

TWYWELL HILLS AND DALES
Northamptonshire

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for the book *Discover Butterflies in Britain*
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Meadow between Whitestones and the Gullet.

<p>Twywell Hills and Dales covers about 55 ha (135 acres) and includes two large disused quarries. In the spring, the undulating ground of the old limestone quarry is a good site for species who favour calcareous grassland. The forest rides also offer a wide range of other species.</p>	<p>Site acquired by the local authority in 1948 and now managed jointly by Rockingham Forest Trust, the Wildlife Trust and the Woodlands Trust on behalf of East Northamptonshire Council.</p>	<p>TARGET SPECIES</p> <p>Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Green Hairstreak (in the spring), Small Heath, Marbled White, Brown Argus, White-letter Hairstreak</p>
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Twywell is at the southern end of Rockingham Forest. After the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror made the Forest a royal hunting ground. It covers 200 square miles and stretches from Kettering in the south to Stamford in the north. Over the centuries, woodland was cleared to provide arable and pastoral land and the area that is now Twywell Hills and Dales was farmland before mining started in 1920. This was part of the growth of Northamptonshire as a major centre for iron and steel manufacture centered on Corby.

To make iron, the raw materials needed are iron ore, coke and limestone. In a blast furnace they are melted together at a high temperature and produce pig iron and slag. Both iron ore and limestone have been quarried at Twywell. Now the quarries are long disused and, as nature has gradually repaired their scars, they have become sanctuaries for wildlife. Predominantly iron ore was extracted from the Gullet area, and limestone from the aptly-named Whitestones area.

The Gullet is a deep quarry, very steep-sided as a result of digging deep for ironstone. In addition to the narrow cutting, there are sloping banks and terraces and a series of old spoil heaps. At the bottom of the Gullet is a series of ponds and you can expect to see common spotted and bee orchids, wild strawberries (favoured by Grizzled Skippers) and Hart's tongue ferns and there is usually an interesting range of butterfly species. In the open grassy areas you may find Green Hairstreaks and Dingy, Essex and Grizzled Skippers. Twywell Gullet is a designated SSSI because of its wide range of rare beetles, flies and dragonflies, including ruddy darter dragonflies.

Whitestones is where limestone quarrying took place and is now undulating grassland, grazed by sheep and cows. It provides an excellent open habitat for butterflies that like chalky grassland. In the spring you should easily find Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and Green Hairstreaks and, later in the summer, Marbled Whites and Common Blues. The population of Marbled Whites usually peaks in mid-July.

There is also a large Wood, the Twywell Plantation. At present this is mainly evergreen, having been planted with European larch in 1932, but there are plans to convert more of it to deciduous woodland to encourage wildlife. The conifers were thinned in 2003 and ash, birch, willow and sycamore are some of the species that are taking hold. There are wide, grassy paths through the trees with the main ride a public footpath connecting the reserve to Twywell village to its east.

As well as at Twywell, there was mining around the villages of Cranford St Andrew and Cranford St John to its west. Cranford was served by the nearby mainline railway but most of the ore quarried at Twywell was carried only a short distance to blast furnaces at Islip, just east of Twywell village. A narrow gauge railway was built for this purpose and, at its peak, had 25 miles of track and 12 steam locomotives. Its gauge was 2ft 10in and it used cast iron sleepers made at Islip. Part of the railway's former path can still be seen at the southern end of Whitestones.

Eventually the Islip furnaces became obsolete and they were closed in 1942. Twywell quarries continued for a few years, but mining finished here finally in 1948, when the site was sold to the local authority for recreation. Mining at Cranford lasted longer, because of its mainline railway link, but eventually closed in 1969 when overtaken by cheaper foreign imports.

There are no facilities at the reserve, but there are pubs at Cranford and Twywell villages. The mainly Norman church of St Nicholas at Twywell is particularly interesting because of its connections with David Livingstone and General Gordon of Khartoum, two men dedicated to the abolition of slavery. Both were close friends of the rector of Twywell, the Rev Horace Waller. The Rector compiled and edited Dr Livingstone's journals. Also

he entertained at Twywell and corresponded with General Gordon. There are mementos of both in the church. Writing of Gordon's death at the siege of Khartoum, Winston Churchill recorded that "The long and glorious defence of the town of Khartoum ... is an event without parallel in history."



Whitestones entrance in May with rare breed sheep grazing.



Murrey Grey cows, chosen for their ability to thrive on poor quality grazing, help sheep maintain the reserve.



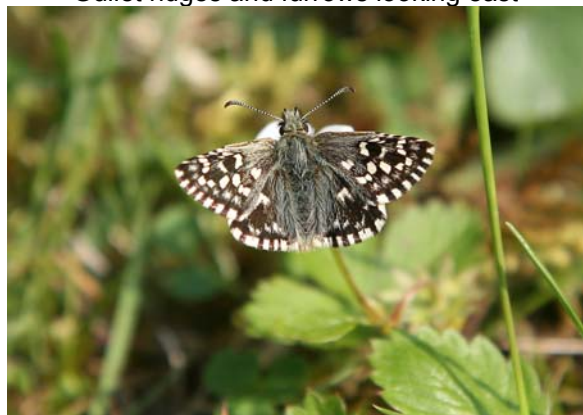
The Gullet looking west



Gullet ridges and furrows looking east



Grizzled Skipper habitat in the Gullet



Grizzled Skipper basking in the Gullet



Path of old narrow-gauge railway, looking south



Whitestones, looking east



Whitestones grassland and scrub



Reserve signpost



Whitestones looking south



Dingy Skipper (f) in the Whitestones area



Dingy Skipper (m) at Whitestones



Chequered Skipper at Whitestones



Exposed limestone at Whitestones



Boardwalk in the Gullet



Footpath through meadows to Twywell village



Brown Argus at Whitestones



Medieval tower of St Nicholas' Church, Twywell



Direction sign in Twywell village



Norman interior of St Nicholas' Church



Unusual carved choir stall, with African figures



Signpost in Twywell village



Reserve entrance

LOCATION

Parking (Entrance) SP940776 OS Map 141

Close to Junction 11 of the A14, about 5 miles east of Kettering. Go north from the junction on the minor road towards Cranford St John. The reserve's entrance is on the east side after only about 200m. Twywell village is immediately to the east of the reserve and the Islip industrial estate, where the Islip iron furnaces were, is about another mile eastwards on the road from Twywell to Thrapston. There is a good car park and picnic area at the reserve, but no other facilities. The picnic area is accessible for wheelchairs, but unfortunately the former quarries are not.