

My time at Camp David and the Purbeck Wildlife SERT

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Day 1- The beginning

29/06/17

We began the day nice and early by meeting on campus at 9am to allow us to re introduce ourselves to our fellow campers, confirm the roles which would be taking on for the next two weeks and collect all the equipment required.

We then travelled to the first site which was in Studland, after some difficulty in finding the location we required we realised that our time had flown by. After the trekking in the rain through the Heaths we had a brief introduction into the different types of Heath and their growth stages. To others this was merely a recap but to me this blew my mind, how on earth would I be able to identify all of these species out in the field with only one partner, who like me also appeared to have very limited experience with plant identification... Sorry Charles!

Finally it was time to find out where we would be staying for the next two weeks, this was about to be the moment of truth for us, well mainly for me anyway as a first time camper. Michelle Brown gave us a brief tour of the site and then we were left to our own devices to set up camp. This was the ultimate struggle for me. How on earth do you put up a tent? Where has all my common sense gone? Can I give up and sleep just under the sheet? These were just a few of the extreme questions which were crossing my mind as everyone around me began to have tents which actually looked how they were supposed to. Charles being the savior he is rescued me and volunteered himself to put up my tent if I did the food shopping for us both, of course I agreed happily, food shopping would be more my thing than putting up tents.

After returning to camp armed with a few bags of delights I was able to organise my tent and have a rest whilst a couple of us frantically tried to access the only points of wifi outside the offices, for me this was key as I began my role of updating the social media pages. Oh, also so that I could let my family know that I was alive and actually did have a tent which was now fully functioning. Sleep was now calling me...

The campsite



Day 2- Trial Day

30/06/2017

After a restless night sleep I woke up shivering away, for some reason I was the unlucky one who felt the cold the most it would appear. Fluffy sock, pj's and a jumper all on underneath my sleeping bag was apparently not enough for me. Note to self: Walk into town this weekend and find somewhere to buy some thick jumpers or a blanket.

This morning we were introduced to David Brown who gave us a talk about the Land Outdoors and Nature scheme which the National Trust were running along with some information about the landscape of the Isle of Purbeck. Following on from this Michelle handed us out some paperwork which gave us descriptions of what we would be doing for the day. Once again my brain decided to go into overdrive and question whether or not I was going to remember all of this. After a brief discussion and handing out of equipment we headed to Godlingston Heath to begin our surveys.

The first two quadrats we surveyed as a group, this lead to a high amount of conflict when questioning whether the species were abundant or dominant with no one wanting their opinion to be the unapproved one. This however proved to be a lot easier to do when working in pairs which sped up the time of surveying drastically.

Today I learnt that walking through the heaths was rather difficult and that I should definitely do some more frequent exercise... however it was during the walk home that I began looking forward to the dinner we had planned. Some good old fajita style wraps. Thank goodness for Mexican food raising my spirits yet again!

Cooking at Camp David



Leon and his pasta sauce modelling skills



Charles was eager to begin our fajita feast



Day 3- Adventure time part 1

01/07/2017

Although today wasn't part of the SERT I decided to record it in this diary anyway as I had really enjoyable day, this surprised me a lot considering the awful mood I woke up in aching from my back and how cold I had been again.

Today Charles, David and I were on a mission, we were going to make it to Old Harry Rocks one way or another. The Journey started with me befriending the horses we met on the way which is always a bonus considering how I ALWAYS fall in love with EVERY animal I see ALL the time. I must admit that it was a great struggle making it to the top of Old Harry but we made it a few hours later, for me I love these types of activities which only a few years ago I was unable to do due to injuring my back. Now, even though the pain is there (especially now 7 or so miles of walking later) and it is a struggle, I love being able to do it and be outside appreciating the views around me! The feeling of being on top of the cliffs is one I have grown to love over my first year at Bournemouth University. It is the feeling of freedom.

We had a short break at the top of the cliffs and admired the view, whilst here we were eves dropping in on what appeared to be a geography lesson going on. The teacher had so much enthusiasm and was sharing many interesting facts to his students which reminded me of my time during A Levels and how I grew to love learning about the world around us.

