature.org

The Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme was launched in November 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments. The programme funds a range of activities from local food schemes and farmers markets, to education projects teaching people about the environment. Imperial College London (the leading OPAL partner) was awarded a **£11,760,783** Changing Spaces grant in August 2007

The Big Lottery Fund, the largest of the National Lottery good cause distributors, has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since its inception in June 2004. It was established by Parliament on 1 December 2006. Full details of the work of the Big Lottery Fund, its programmes and awards are available on the website: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk