

A YEAR OF COED CARIAD

2021-2022



September

The year started with a riot of growth in our vegetable garden and thus lots of outdoor cooking opportunities for the children. We made soup and a stew and the children ran through the bean tunnel snacking on the beans hanging down. We picked blackberries and yellow raspberries and incorporated them into pancakes. Much to the delight of the children the river exploration started early in the year, and the sheer delight of splashing large rocks into deep pools and floating boats made of leaves down the little waterfalls began. Tool use started with using the over-sized courgettes for chopping with knives spoons and saws, gouging, carving and hammering in golf tees. The children then moved their skills forwards using the sharper carving knives and larger tools for all sorts of projects through the year.

A firm favourite throughout the year the Lego, baby dolls, trains and the cars and garage make regular if not weekly appearances, alongside water and mud play! We immersed ourselves in our environment, conducting bug hunts, having the chance to inspect a very calm hornet up close and watch the movements of a disturbed nest of ants. The children ran through the woods, climbing banks and swinging and we rebuilt the woodland den and camouflaged it with a leafy tarpaulin.

The children saved seeds for spring, willowing the broccoli and picking out nasturtium and bean seeds from beans further out of reach of the snackers! We enjoyed reading a wide variety of stories and playing games of twister outside before collapsing in heaps into the grass.

As the month drew to a close, we sewed fabric pumpkins, collected the first few apples from the tree and broke up some old pallets to add to the wood pile for the winter warmth. We made giant leafy cardboard cut-out people and started to papier mâché some giant balls to paint up as pumpkins, one for a decoration and one for a pinata! The last days of the month saw us starting the first of the Autumn's great mushroom hunts!

October

The early days of October saw some wonderful wet weather, leading to the mud slide into the swamp being reinstated. But also leading to some interesting weaving techniques being employed using stones and cooperative working and making giant spider webs in the welcome shelter. The children also started to discover a love of games inside starting with Insect Top Trumps.

Mushroom hunting continued in earnest with all sorts being discovered, and explored, from large bracket fungi to teeny tiny finger like protrusions. The woodland den build was completed with a fern frond roof and we watched hornets as they moved in and out of the tree hollow nest. Potions and 5* meals were concocted in the mud kitchen and the pond life was watched carefully as our new pond gains more life and interest each week.

Chalk drawing on the barn doors and Lego constructions was a firm favourite amongst many, along with den building, rope additions to make the muddy slopes safe and easier for all to traverse. We made nature mandalas in the woods using all sorts of wonderful finds from nature and the woodland swings saw a lot of use. The children made a log into a dining table and chairs and served all sorts of weird and wonderful pretend foraged meals to each other.

We used tools for sawing up wood to make play items and for firewood and also the tools to make items using clay. The lizards re-emerged with the warmer weather mid month to provide hours of watchful entertainment for the children. They were observed, named held and had little hideaways and areas built for them. Mid October also saw our squashes ripening and these were dutifully chopped and carved and made into soups.

We used the colourful leaves to papier mache balloons to try and make decorative bowls, but slippery leaves and lack of layers caused most to collapse when the balloons were popped! So the remaining balloons became a wonderful game.

We toasted Marshmallows around the fire, found even more mushrooms and fungi towards the end of the month and cracked hazelnuts with the nutcrackers to try. As the weather turned colder and wetter, dens were built indoors, seeds were saved and sorted, and wooden spinning tops were made. Indoor board games increased, with the discovery of Cluedo and some fabulous matching games.

November

November began with an array of mushrooms which had developed over our half term break. The mud kitchen became a whirl of activity making some interesting concoctions and the watch of the hornets slowed as the cooler weather meant they became less active. The ninja line once again came into use with many of the younger children feeling more ready to test their skills after watching some of the older children. The swamp bridge was renewed and once again playing in the mud there, building swampy dams became a fast favourite activity for many.

We hunted some bugs using hand lenses and bug catchers, climbed tree and saw early November frosty mornings. We had a chance to use a large manual digital camera and this painted an interesting child view of Coed Cariad.

We were gifted some fabulous circus skills kit which added to our collection and the children started to twirl flower sticks and try all sorts of juggling and ball rolling tricks along with stilt walking, pedalling on the foot pedal cycle and cooperative walking on the skis. They even went as far as to sit up on the ninja line to perform their circus tricks! The squidgy mud became alluring and the children found a deep leafy patch near a bank which gave them a perfect leaping point and they tried to get themselves stuck in the mud.

Chess became an indoor game of choice with the children teaching one another and strategizing their wins. Swingball and football came back out outside, and the lure of the river overcame us and we made more rafts to test in the pools and waterfalls.

We completed some small needle felted projects, felting wool onto a felt base to make pictures. We made larger wet felted pictures and started some Macrame projects to build up to the festive period. The children had a go at bookbinding making themselves small notebooks.

Duncan the Storyteller came in for a fabulous session of stories, music and play. We continued sawing up wood and whittling to make items the children wanted for play, including bows, swords, animal homes and feeders, and sawing up fallen branches for firewood.

