



Chalk grassland, one of the most species rich habitats in the Kent Downs

Teachers Guide: Landscape Features

Chalk grassland



One of the most species rich habitats, supporting a diverse range of flora which has adapted to flourish in the thin infertile chalky soils. This type of grassland has developed over many centuries and has been traditionally maintained through grazing: animals grazed the banks during the day and were then brought down into the valley bottoms overnight to 'manure' land creating more fertile soils

for the growing of crops. Habitats - is the natural home of these living things.

Dry valleys

Dry valleys are a very strong feature of the Kent Downs. Concealed in the Downs is a hidden lacework of dry valleys, meandering their way through banks of arable fields, hay meadows, grassland with sheep grazing and orchards brimming full of fruit. Traversing through these dry valleys, is yet another sunken lane as it twists through flower rich grassland, abundant with drifts of yellow Cowslips, purple Orchids, and blue Scabious with villages nestling in the valley bottom.



Flora and fauna

Flora and fauna is supported by the varied habitats within the landscape. With the sympathetic management of woodlands and chalk grassland our butterflies such as the Duke of Burgundy and Adonis Blue are flourishing. Numerous species of orchids such as the Lady Orchid and the Bee Orchid thrive on chalk grassland.



The Kent Downs Landscape Education Project is part funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, Kent County Council, Natural England and the European Regional Development Fund's Interreg IVA France (Manche Channel) England Programme.



Ancient woodlands cover over 10% of the Kent Downs

Settlements

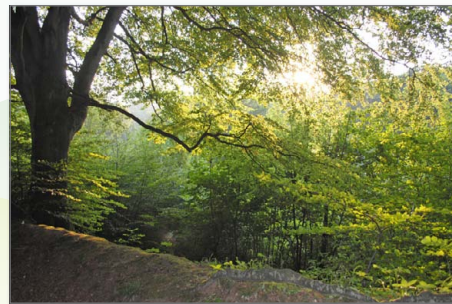
These are features often found situated in the bottom of dry valleys. Many of these villages are comprised of simply a church, a vicarage, and a scattering of farm houses and farm buildings. Kent, unlike many landscapes nationally, was not subject to the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the 18th century, and Kent farmland mostly operated under a Gavelkind tenure system pre dating 1066.



Under this ancient system the land was split equally amongst offspring, with each owner building their own farmhouse. This has led to the familiar Kent pattern of isolated farmhouses surrounded by farmed countryside.

Ancient woodlands

Ancient woodlands cover over 10% of the Kent Downs and have survived over the last 400 years due to the varied geology and poor soil types which are unsuitable for intensive farming. With the slightly acidic clay based soils on the plateau of the Downs, trees such as common oak, ash, hornbeam and silver birch can be seen growing. Generally Beech trees grow on the chalk slopes, however, in some areas there are swathes of sweet chestnut often used in fencing, woodchip and hop poles.



Farmed landscape



With cattle and sheep grazing the chalk grassland pastures and arable farming systems sympathetic to the landscape. This is termed mixed farming which plays an important role in retaining the landscape character and heritage of the Kent Downs.

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A ridge of chalk runs from Sevenoaks to the White Cliffs of Dover

Chalk

A ridge of chalk forming the Kent Downs runs from Sevenoaks to the White Cliffs of Dover, where the high vertical cliffs dramatically contrast with the foreshore providing an awe inspiring panorama. The chalk was laid down 65 million years ago, from the settlement and compression of decomposing minuscule sea creatures. Over time, the forces of climate and geology gradually led to the English Channel separating Kent from France but the chalk deposits we see in Kent also occur on the French coast.

