

## Forest and sustainability : A visit to the forest of Bellême.

Last Tuesday, we went out of school to visit a sustainable forest. This forest is located in Bellême which is 15 kilometers away from our school.



The forest of Bellême covers an area of 2400 hectares. It represents about 2400 football pitches. It contains several wood essences mainly oaks and beeches but also some pine trees. The essence of trees depends on the nature of the soil.



Oak trees



acorns and oak leaves



beech



beech leaves

Forests have 3 different roles : first they provide wood, secondly they are a place where wildlife can develop and they offer a natural environment where people can go for hiking or relaxing.

Forests have been cultivated in France since the 17th century. The French Minister of Finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who was in office under the reign of King Louis XIV, has decided to cultivate forests in order to produce quality wood for warship building. The forest of Bellême started being cultivated on this purpose.



Today wood is used for timber wood (house frameworks or furniture making). Oak is also used to make wine barrels.



The forest of Bellême is owned by the state and cultivated by a state forest office called ONF. When we went to the forest we met a ONF forest ranger who explained to us how the forest is cultivated so that wood is cut and deforestation is avoided.



An oak tree or a beech is ready to be cut when aged 200-300 years old. The forest is divided into square patches and surveyed every ten years to decide which tree should be cut. Tree seedlings (from acorns or beechnuts) are naturally let to grow in order to replace each cut tree.



We therefore discovered that forest are not a wild natural space but it is cultivated with method in order to be preserved throughout centuries. Some of the oldest trees in the forest of Bellême are 400 years old.