The end of the month saw the start to icy mornings and the exploration of the ice found on the water barrels and troughs each morning. Cars and the garage came out most days, to move mud, slosh through water and build or demolish mud constructions. The fallen leaves became a fabulous source of play, with children hiding underneath them and popping up on unsuspecting friends or throwing huge piles into the air so that it rained leaves (and the odd slug!)

Finally at the end of November we got out a huge pile of loose parts for the children to build with on the yard and they made castles, boats and a ninja warrior assault course complete with moving parts! Some of the constructions even became two storeys!

December

December started with a LOT more loose parts constructing and play and the ninja line was also very popular with all of the children. With the loose parts play children started thinking about safety and knot tying and risk assessing their own structures, making modifications to hold parts in place securely for climbing on and to make the structures more durable. Tree climbing continued, as well as using the ropes for the slopes in more interesting ways, tying them up to make over the swamp swings for example.

Inside Lego and chess continued in popularity as well as the Christmas crafting, using cookie cutters to make felted decorations for the Tree, stickers to make snowmen and Santas, and weaving simple fish and wreathes from the willows we harvested, along with associated greenery from the woods. We made drop scones over the log burner and

enjoyed another session with Duncan the Storyteller. Before ending the term with glass jar lanterns, inside dens building, more games like the penguin on the ice game, and the discovery of all sorts of weird gelatinous fungi in the woods and trees.

January

January began with Hot Chocolates, muddy play and more loose parts constructions. The children enjoyed engineering small river flows on the yard and generally making the most of the mud! Including making a mud catapult with a shovel and a log!

We started some weaving projects as a precursor to sewing and sawed up many fallen branches in the woods before loading into bread crate carts designed and pulled back by the children.

We made tin can and stick guitars and the children challenged themselves to try and get multiple notes from the strings they strung. We made a large cardboard Mari Llwyd and a number of sock puppet hobby horses. The children had fun dressing up as the Mari Llwyd using the card head and a white sheet and prancing like a pony around the yard, before Siobhan dressed as the Mari Llwyd and armed with tin can guitars and hobby horses we went to Wassail the apple orchards! To finish off we had marshmallows and warmed apple juice round the fire pit.

Woodland play abounded in January with a younger tribe developing a game of woodpeckering, where they had discovered a range of logs that they gradually used a variety of handmade tools including rocks to chip away at like woodpeckers.

Towards the end of the month, we began some willow weaving projects. Flowers, shields, bows and arrows as always and living willow hearts for Dydd Santes Dwynwen. We toasted bread over the fire and the river called us to play again, floating, damming and splashing through. The mud kitchen saw some new concoctions and chess tournaments continued.

February

The start of February saw us starting to make some steps up the muddy slope by the climbing tree, cutting the earth away and malleting in retaining boards. The children then proceeded to build an ultimate mud slide next to the steps!

Indoors chess, chequers and snakes and ladders tournaments were taking place along with more willow working and den building. We played with mouldable kinetic sand and made alder cone inks and enjoyed messy play with mud and foam. We read stories as we do most weeks. We started peg loom weaving to make little mats and pretended to be Kings and Queens. We used modelling clay to make sculptures and turned a large box into a space shuttle.

We used the diggers to slop about mud on the yard, dammed the swamp to make pools of water and squelched and jumped through mud and puddles. At right at the end of the month we started some Dydd Dewi Sant crafting making some little Welsh dollies.

March

March started a little drier than February ended and we saw the return of the bank leaping games. Where all the children enjoyed running up the bank and leaping from performing a manoeuvre of their own design. Woodland crowns were made and scarlet elf cups discovered.

The children started dolly knitting projects, painting, and sewing, to make head bands and necklaces. A chunk of hay was found and the children delighted in throwing it about covering themselves in the dried grass and seeds.

The swamp was barricaded, with a construction of mud and found logs and sticks and became a source of play inspiration for a while as well as a point to build higher and higher for the children to challenge themselves to leap higher and higher. The circus toys made a resurgence and we managed to rebuild the willow tunnel for our summer plantings, as well as building a number of bean teepees for the raspberries and for in the veg patch.

We introduced the children to the game of human knots, where they all held hands and we 'tied them in knots' but they couldn't loose their hands again until they were back in a circle. We played rounds of stuck in the mud, whats the time Mr Wolf and a few new blindfolded games. The small den in the apple trees had a revamp using the bread crates and some other loose parts.

Bugs and Lizards came out for us to discover later in the month and the river called us to it to make dams and fern floats, as well as paddling in the cool waters. Weird and wonderful bugs were found on rocks in the river and the children challenged themselves to make ever increasingly large splashes in the water.

Willow baskets were woven, trees climbed, seeds started, watery and muddy worlds built in the tuff trays, and large swatches of moss were used for woodland camo clothing. Daffodils were coloured using food colouring, castles, trains and boats were built from bread crates and chairs and a willow basketball hoop made.

