



Getting to the Reserve:

Kingley Vale NNR is 5km north west of Chichester. To reach the reserve by car, leave the A286 at Mid Lavant and continue west, to the NNR car park near the village of West Stoke. The reserve is signposted from there and is about 15 minutes walk along a footpath leading to the main entrance. Here, there is a small field centre with permanent displays and more information about the reserve.

There is easy access to the NNR from the car park to the visitor centre, but not beyond this as the terrain is more difficult.

The reserve is near the Cycle Chichester route of the Sustrans National Cycle Network.

Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

For further information please contact the NNR team:

NNR base Kingley Vale,
Gamekeepers Lodge,
Downs Road, West Stoke
Chichester PO18 9BN
Tel: 0300 060 2681

Front cover image: View across Kingley Vale
© Natural England / Simon Melville



Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

© Natural England 2010

Catalogue Code: NE275

Natural England publications are available as accessible pdfs from:
www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications

Should an alternative format of this publication be required, please contact our enquiries line for more information: 0845 600 3078 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Printed on stock comprising 75% recycled fibre.

www.naturalengland.org.uk



Kingley Vale

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Kingley Vale:

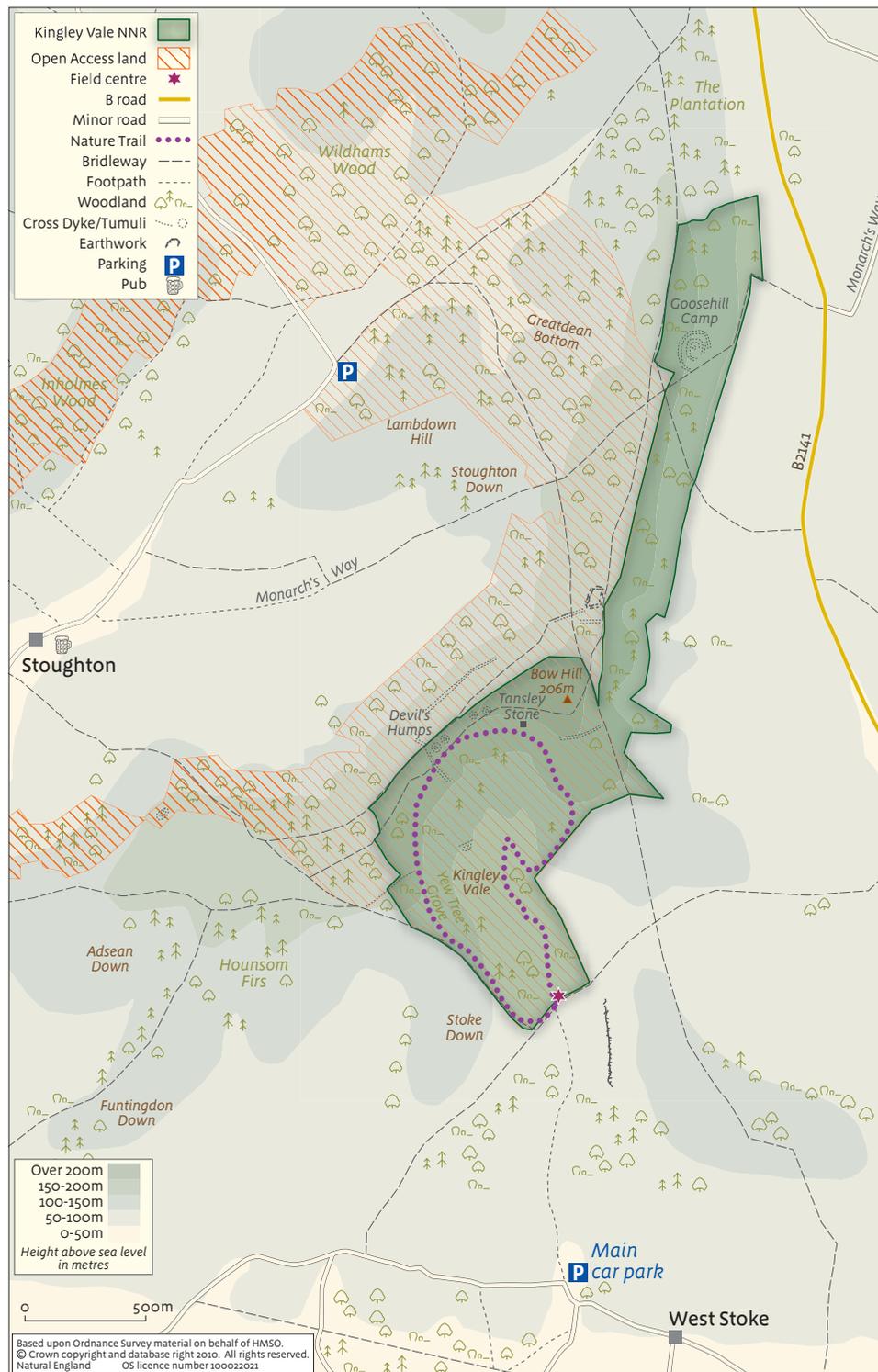
Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve (NNR) is one of the best places in the country to enjoy the outdoors and experience spectacular wildlife.