After enjoying this sight we headed down into Swanage, my aim now was to demolish the biggest portion of chips possible. Finally we were able to dig into some chips after bumping into James on his walk, this lead to great satisfaction, especially for David who seemed to have been starving the whole afternoon. Being the foodie that I am I needed a honeycomb ice cream before we left, what is a visit to a beach without ice cream?! Oh and don't forget the paddling in the sea... That is a major must during any seaside visit!

An hours walk uphill and we are back to base camp. I am achey and well and truly tired out, my only wish for now is that deep heat saves the pain and I manage to sleep like a baby until tomorrow's adventure.

Saturday strolls



Day 4- Adventure time part 2

02/07/2017

It was soon after I had woken up nice and early then stuffed my face with too many biscuits that I had stocked up on the day before, I realised that I was just itching to get out and do some more even with the aching in my calves. Thankfully David and Charles felt the same, so once again the 3 of us headed off in the direction behind the campsite with no specific destination in mind. So if you haven't already gathered, I am animal mad. The big, the small, the fluffy, the ugly looking ones, you name it. When I see it I will let out a massive squeal or 'AWW' (Just ask Charles and David, they have been unlucky enough to experience this on many occasions over the last 4 days). Much to my delight the first field we entered was full of cows, we stopped so I could take many a photo of these cute cows and when we began our journey again they began to follow us. If I could have stolen just one cow I would have loved it! I feel like here is where I should clarify that no livestock have been harmed or set free over my time at Camp David.

Continuously walking uphill for what felt like a life time was more than worth it with the views we experienced when we were at the top where we stopped for a brief lunch break. Corfe castle was spotted in the distance and we were determined. This was when I realised that no matter how close something in the distance appears, it can still be miles away... Just over an hour later we arrived in the picturesque village of Corfe. Unfortunately this was only for a short time as David was suffering from a severe case of too much sun cream in the eye so we headed back to base camp as we thought it was best to let him keep his sight in both eyes.

Top tip- Do not fall asleep on the grass outside your tent. Exhaustion had hit me like a tonne of bricks and next thing I knew, two hours later I woke up to numerous stings over my legs where I had rolled into nettles during my nap. Refreshed after my nap I thought it would be a smart idea to agree to Charles' challenge of walking up the hill opposite camp before we had our dinner. Next thing I know a couple of hours of later we ended up only 1 mile away from Old Harry Rock's again without even planning to. All that was on my mind now was food, I felt starving. I mean we had walked around 20km's today which is far more than I usually do on a daily basis back in halls, which embarrassingly enough can be closer to 2km what with a few backwards and forwards trips from my room to the kitchen.

One massive bowl of pasta later and I am out for the night.

Sunday's views



Day 5- The work begins

03/07/2017

Today we began on the real work, well we attempted to anyway. This morning started with us visiting Agglestone South to carry out three quadrats in our pairs. This seemed a lot easier than it had done whilst working in a large group on the previous Friday. After trekking through the heaths and collecting the data required we headed back to camp in order for us to re group. Here the majority of us were admiring the cows in the field next to us waiting for James and Leon to arrive back. Half an hour later they arrived, it turns out that they had trouble finding their way back due to the vast amount of gorse which they encountered on the way. This was fine with all of us as it meant we were able to stock up on hot tea and the biscuits which Anita kindly provided for us.

Little did we know that the work had barely begun at this point. After an early lunch we all headed to Godlington heath to our own compartment in pairs. We were armed with metre rules, a GPS tracker, data sheets and a variety of maps. This time we would have to complete all 10 quadrats between the two of us whilst mapping out the various types of heathland over the whole section. To me this was overwhelming as I was still new to all of the surveying techniques. Whilst Charles and I were trying to be as precise as possible we ended up being rather slow compared to the other groups, so much so that they ventured out to find us. With Charles being as determined as ever he wanted to finish the last 6 quadrats we had to do and would not give up until this had been complete so sent me back to the mini bus with the others. This was frustrating for me as I am someone who does not like completing tasks on time, especially if it will hold back the group however I am slowly learning that this can not always be helped, especially in fieldwork situations.

When we arrived back to camp it was already after 5.30pm, it did not take Anita long to realise we were a man down and she headed back to the site in order to collect Charles due to health and safety regulations. David and I headed to Swanage to do a shop which I was rather impressed by how smoothly it went considering we were buying meals for 3 of us for the whole week without any list or ideas whatsoever. We then prepared our sweet potato and chickpea curry which was just what I needed after today.