We had a visit from Vimes the teeny lamb, who loved following the children around for the day and snuggling into them when he tired. The children had a go at slacklining across the yard. Wool was woven into plaits for the children's hair. Small works worlds were built and destroyed with equal zest. In the warmth of the last few days of the month the river drew us in and shoes and socks were abandoned for paddling and the river rocks were used to see how big a splash could be made! We also discovered that we could access a new stretch of river from closer to the main garden. We also discovered some interesting larvae and climbing on a fallen tree from Storm Eunice was a fabulous pastime.

April

April started with storytelling and whittling and even more interesting Lego creations. More circus skills practice, the creation of a pirate ship on the log pile with a sail and a net. The pirates decided they were a fishing vessel part way through and used the woven willow fish to catch in the net. The kinex and the wooden blocks came in useful on a rainy day allowing the children some dry time indoors creating monsters and towers to bowl over.

We began to weed and prepare the vegetable garden, played in the river as we now have a closer stretch. We made long obstacle courses and tried fishing in the pond with a section of large net! The Easter holidays passed and we returned to more loose part constructions on the yard.

We tried some rush weaving, found ladybirds and continued a range of imaginative play games that had started before the holiday!

May

Our first May work day was well attended by children and parents and we beat the garden into shape and processed a lot of firewood. The following weeks saw loose parts used in all sorts of play situations, old Hoover tubes became fuel pumps for the tractor, squirting devices.

The bug hunting continued in earnest with us finding more larvae and some interesting beetles. Splash pads were created and bubbled using the tuff trays. The donation of a pedal tractor became the favourite toy for many for a while. The children pushed each other about on the yard, and zoomed down the slope to the garden to see how far they could get.

Sewing projects, Lego, a car and tractor wash game, leafy boats in the river and leafy nests for the birds were all favoured projects. We found an injured squirrel and cared for it for the afternoon, before it was taken to a local vet who decided it was kinder to put it to sleep.

The children started more board games on the wet days with snakes and ladders, chess and top trumps being firm favourites. We met Minx the Ferret. We felted large pieces of wool to make pictures or arrow quivers or bags.

The children also decided to make rivers and mud slides on the bank near the climbing tree. They spent hours carving mud, pouring water and digging holes, once they discovered a small network of animal made tunnels!

We kept up with the gardening, using our push mower and hand shears. A donation of a large skipping rope became a great addition to the on yard games with the children creating a leaderboard for the greatest number of jumps. They spent time watching advising and teaching on another to help everyone move up the leaderboard.

June

Early June became animal visits time, with visit from guinea pigs for the day and Holly the hedgehog for another day!

The skipping rope, Uno and tree climbing abounded. The older children came up with ideas to support the younger children in using the skipping rope allowing them to jump back and forth over a snake style rope. The Rubik's cubes became a source of interest as well with the children wanting to learn how to solve them. One of the children, a definite expert in the field enjoyed teaching the others how to solve the Rubik's cubes and how the algorithms work.

The children learned about sheep fleece and how it is processed into wool. They used wool pickers, carders and had a treadle of a spinning wheel and a go on a drop spindle to make a bit of fleece into yarn or fantastic fluffy wigs! They also used the unspinnable bits to create slug barriers in the vegetable garden meaning that none of the fleece was wasted.

The path to the woods suddenly grew immensely in height so the children had great fun re-finding the trail mid-month back to the woods. In the woods, ferns and mud became face masks and camouflage and crowns. Swingball made a reappearance and the children had some one-to-one tuition in using a scythe!

Down by the river the dam building began in earnest, with the goal of making larger pools to splash things into or float handmade rafts on, or bridge to traverse the river. By the Welcome shelter we witnessed the first bee swarm towards the end of June from the hive in the roof. We followed the swarm and even managed to pop out a nuke box to see if they might want to move in. We discovered frogs had moved into our ponds, three in fact, one teeny, one medium and one large. Hours were spent watching and catching them.

Clay was mined from the swamp area, in various colours. We made herbal oil infusions from plantain, daisies and calendula from the garden. By the middle of the month, we were watching the sparrows feeding their hatchlings in the roof holes in the welcome shelter, but one morning we found two small babies had fallen from the nests. We collected them up and after looking carefully at them we buried them in the garden.

The children made a fabulously long board game of the snakes and ladders ilk at the end of June and whilst this caused some consternation when they had developed doom loops, they all showed some excellent problem-solving skills in fixing the issues and in realising that they had possibly started the game with too many punitive measures and not enough rewards.

July

July saw more clay work from the excavated clay, rainbow leaf painting, indoor cushion dens, and storytelling. We had our first ever Coed Cariad trip to the Botanic Gardens and the Birds of Prey Centre, which everyone thoroughly enjoyed! Duncan returned for an end of year storytelling, music and play session. The children are quickly drawn into his sessions and thoroughly enjoy the chance to listen to, play music and play out the story in the woodlands after! We built tents for shade and cooked popcorn over the fire. The final day then was our annual water fight morning, and everyone was utterly soaked by the end. We then had delicious pure fruit lollies from Popcycle, and face painting for the last afternoon!

All in all a busy and fun filled year at Coed Cariad!

Thank you all for being a part of our wonderful community!

Ellie

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