Its ancient burial mounds, yew woodlands, wonderful butterflies and panoramic views are just a few of the spectacles waiting for you at the Reserve. It is owned by Natural England and the West Dean Estate, who protect its special habitats, its history, and manage the Reserve for its wildlife and visitors.

NNRs offer a first-hand experience of England's special and diverse wildlife. They safeguard nationally important species and habitats, so that they can be enjoyed and studied now and in the future.



© Natural England / Paul Keene



This place is for you, please look after it:

- Follow the countryside code, take litter home and leave gates as you find them.
- Keep dogs on leads.
- Please be considerate to others and clean up after your dog.
- Please do not have BBQs or campfires on site as they can permanently damage the delicate chalk grassland.
- Leave the wild flowers for the butterflies and bees, and for others to enjoy.
- Please note that the site is for pedestrian access only unless otherwise marked.



© Natural England / Simon Melville

View across new yew forest

What's special about the site?

Kingley Vale NNR lies within the South Downs National Park and covers 160 hectares of chalk grassland, scrub, mixed woodland (oak and ash) and ancient yew forest. The reserve is a steep sided dry valley (dry coombe), the top of which offers stunning panoramic views of the surrounding area over-looking Chichester harbour, the Isle of Wight and the South Downs National Park. The plateau is topped with clay and is covered in chalk heath. The lowest areas of the coombe are covered with one of the finest examples of ancient yew forest in Europe.

This mosaic of habitats is important for insects and birds including a large variety of butterflies such as the chalkhill blue and brimstone.

Breeding birds at Kingley Vale include the nightingale, grasshopper warbler, blackcap, marsh tit and green woodpecker. Buzzards are often seen at the reserve along with other birds of prey including the kestrel, sparrow hawk, hobby (in summer), red kite and tawny owl.

Rabbits, family groups of Roe deer and large herds of Fallow deer live on the reserve so please keep your dog on a lead. Other mammals found here are stoats, weasels, foxes, dormice, yellow-necked mice, badgers and bats.

The reserve is one of the most important archaeological sites in southern England and has 14 scheduled ancient monuments, including Bronze Age burial mounds at the top of Bow Hill.

Access to the site:

The NNR is easily accessible from the car park to the visitor centre, but not beyond this as the terrain is more difficult. There is an hour-long nature trail through the valley and up its steep slopes. Kingley Vale NNR also offers community groups and community members a venue for free guided walks and informal education activities.

NNRs are among the best places to get out and about in the natural environment and experience nature. Medical evidence shows that contact with the natural environment improves health and wellbeing, prevents disease and helps people recover from illness. This evidence also shows that experiencing nature in the outdoors can help tackle childhood obesity, coronary heart disease, stress and mental health problems.

A number of events and practical hands-on activities take place throughout the year which help a wide range of people to reconnect with their natural heritage. Volunteers are always welcome to help manage habitats, improve access and help at events on the reserve. To find out about how you can get involved please email: **Katherine.Birch@naturalengland.org.uk**

Guided tour of yew forest



© Natural England / Katherine Birch



© Natural England / James Clies

Burial mounds

History of the site

The site has been grazed and used for agriculture for thousands of years. The 'wildwood', a dense forest which covered Kingley Vale after the last ice age (12,000 years ago) began to be cleared by Neolithic (5000-2500BC) people to make space for grazing animals and crops. Their flint tools can still be found at the reserve.

