

Post 14

SHEEP GRAZING AREA



This side of the valley has been cleared of dense scrub and is grazed by livestock during the summer months. If you are walking with dogs, please keep them on a lead in this area, as sheep can become stressed if dogs are running around nearby.

The shady environment has been replaced by an open one, and plants which were once shaded out by the scrub are able to grow again.



When the scrub was first cleared, plants such as the violet and cowslip bloomed for the first time in years. Until recently, these areas were cut each year to maintain them as open grassland, but in 2002 livestock were introduced to manage the grassland more sensitively. Grazing has lots of wildlife benefits and allows more types of plant and animal to survive than if the area was kept open by tractor cutting alone.



Grazing removes the vegetation gradually, which is much less harmful to butterflies and other insects than cutting. It

also creates grassland with different heights of plants, from tall tussocky areas to closely grazed 'lawns', which allows more wildlife to live here than if it was all cut to one height. For example, skylarks, which were once a common sight on the downs, but which have declined greatly, like to nest in this type of grassland.

As on Farthing Downs, you may notice ant hills in this field. Again, grazing is preferable to cutting as it allows the hills to grow bigger each year, rather than cutting their tops off. Finally, suitable grazing should eventually weaken the scrub and return the area to good quality, flower-rich grassland. Tractor cutting does not kill scrub, but simply cuts it down to ground level, allowing it to re-grow with more stems during the following spring.

Follow the path up the hill and then back down to the bottom of the valley again. Go through another kissing gate, back over the horse ride, turn left and enter the woodland on your right near the bench (see map below).

NATURE TRAIL MAP

