

BURITON
CHALK PITS



NATURAL HISTORY TRAIL

The site of the old lime workings and now a Local Nature Reserve

BURITON



Buriton Parish Council



The quarrying of chalk has helped to influence the South Downs landscape.

What was chalk used for? Some was used as building stone but the majority was turned into lime. There were three main uses of lime: in the building industry, as a soil improver in agriculture and to help improve drinking water.

For over seventy years, up until the Second World War, the hillsides above Buriton village were a hive of industrial activity. Enormous amounts of chalk from three main quarries were excavated and burnt in a series of lime kilns. During the war the Admiralty used the site for enemy mine disposal and important mine countermeasures. At the end of the war much of the site was effectively abandoned, becoming a play area for local children.

As you stand in the Chalk Pits today you can see the remains of the quarrying activity all around you. Chalk was taken from the hillside, forming the quarry bowls as you see them today with their steep sides. Many of the paths follow the old railway lines that moved the chalk around the site.

Three main quarries (known as France, Germany and the White Pit) developed here over the years as well as another large site, the Butser Hill Lime Works, alongside the A3 to the west.

Maps of 1870 show only a relatively small area of quarrying, but by 1897 both France and Germany pits were well developed and by the 1930s the workings had been extended into the White Pit – so called because the chalk had fewer clay impurities and produced the finest chalk.



The nature reserve covers an area of approximately 5 hectares and is located on the scarp slopes of the South Downs. Abandoned to its own devices, the site has slowly regenerated over the years forming a rich habitat with a high level of chalk-based species. Such a large area of old chalkland habitat, with so little recent disturbance, makes the site of significance in Hampshire and it has been designated as both a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and a Local Nature Reserve.

The site is now managed by a part time ranger based at Queen Elizabeth Country Park, funded initially by the Heritage Lottery Fund. A programme of walks and talks for those wishing to find out more about the natural and industrial history of the site is run by the Country Park and Buriton Village Association. Volunteers carry out much of the maintenance of the site and details can be found via the Country Park.

There are two circular walks through the site. One is a path that goes through an area of woodland to the west of the main bridleway. This is a walk that tries to follow the contours of the site where possible, so there are a few steps to negotiate, but it is possible to return along the same path if necessary. The walk takes you through an area with a large number of small hollows and excavations, where the undergrowth is being allowed to grow a little more thickly than in other areas to encourage small mammals. There are sculptures along the trail reflecting aspects of the site.

The second path goes into the quarry bowl then up and over the top edge of the quarry, looking down the steep slopes into the bowl. This path is only accessible to those who can manage a steep ascent along a rocky path.





Small Birds

Many trees and shrubs have grown up over the years, including Beech, Ash, Willow, Birch and Alder. These provide a rich habitat for birds such as Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, Treecreeper, Nuthatch and the Great Spotted Woodpecker. In the summer the migrant Chiffchaff and Blackcap can be heard singing.



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Female Blackcap

(Photo: Bob Chapman)



Common Spotted Orchid

(Photo: Martin Mitchell)

Flowering Plants

A new maintenance plan aims to clear back more of the scrub in the quarry areas to encourage the existing orchid populations to flourish. There are good colonies of White Helleborine, Twayblade, Common Spotted Orchid, and the Yellow Bird's Nest.

Small Mammals

Two of our native small mammals can be seen on the site, the Wood Mouse and the Bank Vole. We are optimistic that the rarer Hazel dormouse is also present on the site, although they are proving harder to find. Most of these mammals are nocturnal and it is unlikely that you will be able to see one; however, they do leave signs behind them such as footprints, droppings and feeding remains.



Woodmouse

(Photo: Jim Day)

Bats

Bats can also be seen in the site where they come to forage and use the mature beech trees for roosting. Species that frequent the Buriton area include both Daubentons and Long-eared bats. There have also been sightings of Serotine Bats and the Pipistrelle family of bats.

Larger Mammals

Larger mammals use the site and you can see rabbit burrows, badger runs and signs of foxes. Once again, nearly all these animals come out at night and once again it is the signs they leave behind that let you know they are present, for example, burrows, droppings and runs.



Cheese Snail

(Photo: Doug Jones)

Molluscs

Buriton Chalk Pits provides an excellent habitat for snails and slugs. In the deep leaf litter, under logs and fallen branches a wide variety of snails can be found. The Cheese Snail lives on the site but is one of our rarer species and not easy to find. They usually live under old decaying logs and are fairly small, about the size of a 1p coin. They have a distinctive flat-topped 'cheese-round' shape and, so that you have plenty of time to identify them, they don't move very fast! Young ones can also be hairy, but these 'hairs' wear off with age. This species is on the Red Data list which means it needs to be protected.