In 2500BC the Bronze Age burial mounds were constructed on the top of the hill and nearly all the remaining trees were cleared to make way for farming. A hill-fort was constructed on the northern end of Kingley Vale during the Iron Age (700BC) which is known today as Goosehill camp.

Over the past few hundred years the grazing stopped at certain times which allowed the Yew trees to spread up the sides of the valley and onto the top of the hill.

During the Second World War the area was used by Canadian and British troops training for D-Day. You can still see bullet holes in some of the yews, and you may find WW2 dug-outs that were created in case England was invaded.

After WW2, Kingley Vale was declared a National Nature Reserve and protected by law for the enjoyment of everyone. Arthur Tansley, the pioneer ecologist, was the driving force for the designation. The Tansley Stone was positioned near the burial mounds (his favourite viewpoint) to commemorate his contribution to nature conservation.

Five, 2m high historical interpretation panels have recently been installed at the field centre.



Flora & Fauna

Grassland

The special chalk grasslands of the reserve contain hundreds of species of plant which support thousands of species of insect. These grasslands have developed over thousands of years and are older than the ancient yews. The grassland needs constant grazing to prevent coarse grasses and trees from stifling the growth of wildflowers such as rock rose, wild thyme and marjoram. Throughout winter, sheep maintain the grassland by grazing, along with the wild rabbits, fallow and roe deer.

The nectar in the orchids and wildflowers provides food for the spectacular variety of butterflies on the reserve. The grassland is thriving with yellow meadow ants which have a close relationship with the blue butterflies. Thousands of the ants are eaten by the green woodpeckers at the reserve.



© Natural England / James Clies

Chalkhill Blue

This graceful butterfly is one of a number of 'blues' which are found on the reserve. These include the common blue, small blue, holly blue and the chalkhill blue. They have a very close relationship with the yellow meadow ants. The ants take the butterfly larvae into their anthills where they are protected from predators. The ants need the soil at the right temperature for their larvae to hatch – and the grazing animals keep the grass short enough for the sun to heat the soil to the correct temperature.



© Natural England / David Rogers



© Natural England / James Clies

Ancient Yews

There are several legends as to where the magical ancient yew forest in the bottom of the valley came from. It is thought they could have been planted as far back as AD 849 to commemorate dead Viking warriors, or that they were planted in the middle ages to make longbows. Some people think that they could have grown during the 'black death' in 1348, as there were not enough people farming the land and stopping the yews from spreading.

Nobody actually knows how old the ancient yews are or whether they were planted as they are very hard to date. That is because

they grow in layers and the older layers rot from the inside so you cannot simply count the rings. However, we know that they are at least 500 years old and are probably much older.

On the site, we leave the yew forest to develop on its own but we maintain the grasslands and farmland next to it which stops the forest spreading outwards.

Field Fare

Thousands of birds flock to the yew forest in great clouds throughout the autumn. The clouds are made up of fieldfares, redwings,

mistle thrushes, song thrushes, and plenty of blackbirds. They come to the ancient forest from Africa, Eurasia and Scandinavia to eat the yew berries which are the only part of the yew tree that is not poisonous, except for the berry's seed (aril) which is poisonous – spit it out if you try a berry.

Fallow Deer

The fallow and roe deer on the site help Natural England manage the spread of scrub by eating it! You can detect their presence, by virtue of a 'browse line' at deer head height where they have removed all the lower leaves from the trees and bushes. As well as providing food for the deer, the forest is essential for hiding and raising young deer.



© Natural England / Peter Wakely

Bee Orchid

There are 11 different species of orchid at the reserve including the bee, common spotted, frog and fly orchids. The bee orchid looks like a queen bee. This attracts male bees which then pollinate the flowers.



© Natural England / Charlie Hedley



© Natural England / P Greenhalf

Scrub clearing

Scrub

The scrub on the reserve is made up hawthorn, blackthorn, elder, ash, gorse, spindle, willow, juniper, birch and conifer, depending on where you are on the Reserve. It supports a variety of life, but needs to be managed to stop it dominating the grassland as it grows quickly. It is essential for the brimstone butterfly as it lays its eggs on the scrub and the leaves provide food for the caterpillars. The scrub is also good for more common birds such as robins, blackbirds, thrushes and wrens.