



Hambledon Hill National Nature Reserve



Hambledon Hill

National Nature Reserve

Hambledon Hill is an exceptional place for wildlife and archaeology. The Reserve covers 74 hectares and lies four miles north-west of Blandford between the Stour and Iwerne valleys. Rising to 192 metres above sea level it affords superb views over the surrounding countryside.

Only a few fragments of Dorset's once common chalk grassland remain. Hambledon's extensive grassland with its variety of slope and aspect provide the nature conservation interest for which Hambledon Hill was declared a National Nature Reserve. The archaeological remains are of international importance and are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Man's influence on Hambledon Hill has been profound, but spread across thousands of years. The ancient forests that at one time covered most of lowland Britain were probably cleared from around Hambledon when Neolithic people settled there more than 5000 years ago.

The open grassland developed as successive civilizations cleared the trees and grazed their livestock. The earthworks, perhaps the biggest influence on the hill, have added many steeper slopes which favour Hambledon's special wildlife. Most of the grassland remains untouched by fertilisers or herbicides.



The grasslands

1. Quaking grass
2. Salad burnet
3. Horseshoe vetch
4. Wild thyme
5. Chalk milkwort
6. Mouse-ear hawkweed

The thin chalky soils on the steep rampart slopes are dry and infertile; ideal conditions for fine grasses, sedges and an astonishing variety of flowering plants. The gullies between the ramparts are dominated by vigorous grasses and plants such as nettles because the soil is deeper and more fertile.

The rare early gentian, with its tiny purple trumpets, is abundant in some years and can be seen from April onwards with the delicate white flowers of meadow saxifrage. Early gentian is found on the shallower soils of the western slopes where the vegetation is open, whilst meadow saxifrage prefers the deeper soils on top of the hillfort which can be leached and acidic.

As different plants appear, the colours and hues of the slopes change as spring passes into summer. In late May, the slopes are splashed with the vivid yellow of horseshoe vetch and the pinks and blues of milkwort. In midsummer, bright pink pyramidal orchids and bee orchids come into flower with many other plants including squinancywort and lady's bedstraw. Late summer flowers include the delicate white spirals of autumn lady's tresses, and mauve devil's-bit scabious.



Bee orchid

Archaeology

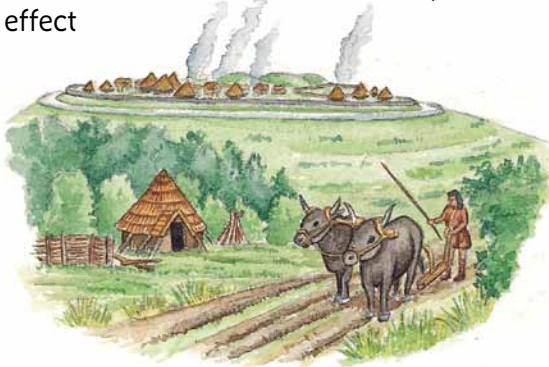
The Iron Age hillfort is one of the most impressive earthworks in southern England. It reflects the organisational and engineering, as well as defensive, mastery of its maker.



Part of the interior of the Iron Age hillfort, showing a variety of buildings in use.

Many small circular areas of levelled ground inside the ramparts show the position of Iron Age huts. People with a wide range of skills and occupations would have lived in the hillfort, which was in effect a small town.

Iron Age farming near the hillfort. The hillfort itself would have been surrounded by fields and smaller settlements.



To the south lies a rare complex of Neolithic enclosures, broadly contemporary with the long barrow surviving within the hillfort itself.

How a Neolithic long barrow might have looked during construction.



Butterflies

Hambledon supports a good range of butterflies such as dingy skipper and grizzled skipper, both of which are on the wing early in the summer. Chalkhill blue and the stunning adonis blue, two of Britain's rarer butterflies occur on the south and south-west facing slopes. Their caterpillars feed on the tiny horseshoe vetch.

Both species of blue butterfly have a close relationship with ants that live in the chalk grassland. The tiny caterpillars are tended by certain types of ant which often carry the caterpillars into their nests overnight. As a chrysalis, each butterfly spends the winter months tucked away in an ants' nest before emerging the following spring or summer.