Day five's activities



David all ready for a day of surveying. The face that you make when sitting on Gorse. James setting up the BBQ.

Day 6- Introduction to Living Records

04/07/2017

Today was the day which we were introduced to the Living Records system which would be likely to become our most used website over the next two weeks. It was where all our raw data was going to be stored in order for it to be analysed in the future. I for one did not know what to expect as I have not had any experience in this kind of field before so was keen to get onto the system and listen to Michelle describe the in's and out's of it.

Once we had finally all been given our own log in details and after a complex discussion on what would be the best way to collate some of the data we were given time to input all of the previous days work onto the system. This is something which I got the hang of rather quickly compared to the actual collection of data and felt comfortable doing. After a morning inside we were itching to get out and start this afternoon's tasks. We drove to Godlingston heath where Charles and I ventured back into the Brands Bog compartment to complete the tasks from yesterday. We managed to do this quickly before walking across to Studland heath where we attempted to map out the heathland types in Western Arm whilst completing the 10 quadrats. We were impressed with how we managed to complete the map and 5 quadrats for this section before heading back to the minibus. Anita had learned that with our kind of determination to finish tasks, a time had to be set in order for us to gather together or else we would have tried to keep going for as long as it took.

When back at camp we had a debrief and discussed the plans for the next few days, along with a brief introduction as to how the camera traps would work. Before dinner we updated living records with our results and had time to relax before preparing for tomorrow.

Living records training session



Day 7-Messy bogs and busy bees

05/07/2017

I was looking forward to today as I knew we were spending the morning looking at pollinators with Liz which would make a change from just identifying types of heather for 7 hours straight. The morning started by identifying *Bombus Terrestris* and *Bombus L* in the camp site which Liz had finally managed to trap whilst looking like a real life Pokémon hunter. Once we had all been able to colour these in on our bee guide and have a look at how to identify them we headed out into Godlingston Heath once again.

We were set free to try and capture some bees of our own in order to help with our identification skills. With no luck finding any apart from the common honey bee I headed back in the direction of the others, when it was James who had been able to find the *Bombus lapidarius* we had been waiting to see for the last hour. As a group we trialed a sample quadrat so we would know what we had to do when in our pairs. This sampling appeared to be a lot simpler compared to when looking at heathlands however the difficulty we faced was that bees did not always land on the plants but simply flew off which made the identification process rather difficult for an amateur bee hunter like myself. In these quadrats we simply had to only estimate the amount of each bee attracting species were present then count the number of bees seen in 10 minutes each. This was unfortunate for us as we did not see as many bees as I had hoped. 5 quadrats later and we were done.

David and I were teamed up today and were keen to get our task done as quick as possible due to the heat. This plan began to fail slowly because David thought he saw a short cut to our destination however little did we know it was all bogs. This was not an issue for David and his longer legs however every few metres we went I seemed to sink ankle deep into bogs, much to his amusement. Along the way we discovered a deer skull with the antlers still attached which we both wanted to keep but soon realised after me falling in many bogs later that it would have been far too large for either of us to take back to Kent and sadly had to leave our great discovery on the heaths.

We were able to get our sections of heathland mapped out quickly and headed back to camp where I have never been so grateful for a cold shower ever. My only concern now is will my boots be dry for tomorrow or am I going to have to wear socks and sandals again?

Bogs, Bees & Skulls



Top tip- Do not
sink into the bogs



My first bee.

Day 8-GPS Failure

06/07/2017

Today we headed to a new location with a new surveying method to learn, the highly anticipated BU SERT squares. We had been lucky to get away without using these until today when we arrived on Slepe Heath armed with canes wrapped in string. After a struggle unwrapping the string, Anita demonstrated the highly sophisticated surveying technique to us to show how we would be now using a 20m by 20m square to survey in, this looked daunting in comparison to our small 4 x 4 squares we were used to seeing. We worked through the first square as a whole team to allow us to get the hang of how today's samples would be carried out before heading off in our pairs to our first location.

