

White Rose Lane Nature Reserve: Bamboo Removal

DofE Volunteer Report

Introduction

My name is Ellie van der Graaf and over a period of 8 weeks starting in November 2025, I have been taking part in the removal of bamboo by the riverbank in the White Rose Lane nature reserve, as part of my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award volunteering.

What is bamboo?

Before I started this project, I didn't know much about bamboo (other than the fact it was food for pandas) but over the weeks I learned that bamboo is a very aggressive plant that can take over space much faster than any other plant; some species can even grow 1 metre in less than a day! Not to mention that it can grow through concrete like the shed foundation in your back garden. This occurs because of the very sharp rhizomes (underground stems) forcing their way through anything, penetrating everything, even the strongest materials. And this is only on a small scale; you may think that from the surface the several stems that you can see above ground each have their own root however multiple stems can grow from one single rhizome.



Why do we need to get rid of it?

As I have mentioned before, bamboo is very aggressive and if we do let it grow in the nature reserve it would overpower every other plant wiping out our native species and the animals and insects that rely on them.

How do we get rid of it?

Our job is to dig up these rhizomes and reduce any further regrowth as one tiny rhizome, about as small as your pinky finger, can grow back and take over an area quickly and with ease. We do this by choosing a stem and loosening the soil around it then trying to pull the stem out, repeating this until we uncover and eradicate the network of roots and rhizomes underground. Once we have finished our work for the day, we put all the waste into a large garden waste bin making



us absolutely certain that all the bamboo that we have removed is in the bin (properly in for that matter) so that rhizomes cannot be littered across the nature reserve and regrow.



How to dispose of uprooted bamboo plants?

We contacted Woking Borough Council to ask how to get rid of the bamboo we dug up. They told us that if we have a garden waste bin, we can put the bamboo in it. If not, we can take it to a Community Recycling Centre, where it will be accepted.

How did the bamboo get here?

Though we are not entirely sure how the bamboo came to the nature reserve it is evident that the river carried bamboo waste of some kind, as the rhizomes started growing from the riverbank, deep in the soil. It is possible someone just threw away an almost dead bamboo potted plant which in turn was carried by the river and started growing in at the riverbank or rhizomes may have spread from another area by wind or animals.

