

Robert Carr, Shank Wood Log Cabin

Tourism? Tourism? Don't be daft. This is posh camping!"

That's the short shrift you get if you suggest to Robert Carr that he's diversified from farming into eco-tourism. Through a sandstone cut leading down to the River Lyne, Robert and his son - also named Robert - have invested in the Shank Wood Log Cabin, a hideaway for anglers looking to take advantage of the sea trout wending their way through the river as it feeds into the Esk.

Constructed from Sitka spruce sourced from Forestry Commission woods just over the border in Dumfries, the cabin boasts some strong environmental credentials, including an eco-toilet and a photovoltaic array. The cabin, the track leading down to it and the angling stages it provides access to are all in the middle of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). English Nature, the guardians of the site, have pored over the plans and it is arguably only the Carrs' long-standing record of stewardship and careful approach to developing their fishing business that has ensured that the development could go ahead.

The fishing side of the family business is doing well, to say the least. "Since we started to focus on it we've seen a 50 per cent increase in our fishing income," says Robert, a struggling dairy farmer with 250 cows and a landholding of 550 acres. He and his wife Diana, and now his son Robert, have been working the farm since 1972. Through the ups and downs of a business that has seen everything from Foot and Mouth Disease to the globalisation of agri-business, the Carrs' humble fishing sideline is emerging as something of a lifeline, according to Diana. "The chalet and fishing business makes up around three or four per cent of our turnover but importantly that's all on the bottom line. When you're in a milk market that can see the price of a pint drop by seven pence overnight, it's a really important boost to profits," she says.

As you climb back up the woodland track from the cabin, alongside twelve acres of new broadleaf planting and an enigmatic sandstone outcrop known as the 'Fairy Castle', the optimism in Diana Carr's voice is matched by the sight of a good-sized house beginning to take shape on a plot of land just outside the SSSI. It's the construction site for the younger Robert Carr's new family home. "My son is quietly confident that he'll be one of the survivors," says Carr Senior, in a comment that at first glance seems bleak but that in fact signals a farming family that is forging a viable future for itself.

The Carrs are just one of hundreds of rural businesses across Cumbria that have benefited from the Forest Futures rural development programme. Created by the Forestry Commission and partners, this programme has funded the track running down to the cabin, at a cost of £24,000, and helped to unlock further support from Cumbria Tourist Board and Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency.



