

Young handler retriever training day at Westhide Estate – with Julia and Morton Redpath

On an unusually dry Saturday in the middle of June, 14 children aged between 4 and 15 converged on the Westhide Estate in Herefordshire by kind invitation of Mr Luke & Mrs Nicola Thompson Coon. Even though the children, their accompanying adults AND their four-legged charges were of all ages, they mingled effortlessly and the day got off to a super start. Luke and Nicola kindly gave each child a bright red Sporting Saint dog lead, some were squirrelled away for keeps and some were put into good use with immediate effect.

We split the children into 3 groups. Group 1 was made up of children who had come without a dog of their own, so we loaned them one of ours and assigned a fellow dog handler to watch over them carefully. Group 2 had brought with them their own dog and these two groups were met by Wye Valley Retriever Club trainers and helpers (with dogs) at four different locations around the lake and in the wood. Each child was given the opportunity to handle a dog and have a go at set exercises previously set out. Exercises included, marked and memory retrieves, hunting and double marks, one of which was in the lake. The Junior Handlers were really keen to learn and find out exactly what it's all about. It was incredible watching the dogs work for the children.

Group 3 were experienced at running their own dogs and they had a training class in the field with Morton. Some of the less experienced children had time to watch for a moment and were clearly inspired by them.

We all stopped for a picnic lunch under the Poplar trees and soaked in the atmosphere. Westhide is a majestic woodland estate and the children seemed to love being at Westhide too.

After our picnic we all headed off to the big field and sat in the tall grass watching each group of children demonstrate their newly acquired dog handling skills. Some had never handled a dog before at all! It was quite something to see, a group of all ages and all sorts of personalities, each succeeding at their own level and in their own way. The training in the morning clearly had an impact on the children as it was evident to see the improvement in the afternoon. The children handled each task with confidence and great enthusiasm.

At the end of the day everyone was given a goody bag kindly sponsored by Pip at Sporting Saint, thank you Pip, a very generous bag of goodies. Thank you also to Laura Peakman from Skinners who arranged Certificates and another goody bag for all the children. This was a nice surprise and went down very well indeed.

Thank you to everyone who came on the day and helped out. We could not have done this without you, you were all brilliant and so friendly and helpful – thank you so very much.

To say this day was 'special' is an understatement, it was amazing and one we will treasure! A joy to meet so many polite and happy children, watching them laugh and have fun yet take on challenging exercises with the dogs. The dogs were all so well behaved, gentle and patient, they seemed to rise to the expectations of the situation they were in. They must have been very pleased with themselves and probably shattered by the time they arrived back home (and the children)!

A massive thank you to you all for taking part in all the fun & laughter, to the Land Owners, all the helpers and the Sponsors for giving us this opportunity to have such a memorable and happy day at Westhide. We hope you are inspired to continue training and enjoying your lovely dogs at whatever level you choose for many years to come! Who knows, maybe we have inspired a future IGL qualifier.....

Julia & Morton Redpath