Sophie and I headed to plantation heath A, or so we thought we were. One hour later we were still walking trying to find the right site using the GPS. Were we using it wrong? Was the GPS playing up? Can I sunbathe instead? Those are just three of the main questions going through my head as we were walking through the heaths on such a hot day. Finally we thought we had found it but turns out still no luck. Liz arrived to save the day, well sort of as she realised that most of the GPS co-ordinates were incorrect meaning we were all heading to the wrong sites. This meant that Sophie and I just had to carry out the 10 National Trust transects for our designated site which seemed a lot simpler compared to the new BU squares. One hour in we had already drained our water supply and were severely lacking energy and motivation. After speaking to Charles we were relieved to find that we would be able to finish the day at 4pm as the other groups were in the same situation as us. We sped through the last quadrats with the idea that we would head to the beach after imprinted into our brains. I needed to lay down on the sand and have a paddle in the sea before my brain fried.

Vicky, Sophie and I headed down to the beach for a few hours where we had a paddle in the now rather chilly sea before going on a hunt for some good chips. Harry Ramsden's definitely improved our mood after today's tasks. Like the big kids we are we couldn't resist the arcades. 10p and Sophie had won a cuddly rabbit, me however with my bad luck was £10 in and still no toy in sight. This was when I realised enough was enough so left empty handed whilst the lucky two had their prizes in arms.

The bad luck continued into the late evening when I proceeded to slice into my leg whilst showering in the dark using my head torch, thank goodness for Leon and his first aid kit who saved the day. I am going to sleep tonight hoping tomorrow goes much smoother and I can have a relaxing weekend.



Mini bus trips

Feeling hot hot hot



Setting up the BU squares



Girls at the beach



Today's dinner



Sophie and her prize

Day 9- Those Friday feelings

07/07/2017

After the nightmare that was yesterday I woke up determined and exhausted. Now that I think of it, although I was determined to complete all of today's tasks it was mainly exhaustion. After all we had been camping now for just over a week and had walked at least 80km (well according to my apple health account anyway) but it was Friday, we were patiently awaiting the much anticipated rest.

We headed to Slepe Heath again and whilst in our morning brief we received the new and correct GPS coordinates for today's site before being set off with our targets. Sophie and I were extremely grateful to Liz who had allocated us a section close to the minibus which was a life saver after all the heath we had trekked through yesterday just to find out our coordinates were incorrect. As we headed off and were approaching the site our GPs died, oh well its alright we have spare batteries in my bag I thought. Little did I know these were not new and actually dead too. Frustration levels were increasing what with being so close to our site and having walked through many a gorse bush to get this far. Half of me was wanting to carry on but the other half of me could not stop thinking about how badly blistered my feet were, the heat and the fact that it was so close to the weekend. Thankfully we met Adam back at the minibus and managed to find batteries with enough left in for us to finally get started on our day. Moral was slowly rising.

Reaching our correct coordinates and successfully setting up the BU SERT squares we were all ready to carry out our 10 2m by 2m surveys. This was so much simpler today than yesterday and we managed to complete in record time before speeding through our National Trust transects which were becoming more second nature to us. I could actually recognise some plant species now, I could not believe it!

Today the team did extremely well, we all finished the tasks set and made it back to camp the earliest all week by 3pm. It felt so good to be back and have all of the work done, there is a feeling of achievement when you complete the required tasks which I for one enjoy. It is even better when you are all working as a team and can help each other out. Whilst being rewarded with an ice cream all thanks to Liz, Anita discussed how to enter the data for the BU SERT Squares into the excel spreadsheet which I would be organising and writing the report on these in the new future. So much data, so many columns and what feels like so little time before the placement will be over.

Now, I am ever so happy it's the weekend and we get some rest. But mainly, I am over the moon at the fact I am going to have a proper bed and a shower tonight as I won't be spending the weekend at the camp.

Set up of the BU SERT Square



Day 10- Monday Blues

10/07/2017

I thought weekends were supposed to make you feel more relaxed? Apparently this wasn't true I found out this morning after waking up a lot earlier than my alarm to the sound of David and Charles out of my tent supposedly whispering 'Shall we wake Lindsey up?'. Lets just say my response was strongly worded as my alarm was not due to go off for another 40 minutes and I had only returned to camp the night before at midnight, all thanks to good old public transport. I must say that I was very relieved when they informed me as to how they had undone the inside of my tent and removed my air mattress and placed on top of the inner tent but they felt bad when realising how late I would be returning to camp.

