

MILL HILL
West Sussex

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for the book *Discover Butterflies in Britain*
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Shoreham Bank, the south-western slope of Mill Hill, looking north in August

Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve is immediately north of Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex. It is about 12 ha (30 acres) of chalk downland, scrub and meadow and will lie within the boundary of the new South Downs National Park. From the summit there is a panoramic view over Shoreham-by-Sea and Lancing.

This site has been well-known to butterfly seekers for many years because of the strength of its Chalkhill and Adonis Blue populations. It is owned by Adur District Council and managed in partnership with the South Downs Joint Committee. This is a temporary body which is expected to evolve into the South Downs National Park Authority after 2011.

TARGET SPECIES
Chalkhill Blue (June-August) and Adonis Blue (May-June and August-September), as well as Common Blue (May-June and late July-September), Brown Argus (May-June and July-early September) and other downland species.

Most of Britain's national parks date from a 1949 Act of Parliament. Of the 12 parks proposed then, 10 were formed soon afterwards. Only the New Forest National Park, formed in 2004, and the South Downs National Park, to be implemented in 2011, came later. Originally it was felt that too much of our southern downland was in agricultural use for it to become a national park, and various areas of outstanding natural beauty were declared instead. But views about the importance of conservation changed and the call for a South Downs National Park was renewed in the 1990s. After several public inquiries, the government's final decision was announced in March 2009 and plans are currently in hand to transfer the responsibilities of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board to a new South Downs National Park Authority.

The Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve at Shoreham falls inside the boundary of the new national park. This will inevitably affect how decisions are made about its management. That is important because both Chalkhill and Adonis Blue butterflies are very sensitive to their habitat. They need some scrub for shelter, but not too much. They prefer grazed downland but not too much grazing. They need their caterpillars' foodplant horseshoe vetch. And they need enough ants to coexist with. When I visited in August 2009, there were Chalkhill Blues about but not nearly at the density that reports indicate had been achieved some years earlier. The Adonis Blue population seemed more stable, and there were a relatively good number to be seen, but the density of Adonis Blues at Mill Hill has never been as high as that of Chalkhill Blues. My impression is that scrub growth needs to be checked to leave larger areas of flowery, grazed, short turf and allow both these downland butterflies (and their coexisting species of ants) to flourish.

The upper slopes of Mill Hill give fine, panoramic views over Shoreham and Lancing and over the runway of Shoreham airport. You can see a long stretch of the picturesque River Adur valley. The river here is tidal and its mud flats provide good bird watching opportunities. Among many species, if you are lucky you may see little egrets, lapwings and ringed plovers. The elevated junction of the A27 and A283 roads, with its complicated clover-leaf design is to the south. A wheelchair-friendly circular trail starts near the northern car park and has a good viewing point.

During the spring and early summer. Mill Hill is noted for its brilliant display of yellow horseshoe vetch. Its herb-rich, chalky grassland also supports many different flowering plants. According to Natural England's website, over 160 different species have been recorded. They include round-headed rampion (the County flower of Sussex), bird's foot trefoil, field scabious, small scabious, carline thistle, stemless thistle, eyebright, toadflax, autumn gentian, ragwort and the knapweeds.

To reach Mill Hill, it is necessary to turn north from Shoreham (see the directions below), and the minor dead-end road to Mill Hill has its own high viaduct over the A27. Even on fine days, there may be a steady sea breeze across the upper slopes, and this makes the hill a great place to fly model airplanes and kites. However byelaws prohibit hang gliding, flying powered model aircraft, horse-riding and cycling.



Southern entrance to Mill Hill



Adonis Blue territory on the SW-facing slope



View from Mill Hill towards Shoreham airport



View from Mill Hill across the River Adur towards Lancing College



View NW from Mill Hill across established scrub



Thick vegetation towards the south of Mill Hill reserve



Entrance to Mill Hill access trail



Mill Hill limited access trail



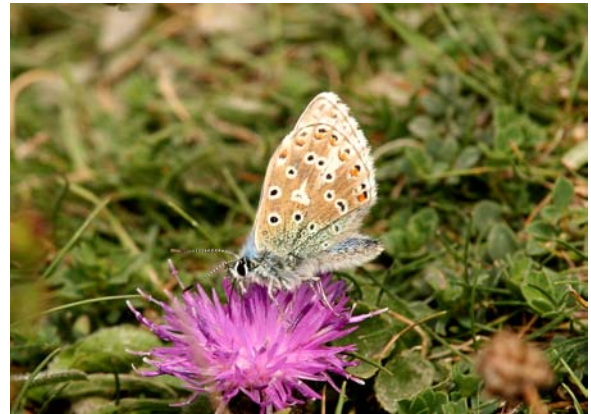
Flying model gliders from Mill Hill



Lancing College seen across the River Adur from Mill Hill LNR



South-west facing looking south



Adonis Blue (m) at Mill Hill



Adonis Blue at Mill Hill in August



Adonis Blue at Mill Hill



Adonis Blue (m) nectaring on carline thistle at Mill Hill in August



Common Blue (f) at Mill Hill



The same Common Blue (f) at Mill Hill



Common Blue (m) at Mill Hill



View north from the Mill Hill's accessible walk

LOCATION

Explorer Map 122: Brighton and Hove
Landranger (pink) Map 198: Brighton & Lewes
Grid references: South car park TQ212068
North car park TQ212075

The entrances to the reserve are on a minor no-through road which runs north from Shoreham-by-Sea. If you are coming by car, leave the A27 at the A283 turning. This involves negotiating a 3-circle cloverleaf of roads. Head south towards Shoreham centre on the Steyning Road, but, after less than ½ mile, turn east on Upper Shoreham Road towards Kingston by Sea and an A&E hospital. After another ½ mile turn hard left to go north on Erringham Road, crossing the A27 on a high bridge to climb up Mill Hill. The reserve is then on your left.

There are disabled spaces at the north car park. A hard-surfaced walk of about 1/3 mile begins here. It has only gentle gradients and is wide enough for wheelchairs. There are a number of other steeper paths and it is possible to make a complete circular tour of the reserve. For Chalkhill and Adonis Blues, look for sheltered areas on the lower south-west facing slopes of the hill where there are open areas of short grass between low scrubby bushes.

Access by public transport is by bus to the Red Lion pub in Old Shoreham Road (Old Shoreham is just south of the A27 road interchange). From there walk north and look for the footpath that leads over the high footbridge and then forks left into the reserve.

There are no toilet facilities at Mill Hill Local Nature Reserve, but the centre of Shoreham-by-Sea is not far away. Refreshments should be available at the Red Lion pub in Old Shoreham.