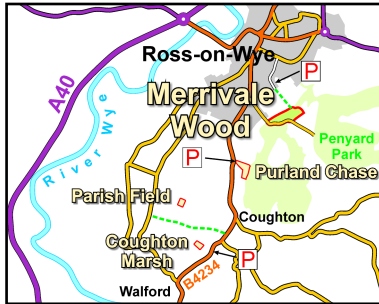


# Merrivale Wood

Ross-on-Wye SO603229 (Explorer OL14)

Ancient woodland



## Visitor Guidelines

Please keep to the paths so that wildlife is not unduly disturbed and make sure dogs are under control. The quarry area in the eastern section has steep drops, and although the top has been fenced around, care is still needed, particularly if young children are present.

## Description

Merrivale Wood is an outlier of a much larger area of *ancient woodland* covering the Chase and Penyard hills. The wood lies on a north-facing slope below Hill Farm, and occupies a prominent position in the landscape with fine views over Ross-on-Wye. Old Red Sandstone rocks are not far from the surface in many parts of the reserve, and rock exposures are found along the southern track boundary, and in an old stone quarry part-way up the slope. Tracks bounding the wood are deeply sunken, indicating long usage, and the wood has probably survived because it is situated on a steep rocky slope, quite unsuitable for agriculture.

The reserve woodland clearly falls into two vegetation types: the western two-thirds is dominated by Oak (mainly Sessile) and some Ash, while the eastern section is quite distinct, with many fine old Ash, Wild Cherry and Sycamore trees. Large Silver Birch and Sweet Chestnut trees are found mixed in with the oak, and there is a substantial *shrub layer* composed mainly of Holly and Hazel, with Field Maple, Hawthorn, Crab-apple and Honeysuckle also present. Bramble and Bracken are frequent to abundant in the *field layer* and clumps of Great Woodrush are common on the banks and beside the paths. In the eastern section, the *shrub layer* is relatively sparse, with some Wych Elm among the Hazel and Holly. Dog's Mercury is frequent and the flora is more diverse, possibly indicative of more base-rich conditions. Bluebells, Sanicle, Yellow Archangel, Wood Spurge and Enchanter's Nightshade occur throughout and provide further evidence of the wood's *ancient* status. A notable feature of Merrivale Wood is a stand of old *coppiced* Small-leaved Lime stools in the transition area between the two woodland types. The wood's north-facing aspect produces ideal shady, damp conditions for ferns, such as Hart's Tongue Fern.

The wood provides valuable habitat for a range of woodland bird species, including breeding Blackcap and Marsh Tit. Among scarcer species, Goshawks have been

sighted recently, while Willow Tit and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker have been recorded. Flocks of Siskins are regular during the winter and early spring, and Goldcrests may be seen foraging with wandering groups of tits during autumn. Most of the common woodland butterflies are to be found here in summer along open glades and woodland margins. In autumn, a visit to the wood should yield a good range of fungus sightings, including Fly Agaric and Dryad's Saddle.

### Present Management

The wood is currently being managed as *high forest*. The more open conditions have already benefited Bluebells and Wood Anemones, as well as numbers of woodland warblers. Non-native False Acacia trees and Sycamore are gradually being removed.

### Acquisition Details

Freehold bought by HNT in 1990 using funds given to RSNC Wildlife Trusts Partnership by the Sutton Place Heritage Memorial Trust.

### General Information:

**Best time to visit:** All times of year.

**Habitat:** *Ancient semi-natural woodland*.

**Size:** 4 hectares ( 10 acres).

**Specialities:** Marsh Tit, Blackcap (4-7), Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Sparrowhawk. Speckled Wood (3-10), Gatekeeper (6-8), Green-veined White (3-10). Bluebell (4-6), Wood Anemone (3-5), Yellow Archangel (5-6), Tutsan (6-8).

**Parking:** There is room for three cars in the parking bay.

**Nearby HNT reserves:** Coughton Marsh, Parish Field, Purland Chase.

