

SECTION 2

- WOMAN: For the second in our series about locally-run businesses, we meet Simon Winridge, co-founder of the hugely-successful Winridge Forest Railway Park. Welcome, Simon. Now, perhaps you can begin by telling us a little bit about how it all started.
- MAN: Well, during the 1970s, my wife, Liz and I had just acquired 80 acres of sheep-farming land, and we decided to settle down and have children. Pretty soon we had a daughter, Sarah, and a son, Duncan. The place was wonderful for the kids: they particularly loved trains and gradually built up an enormous network of miniature railway track. I began to develop larger-scale models of locomotives but we didn't think anything more of it until I went on a trip to a theme park near Birmingham and decided we could do a much better job! So we set up a small one ourselves based on the miniature railway and we opened to the public for just a month that year, 1984 – in July – our driest month – because our children said they didn't want our guests to have a miserable, wet visit. I dealt with Park business and Liz carried on with the farm work. Q11
- It soon became clear that we were onto a winner. We began to extend the railway track and lay it among more interesting landscape by planting trees, which in turn attracted more wildlife, and by making cuttings through the rock. Q12
- Nowadays, we're open all year round and we're pleased to say that Winridge is one of the most popular visitor attractions in the area – with 50,000 visitors a year – a million and a half people have been through our doors since we opened. Q13
- All these visitors mean we have had to expand our operation and it's now a truly family concern. I'm near to retirement age so I only concern myself with looking after the mechanical side of things – keeping the trains going. Liz now devotes all her energies to recruiting and supporting the large Q14
- squadron of workers, which keep the place running smoothly. We're really pleased that after some years away teaching, Sarah has now returned to the park and makes sure the visitors are kept fed and watered, Q15
- which keeps her pretty busy as you can imagine. Our son, Duncan, has been a stalwart of the park for the last ten years, taking over from me in the area of construction – and I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment – and his new wife, Judith, has also joined the team in charge of retail. That's becoming a tremendous growth area for us – a lot of people want to buy souvenirs. Q16
- WOMAN: So have you finished your development of the site for the moment? Q17
- MAN: Not at all! We're constantly looking for ways to offer more to our visitors. The railway remains the central feature and there's now 1.2 kilometres of the line laid but we'd like to lay more. Because of the geology of the area, our greatest problem is digging tunnels. But we're gradually overcoming that. We're also very pleased with a new installation of the Go-Kart arena which is 120 square metres in area. Again the problem is the geology; we had to level the mounds on the track for safety reasons. We wanted to enable 5–12 year olds to use the go-karts. And the main attraction here is the Formula 1 Kart. We've known fights to break out over who gets it! And then finally to our most recent development which is the landscaped ... Q18
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