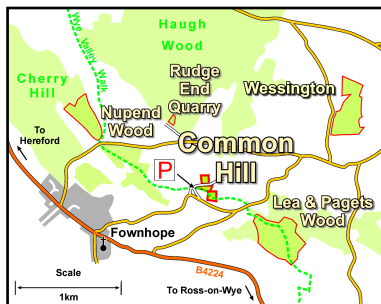


Common Hill

Fownhope SO591347 (Explorer 189)

Unimproved limestone grassland and old orchard

SSSI



Visitor Guidelines

Visitors should note that there are three parts to the reserve; Monument Hill, North Meadow and Old Cider House. The plant and insect life of Common Hill is best appreciated during the spring and summer months. Please ensure that gates are kept closed at all times.

Description

Common Hill reserve sits on top of a ridge of Wenlock Limestone, which forms the southern boundary of the Woolhope Dome. The name indicates that the area was once *common* land, but by the early 19th century most of it had been enclosed into smallholdings. Monument Hill (named after the adjoining quarry) was one such holding, but the house that used to stand by the lane has since disappeared. What was once steeply sloping, grazing land has developed into an attractive herb-rich *meadow*, supporting a wide variety of insect life. North Meadow and Old Cider House made up another smallholding, which was apparently part-arable and part orchard. The orchard still remains, but all the arable land has reverted to grassland.

North Meadow is surrounded and sheltered by hedgerows containing a variety of shrub species and some standard trees. The thin, humus-rich soils support a rich flora of the kind usually associated with calcareous soils on a steep slope. Notable species include the tiny Adder's Tongue fern, Common Spotted Orchid, Yellow Rattle and masses of Cowslips. Many Yellow Ant mounds are scattered over the meadow, a further *indicator* of its *unimproved* status. Monument Hill shares the same bedrock as North Meadow, but was previously used as grazing land. It has many species typical of limestone grassland, including Quaking Grass, Common Rock-rose, Wild Thyme and Milkwort. The sunny, sheltered conditions at Common Hill create ideal conditions for many insect species. Over 20 kinds of butterfly have been recorded, including scarce species like Dingy Skipper and Wood White, while Monument Hill is a local stronghold for Marbled Whites. Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Green and White-letter Hairstreaks have been observed in the past but, sadly, not in recent years. Other insects to look out for include Meadow Grasshoppers, Glow-worm beetles on warm summer nights, day-flying Burnet and Forester moths, and the local 6-belted Clearwing moth, whose larvae feed on the roots of Bird's Foot Trefoil. Adders have occasionally been seen basking on the sunnier slopes.

Around the old Cider House the soil is much deeper, enriched by past cultivation and less free draining. As a result, coarse grasses and rank vegetation predominate, but interesting plants like Wood Avens and Common Spotted Orchid still occur. The old fruit trees of the orchard areas provide useful vantage points and singing perches for Chaffinches and thrushes, while their gnarled trunks have accumulated a rich moss/lichen flora over the years. The remains of the Cider House can still be seen.

Present Management

The reserve is managed as a traditional *meadow*. Coarse vegetation in the orchard areas is controlled by an annual cut and clearance of cut material in late summer. *Aftermath grazing* is being introduced. In recent years, more young trees propagated from old Herefordshire varieties have been planted to help restore the orchard.

Acquisition Details

Freehold bought by the Trust in 1974 (Monument Hill) and 1984 (North Meadow, Old Cider House) with grant aid from World Wildlife Fund. Monument Hill and part of North Meadow are designated as a *Site of Special Scientific Interest*.

General Information:

Best time to visit: Early spring to late summer.

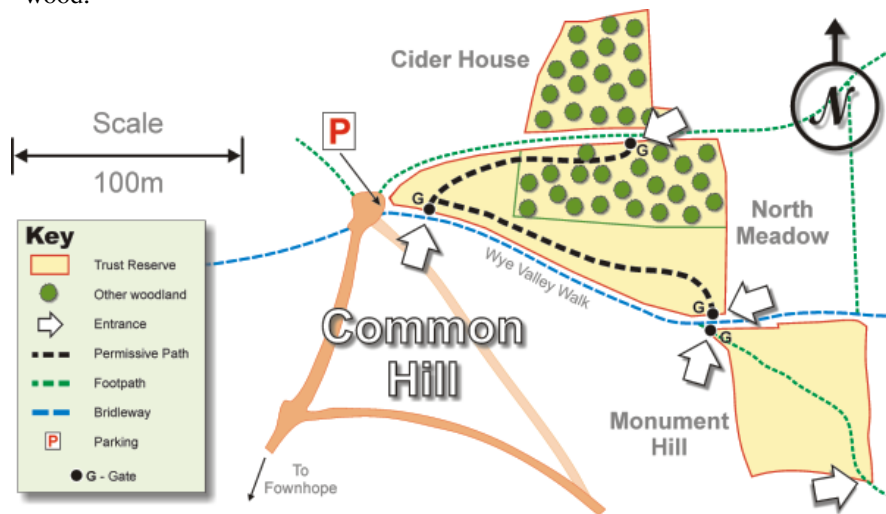
Habitat: *Unimproved* grassland and old orchard.

Size: 1.2 hectares (3 acres).

Specialities: Common Rock-rose (5-7), Common Spotted Orchid (6-8), Early Purple Orchid (4-6), Marjoram (7-9), Burnet Saxifrage (5-9), Adder's Tongue fern (5-8), Marbled White (6-8), Yellow Ant, Glow-worm beetle (6-7), Adder (4-8).

Parking: There is space for two or three cars at the top of the lane.

Nearby HNT reserves: Lea & Pagets Wood, Wessington Pasture, and Nupend Wood.



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