Today we headed out to Godlingston heath to look at the camera traps, or where they used to be until the ponies decided to destroy them. It was not a good day for the camera traps, what with the ponies deciding that they were good scratching posts and the newer models not cooperating with re-chargable batteries but we powered on (unlike the batteries). The team completed five 2m x 2m quadrats in the areas where the cameras were facing which seemed to take us barely any time as we were all getting used to completing our tasks.

During our lunch it started to rain, I was not prepared for this as it was ever so warm and sunny when we left camp this morning. Thank goodness Vicky had two spare rain ponchos for David and I. I call them rain ponchos but I believe that the proper name for them were bin bags with holes in for your arms and legs. As rustly as they were in the wind in the mires I was very grateful for it to keep the burst of rain off me. This afternoon was dedicated partly to mires. How lovely I thought as we were delicately making our way over the bogs whilst trying not to fall in them again. Anita introduced us to the different types of sphagnum mosses which we may find across the mires, there were so many different shades of greens and yellows they all began to merge into one clump in my head. Whilst exploring the mires to see if we could find any other species James was unlucky enough to take the biggest fall whilst attempting to run through the boggy patches which was amusing to us all when he climbed out with mud up to his knees. However, I knew my time would be soon and I was right. My back foot got stuck in a mire resulting in me slowly sinking down to my knee and having to be pulled out by Adam and the metre rule. I can imagine that without this assistance I would have probably toppled over and both of my legs would have sunken which would have been a nightmare.

Once out of the bog Adam and I headed to the last location of the day to change the camera batteries and SD card before heading back to camp and do our last food shop of the week.

Tonight on camp, there were positive vibes everywhere, I think this could be partially due to James' tunes and Vicky's glow sticks.

The worrying looks from today



Glow sticks made an appearance at the camp tonight



Fashionable clothing for the mires



Someone had a slip in a bog

Day 12- Soggy feet

11/07/2017

Today started with the annoying sound of David's alarm going off constantly at 6.30am when he had gone down to shower and forgotten to turn it off, thanks for that David! Was a lovely wake up call over an hour before I had planned to. After managing to fall back asleep I awoke to the sound of rain on my tent. This was a bad sign and it made me wish to stay in my sleeping bag all day long even though I was delighted that we would be doing something different today.

We headed out to Down farm this morning before meeting Anita and Liz who introduced us to Martin and Peter who were our guides for today. The day began with a talk from Martin who owned the farm in which he told us information on how he acquired the farm and the various stewardship schemes which he took part in over the years to try and manage to various habitats which are found across the land. A key point which I found interesting was how he and Peter were worried about how Brexit would affect the protection of the countryside due to the pressures being put on the grants available. Peter began to tell us how he was taught to identify different plant species whilst working at a nature conservancy. He was told that the easiest way to do this would be to find a key identifiable feature of each species which would separate it from everything else, but this feature would have to be one which was visible all year round so it could not be something such as the flowers.

After our talk we headed out to the field pond which was surrounded by chalk grassland which was a beautiful sight. We headed into some of the fields to have a look at the species which are key in a chalk grassland and some key features which can be handy when identifying them. In the afternoon we headed into the valley and looked at the difference between the areas which had not been grazed for 2 years compared to that which had been grazed. The difference was astonishing, the height difference in grasses which were measured by Charles and I came out to around double that in the ungrazed section compared to the grazed.

After walking around in the rain for a few hours my feet were soaked and I had bubbles squeezing out of my shoes, I was happy to head into the dry museum which Peter had on site. This museum was full of interesting artifacts which had been discovered around the local area.

We headed back to the camp site and were all desperate for a warm cup of tea and a heater to cuddle around.

Fun on the farm



Day 13- Fieldwork finale

12/07/2017

I woke up wishing that I could stay cosy and warm in my sleeping bag as the past two weeks were getting to me and I felt drained. Today was our last day of fieldwork, finally! In one way it has felt like a lifetime and in another it does not feel like we have had long enough here.

We headed out to Studland heath this morning with Liz where Charles and I completed the western arm heath section which we started last week and then took on a new site called plateau heath North. This felt relatively easy compared to some of our other tasks, the main issue which we faced involved being trapped in gorse. Oh and I personally was suffering from a case of wet shoes and socks which hadn't dried from the night before. We took a brief break to sit on a scenic sandy area overlooking Poole harbour where Charles proceeded to laugh at my stone throwing skills, or should I say the lack of them.

