

Big Green Gathering – A first-timers review

Contributed by Wellington Womble

It's big and green and a gathering. Our very own Wellington Womble tells us what she thought of it.

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It was certainly big, and impressively green, so 10/10 for living up to its name. I was a bit daunted as to what to expect from this. I've been to music festivals, and to other camps based around dance and things, and this was a cross between the two.

Although it's not based on music, there was plenty of entertainment, both scheduled and improvised (all on solar or wind powered stages – no generators) and plenty of vegetarian places to eat (there is some meat tucked away, produced on the farm provided you know where to look!) Masses of things to do and see, especially for children, but lots of green crafts, permaculture, sustainable building, alternative energy and healing or therapies for grown ups too. Many places had demonstrations, and there are hundreds of workshops on everything from humane and small-scale olive oil production to drumming and yoga. There must have been vast amounts of information in the workshops, all free once you've paid your gate price of 90 quid (65 concessions, and big discounts for teens and kids)

The site doesn't allow cars (its an extra £25 to park) for obvious reasons, but there are horse and carts and luggage bikes to help get to your campsite (it's a huge site, if not very level), so we travelled pretty light, and ate out while we there – this is my only criticism. I thought the event was good value for money, but the food was not – the going rate seemed to be about £6 for vegan curry and rice, which was the predominant menu choice (it's easy to make in bulk and keep hot) which we thought was expensive for what it was, and which got a bit monotonous after 5 days. The farm-produced meat was also not cheap, but worth it in my opinion, as it was fantastic meat, and produced on the farm, but is discreetly positioned, and took us a while to find. The organisers allow alcohol for personal consumption, but there are no bars on site (one or two places selling local cider though – it is in Somerset!) They are very specific about this, I think to try and keep the yob culture out, and by and large it worked. In general, the people were considerate and cheerful, and even most of the kids there were exceptionally good-natured, and generally well behaved, especially for a festival that might attract the more 'relaxed' kind of parents.

There were also lots of things to buy – everything from books to loads of lovely clothes and candle-powered steamboats to put in your bath. You could get massages and healing, buy bio-diesel, knitting wool, soaps and smellies, elderflower champagne and lots of chai (a nice drink that tastes like really good rice pudding without the rice) or advice on planning permission, Composting, gardening, crafts – allsorts.

They did provide some containers for fires, and also a limited amount of wood for fuel, although it got nabbed pretty quickly. Toilets are chemical due to it being a large event (my ticket number was 22 thousand and something) and 'tidy points' (no rubbish, see?) were split into glass, paper, cans and plastic (all the food was served on paper plates with wooden cutlery) and sent for recycling. I've never been to such a litter free event (except for the horse poo!)

Overall, a really good event for downsizers or anyone green, with a lovely atmosphere, whether you want lots of practical information from workshops, something more spiritual, a few days green shopping, a family holiday or just to be entertained. It will be along time before I forget 'Ivan Inversion' accompanying 'copa cabana' on his guitar suspended from a tree by his ankles, or the pedal powered washing machine. Highly recommended, and very good value for money, with an unbelievable amount of free information and expertise on practically everything you could think of.

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