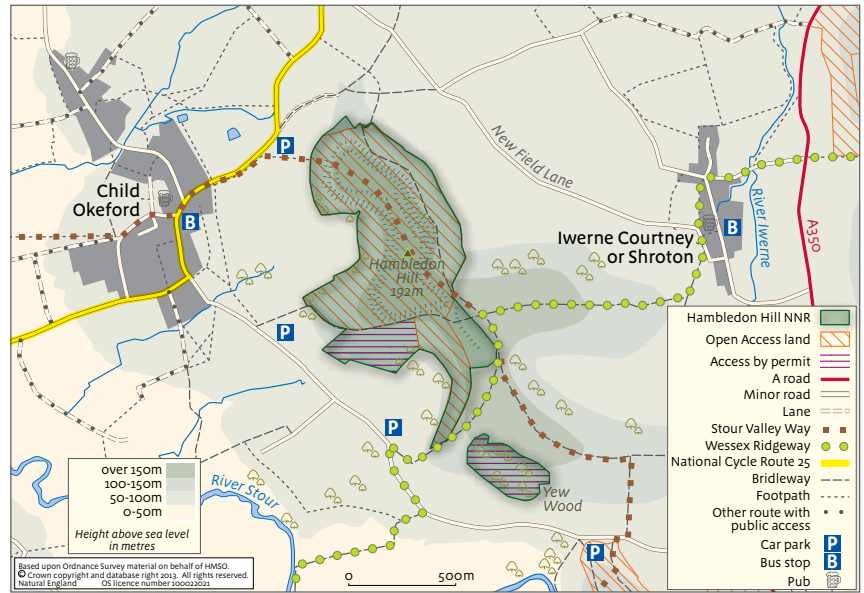
Adonis blue butterfly



Pyramidal orchid

Grazing

The grasslands on the hill have long supported grazing animals. The different pattern of foraging by sheep and cattle is the key to sustaining the rich grassland wildlife. Cattle forage across the hill whilst sheep graze on the steeper slopes encouraging a short tight turf. Trees and scrub cannot spread and vigorous grasses are unable to smother finer grasses and wild flowers. The archaeological remains are protected from erosion by keeping a tight grassland cover which binds the soil together.



Scrub Management

On the lower eastern slopes, the grassland is less rich. The scrub contains various attractive shrubs like hawthorn, spindle and wayfaring tree and is home to many kinds of insects and birds. Work is needed to keep scrub of various heights and to prevent the trees from taking over. Each year small blocks are cut which then regrow from the stumps. On archaeologically sensitive areas, scrub is generally removed to prevent damage.

Visitors are free to wander in the open areas of the reserve. Take care to avoid causing erosion, or damage to flowering plants; horse riders and cyclists should keep to the marked bridleways. Please also note that metal detecting is not allowed.



Please follow the Countryside Code

Respect other people

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available.

Protect the natural environment

- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home. Please leave flowers and wildlife for others to enjoy.
- Keep dogs under effective control and on a lead when sheep are grazing.

Enjoy the outdoors

- Plan ahead and be prepared.
- Follow advice and local signs.

We hope that you enjoy your visit to the Reserve.

Sheep grazing

Natural England manages the Reserve in partnership with the two owners, the Hawthorn Trust and Hanford Farm. The Hawthorn Trust, a registered charity, was set up to acquire Hambledon Hill to protect its wildlife and archaeological features. Gore Farm, Ashford, which provides the grazing on the hillfort, is managed organically.

English Heritage is advising and assisting with management to protect the archaeological remains. English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on the historic environment. It aims to secure the physical preservation and to promote the beneficial management of nationally important monuments such as Hambledon Hill for the benefit of current and future generations; whilst encouraging appropriate public enjoyment and understanding.



ENGLISH HERITAGE

How to get there

By car:

Hambledon Hill National Nature Reserve is situated 4 miles north-west of Blandford, near the village of Child Okeford which can be reached from the A350, A357 or A30. Parking is available at points around the Reserve; please note that available car parking is in car parks and lay-bys.

By public transport:

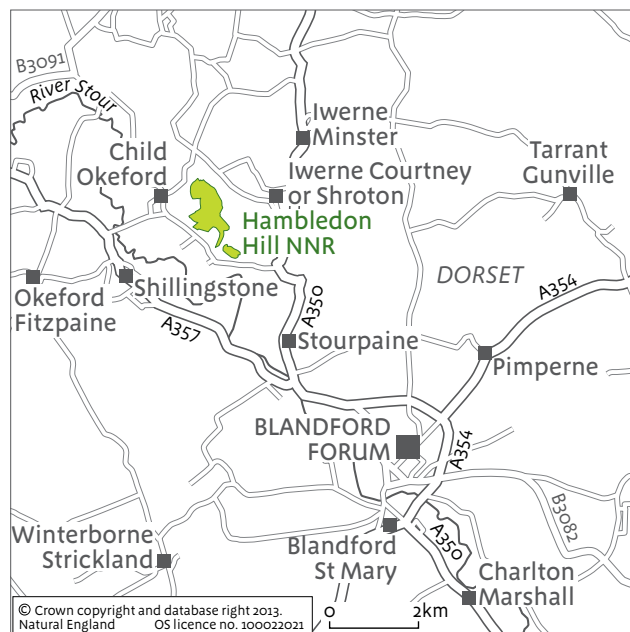
The Wilts & Dorset Bus Co (01722 336855 www.wdbus.co.uk) operates the number 309 between Blandford and Shaftesbury, stopping in Child Okeford village.

On foot:

The Wessex Ridgeway Trail and Stour Valley Way walking routes take in Hambledon Hill National Nature Reserve. For more information on these and other walks visit www.dorsetforyou.com

By bike:

National Cycle Route 25 passes the Reserve, running through Child Okeford village. For more information visit www.sustrans.org.uk



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Facilities

The nearest toilet and refreshment facilities are in local villages. Child Okeford and Shroton are well situated for a visit to the Reserve.

For further information please contact:

Tel: 0300 060 2513

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Front cover image: View of ramparts on Hambledon Hill
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Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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