The team headed back to the camp site for a lunch break before heading to Hartland heath to have an afternoon of pollinators. Luckily the sun was out and I had dry feet all thanks to Liz lending me her shoes, I must say that this improved my mood massively and I now know that at the end of this trip my shoes will be finding themselves in the bin as they are useless! We were shown the successful bee nest which had been set up by James and Liz before David and I headed out to look for the different bee species.

After this we headed back to camp with a feeling of relief and panic. Relieved at the fact that we had been able to collect all the data required for the SERT but now there was a slight sense of panic for me as there was data which needed to be entered, reports written and presentations prepared. After Liz had talked through tomorrow's presentation with us we were set loose to complete the final tasks we needed to do.

Hours later here we are all sat outside the offices. Some are sat gripping onto whatever wifi we can get to upload the data to living records, others are busy writing their presentation scripts and here I am finishing today's diary entry before going back to the presentation preparation. Thank goodness we have all been filled up and energized from the fajitas.

Slepe and Hartland



The nesting bees



Dorset Heather



Day 14- Presentation professionals

13/07/2017

Today was the day of the presentation. All our hard work would soon be on show in front of Michelle and David, we were all determined to show how much we had done in the last two weeks as well as how much we had enjoyed our time here. A few of us were up and preparing at 8.30am, all sat around the Wi-Fi areas outside the offices trying to access the data online to help us make our PowerPoint slides.

A few hours had passed and a lot of celebrations had been consumed, especially from me and David. Thanks Anita for these, the sugar rush was just what I needed to get me through the morning of preparation.

After lunch it was time for us to show off. We wanted to show off to everyone how much we had learnt over the last two weeks and how much data the 8 of us had collected over the two weeks. I get rather nervous with public speaking, even though this was a presentation in front of people who I had met before and some of who had even see me grumpily roll out of my tent in the mornings with a serious lack of sleep some nights. Anyway, I powered through my first part discussing the BU SERT squares which I had been analysing the data for and will be soon writing the report on which went smoothly. The hard part was over, I had a break whilst listening to my team mates before heading to the front again to show an entry from my diary along with a few screenshots of the social media pages which I had been running.

Charles finished the presentation with a heartfelt speech in which he mentioned all of us, he is so cheesy but it was lovely to hear. Anita and Liz expressed how proud they were of us due to how much we were able to do on our time here, our willingness to work and the motivation we had. We were all proud to be ambassadors for Bournemouth University. Michelle and David were impressed with all our hard work and there was an overall sense of achievement. It felt so good to be part of such a successful project whilst working with a great team.

As a reward to ourselves we attempted to make a BBQ, however this did not go too well considering we had no firelighters. We had to quickly transfer all our food into the camping stoves as we rushed off to Winspit for a bat walk with Michelle. This was such an amazing experience.

Last night in camp



Day 15- Departing from camp

14/07/2017

Today when I woke up there was a feeling of happiness mixed with sadness. I was over the moon at the fact that I would be able to go home to my bed tonight and have a nice warm bubble bath along with a big bowl of mash potato (Yes food is mentioned yet again oops). I also have an overwhelming feeling of sadness, I have just spent the majority of the past two weeks with 6 other people, only 1 of whom I knew before this trip but now I feel like we have all grown as a group and bonded. There have been many personality clashes along the way don't get me wrong. But I believe that I have formed friendships with some of these people, some friendships have been formed through collecting data, others through winding each other up. No matter the way the friendship has been formed I genuinely have enjoyed spending the last two weeks of my life with this group.

I have learnt a lot over my time here, both about myself, others and the nature of the work itself. I could have chosen an easier placement for sure, I could have decided not to take on the extra tasks which I have but I know for sure that it would not have had the same impact on me as this one has.

After a morning of entering the last bits of data, packing away the tent and finishing up the extra tasks we were given here I am writing this last entry of my diary. Although I have not written a diary since primary school I have thoroughly enjoyed documenting my time over the last two weeks.

Until my next SERT (hopefully), goodbye.



The team with Michelle and David from National Trust