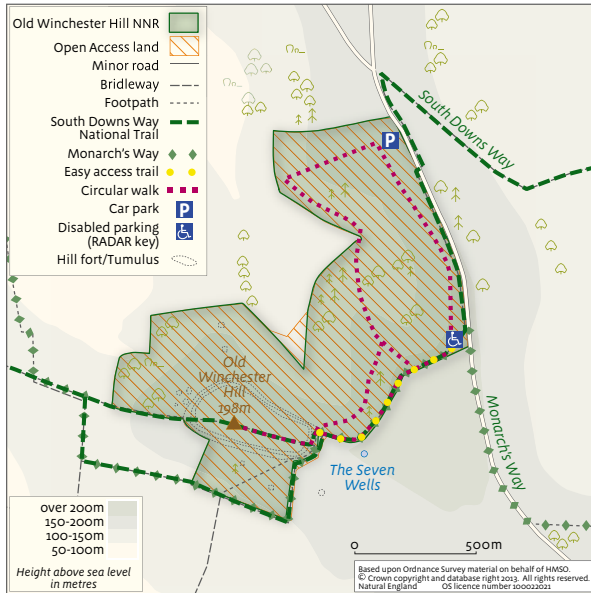




Old Winchester Hill National Nature Reserve



Access for visitors

You are welcome to visit the reserve on foot at any time, but dogs must always be kept under close control and on a lead when sheep are present to avoid disturbing the livestock and wildlife.



The main car park at the northern end of the reserve gives access to the picnic area and interpretive unit. RADAR key holders may use the car park which is accessible from the north gate and follow the Easy Access Trail to the hill fort. There is also parking for disabled visitors at the viewpoint along the lane.

Further information can be obtained from Natural England on 0300 060 6000

Front cover photograph: Herdwick sheep graze the ramparts
© Barry Proctor



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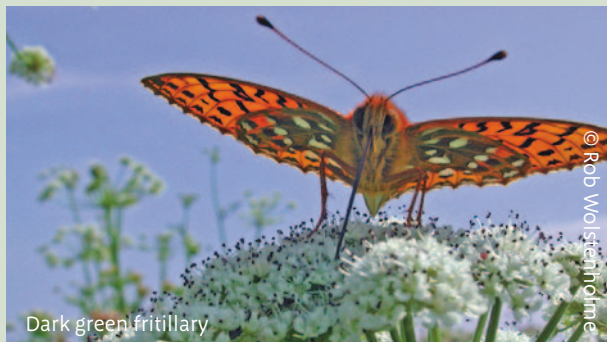


Introduction:

Old Winchester Hill occupies a prominent and visually attractive site, which has been enjoyed by generations of Hampshire people. A circular footpath takes in steep slopes and woodland, or you can keep on level ground by following the hill fort route at the top of the hill. Visitors can also join the South Downs Way - please follow the signs on site.



The site is ideal for a wide range of plants and animals. The flower rich grasslands have developed on the thin chalky soils that are low in nutrients, and prevent vigorous species from dominating the finer herbs. There are distinct differences between the plants found on the warm, dry, south-facing slopes and those on the steep north-facing area, and in the coombes, which are much damper.



Archaeology:

Bronze Age burial mounds for important members of the local society were erected prominently on the crest of the hill between 4500 and 3500 years ago. These barrows can now be seen as large grassy lumps in groups to the west of, and within, a later hill fort. There are also some smaller mounds, which were partially engulfed when the southern and western ramparts of the fort were constructed some 2500 years ago. The hill fort also overlies a pattern of pre-historic fields.

The fort is believed to have provided a defended settlement for a Celtic chieftain. Its defences comprise a single bank and ditch enclosing about four hectares. Within the fort itself, you can still see the site of the huts as subtle hollows.

Some of the smaller hollows were created during World War II, when the army used the hill as a mortar firing range. Some sections were never fully cleared of ordnance so, for your safety, please keep to the well-marked paths that avoid these areas.

Please report any metallic or suspicious objects, either to the voluntary wardens, Natural England staff, or to the Police on 101. Do not pick them up.



Wildlife:

Several types of orchids can be seen here including greater-butterfly, bee, frog, fly, common spotted and fragrant orchids, all of which are found on the slopes around the hill fort in May and June. Field fleawort also flowers at this time of year amongst the huge population of cowslips.

Ox-eye daisies are in flower during July, as well as the rare round-headed rampion that occurs in magnificent numbers on the south-facing slope of the hill fort. Later, you can see small and devil's bit scabious along with autumn lady's tresses. Look out, too, for juniper bushes on the southern slope of the hill fort. Elsewhere, scrub and woodland provide contrasting habitats for wildlife.

Insects and butterflies like the chalkhill blue can be seen in huge numbers during the summer months, whilst dormice, badgers and deer live in the woodland.

Management

Old Winchester Hill needs constant management to conserve the variety of habitats, and to maintain the grassland that has been created by centuries of livestock grazing. We achieve this by continuing the traditional sheep grazing, and by mechanically clearing some areas of scrub during the winter. Our management work helps to provide ideal conditions for a wonderful diversity of wildlife.