Earth Star

(Photo: Abi Peett)



Hart's Tongue Fern

Insects

A survey of insects recorded 64 species all of which are relatively common. Planned maintenance work aims to clear some of the southerly facing slopes of the quarry to allow more sunlight to penetrate which will help both the flowering plants and the insects.

Ferns, Mosses and Liverworts

The site suits a wide variety of lower plants. There are two common ferns present in abundance, Common Male Fern and Hart's Tongue Fern. There are a few uncommon species of moss which are of conservation interest and unfortunately two of them are to be found in the small quarry bowl where moss has been regularly stolen in the past for making window boxes and flower arrangements. The aim is to stop the damage and encourage fresh growth.



Big Shaggy Moss



Fern



Fungus

The Chalk Pits have a healthy variety of fungi growing on the site with one or two very important species. A key find in 2009 was the rare Alder Bolete which is another species on the Red Data list. The management of the areas around the alders – both grey and black – will protect this fungus for the future. It is only the fourth time this species has been recorded in Hampshire. Two other interesting fungi were also identified in the woodland, where the new woodland path is, and they are: Entoloma byssisedum and a Purple Coral Mushroom called Ramariopsis pulchella.

Other typical and more common species include the Oyster fungus, Earth Star fungus and Artists fungus.

A few fungi are very poisonous and should not be touched or eaten.



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How to get to Buriton Chalk Pits

Access to the site

Car parking can be found at the Halls Hill car park adjacent to the site, grid reference: SU733197. There is very limited parking in the village of Buriton (half a mile to the north of the site) except for customers of the Five Bells or the Maple Inn.

Public transport to the village is via bus 94 from Petersfield. There is a regular bus service that runs every day except Sundays. Details can be found on www.countryliner-coaches.co.uk

Cycling routes exist from Petersfield and Queen Elizabeth Country Park. From Petersfield travel along the Causeway and take the old Petersfield Road to Buriton. This is a narrow road so please take care. Buriton is approximately 3 miles from Petersfield. This is part of the new Shipwright's Way.

From QECP take the South Downs Way path to the Halls Hill car park, the entrance to the site is across the road and well signposted. Buriton village pond is a little over 2 miles from QECP.

As well as the new Shipwright's Way, two long distance paths pass through or adjacent to the site. The Hangers Way path is a 21 mile walk from Alton to Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Petersfield. A section of the walk is a bridleway that runs through the middle of the Chalk Pits site and forms the main access. The South Downs Way is a 100 mile bridleway that runs the length of the South Downs from Eastbourne to Winchester. The path runs along the southern edge of the site.

Food and Accommodation

There are two pubs in the village of Buriton:

The Maple Inn **01730 267275**

The Five Bells **01730 263584**

There is a café and shop in the *Queen Elizabeth Country Park* open daily. **02392 595040**

www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/qecp

Local B&Bs can be found via the Tourist Information Office in Petersfield.

Further information

Natural History

Surveys of the site were undertaken during 2009 as part of a Heritage Lottery Funded project. These included surveys of molluscs and invertebrates, bryophytes and lower plants, small mammals and the general flora and fauna. More details can be found on the Buriton Parish Council website:

<http://www.buriton.info>

Another site of interest in the area can be found at Coulters Dean along the South Downs Way, a small nature reserve of chalk downland owned and managed by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Details can be found on the website:

<http://www.hwt.org.uk/data/files/ReserveMaps/coulters.pdf>

Queen Elizabeth Country Park has over 20 miles of trails for walking, cycling and horse riding:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/qecp>

General

An industrial history trail round Buriton Chalk Pits is also available. Leaflets are to be found at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park and at each of the two pubs in Buriton: the Five Bells and the Maple Inn.

More information on the two long distance paths, the Hangers Way and the South Downs Way, can be found at:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/longdistance/hangers-way.htm>

<http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Southdowns/>

There is a Tourist Information Centre in Petersfield for further information about the surrounding area

Tel: **01730 268829**

www.visit-easthampshire.org.uk

This information leaflet has been produced as part of the Buriton Chalk Pits Project. The project was established in 2007 by Buriton Parish Council to help secure and protect the heritage and natural history of the Chalk Pits area for the benefit of parishioners and visitors. In 2010 the project was awarded a Heritage Lottery Grant to fund development works. Information for this leaflet has been kindly provided by the Buriton Heritage Bank.

