

Wilderness Festival



Wilderness is a 4 day boutique festival spanning music, the arts, food and wellbeing. It takes place on the first weekend of August each year in Cornbury Park, Charlbury, Oxfordshire. An Idyllic setting. I was lucky enough to attend Wilderness for the 6th time this year and it was wonderful and exciting just as it has been every year.

This venue is a Deer Park the rest of the year so before anything can happen a Deer fence is put in place. The first piece of deer fence goes in 1 month before the show to start gradually moving them off the Main Festival ground. They begin building about 2.5 weeks before the show (that's just fence , trackway and cabins etc) with the Main build (structures etc) starting 2 /1.5 weeks before the show. The Majority of the breakdown (dismantling) happens in 5 days .(Mon to Fri of the week immediately after the show finishes i.e. the Public leave Monday) Any residual work is done at the weekend with everyone fully off site by the Tues of the next week. It goes from a team of 20 , who work on the show year round , to a team of 4,500 working on site during the show. This includes staff / crew and performers.

To prepare the land for the deer to return to they do a full litter pick of all the Deer fields and then gradually remove the fence to bring them back onto the land. There is still the large infrastructure i.e. fence and unplugged generators in situ when the deer return. These are all stacked up ready for collection but the deer just roam around and clear out of the way when the drivers come in to collect the equipment.

Horse trials also take place on this land and to get ready for this a large magnet is towed behind a tractor and is dragged across the camping fields. This is followed by a team of 25 metal detectorists who spend 3 days going over the fields and removing any tent pegs / metal .After this Emma (the Event Manager) and Mike (Build supervisor) will do a post-show walk around to look for damages. With the Estate they then make a plan for remediating the land as needed which can include reseeding,

harrowing and lifting? digging any compacted ground which the Estate then action.

There is a pre-, during- and post-show ecology report to make sure that nothing has been done that will negatively impact on the ground and habitats. This is taken very seriously to the extent that this year they found a moorhen and her eggs under a tree in the Sanctuary area. The area was fenced off and signs erected ,unfortunately the mum left her nest. The Estate team rescued the eggs and put them under a hen elsewhere. All eggs hatched successfully.

The show tries to be as ecologically sound as possible. Water from showers etc is recycled to be used on the toilets to prevent as much waste as possible. Rubbish is collected and recycled as much as possible. All stall holders, food vendors etc have to use recyclable products. No glass is allowed on site. Food vendors donate all food left at the end of each day which is collected by Oxfam and repurposed. Last year 7 tonnes of food was given to Homeless shelters and food banks.

The show tries to be as inclusive as possible. The people attending are of a large age range (6 weeks to late 90's) and of all abilities. There is a Hospital and dedicated campsite for people who need daily medical care so that they can attend the show and all it has to offer. BSL is available across the site for those with hearing difficulties.

There is 1 Main stage and at least 5 slightly smaller stages and about 20 other smaller venues. Each offering different genres of music, arts , health and well being and food . There is a Sanctuary area which has a Spa and many small venues for health and well being classes and activities. There are different banqueting areas where up to 400 people can sit down and enjoy 5 course meals provided by well known chefs in addition to food vendors supplying food from all over the world. There are venues offering talks , debates and classes on many subjects. A children's area with entertainment from 10am to 8pm and Nannies available. In addition to



this there are many other activities/ lessons you can take part in on a huge array of subjects.

The Camping areas include General, Quiet, Family, Boutique ,Meadow , Grove, Accessible as well as Live-in Vehicle areas.

For those travelling by public transport a regular shuttle bus is provided from and to Charlbury Train station and for those travelling by coach there is a coach (Big Green Coach) from London Victoria and London Richmond. This takes you to (on Thursday) and from (on Monday) the Festival. The Big Green Coach company uses carbon neutral coaches to transport festival goers. £1 is donated from every Car Park pass to Trees for Cities, who will plant trees in the Oxfordshire region to sequester CO2 emissions.

It is the equivalent of building a small town including all the necessary amenities required for 4 days of living and a huge selection of entertainment for approximately 30,000 people (Including staff etc.) then dismantling it all and making the ground look as it has never been there.

I cannot recommend it highly enough. It is a truly wonderful experience.

Jayne Kirkby

