



Crows Nest Clump

The 32ha/80 acres enclosed by the fence have a fascinating history. The area was requisitioned during World War Two and by late 1942 the world's most powerful radio transmitter, American-built, and named Aspidistra after a song by Gracie Field, had been installed to beam messages to Occupied Europe. By 1943, 34 masts dominated the Forest sky-line. After the War the Radio Station passed from the Political Warfare Executive to the Diplomatic Wireless Service.



The Radio Station in 1985  
(© Mike Parcell)

In the 1980s, the remaining masts were removed and, in circumstances of great secrecy, a bunker was installed as an emergency Regional Seat of Government with the capacity to support life for six months in case of nuclear attack. Barely had the new facilities been completed than they became redundant as East-West relations thawed. The site was closed by the Home Office in 1992 and in 1994 it was bought by Sussex Police as a training area. The Police have been local pioneers of the use of Exmoor ponies to help heathland restoration.

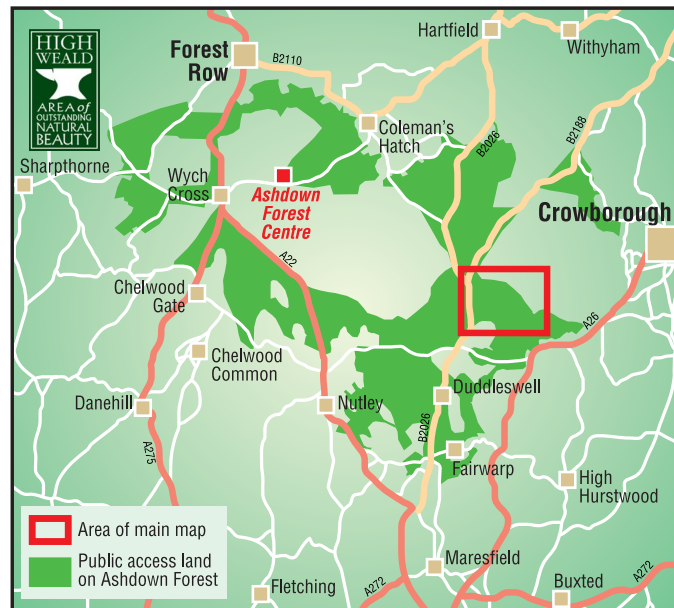
**When the fence-line bears left, continue straight along the ride and in 800m return to Kings Standing car park.**

This final stretch of the walk is parallel to the Lewes to London Roman road on the other side of the B2026. Part of the Roman road is visible by the car park of that name.

## Information

A Board of Conservators manages Ashdown Forest as a quiet, natural place for you to enjoy and as a refuge for wildlife. At 2500 hectares (10 square miles), Ashdown Forest is the largest open access space in the South East. Nearly two thirds of it is heathland, one of the rarest habitats in Britain. On account of this, the Forest is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and an EU Special Area for Conservation and Special Protection Area.

Ashdown Forest is a former medieval hunting forest, the largest of four spread between Horsham and Tunbridge Wells in an area known as the Weald Forest Ridge. This is the highest ridge of the High Weald, itself recognised as one of England's Finest Landscapes and designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).



If you would like further information about the work of the Conservators and the Friends of Ashdown Forest, visit the Forest Centre at Wych Cross. Telephone 01342 823583 or visit [www.ashdownforest.org](http://www.ashdownforest.org)



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## The Eastern Clumps

**Two walks through open heathland that start at one of the Forest's iconic hill-top clumps of pine trees**

The area has evidence of diverse human uses over 2,000 years from pre-Roman occupation to the Cold War.



Exploring Ashdown Forest on foot



# The Eastern Clumps

**Long walk - 2.2 miles/3.5km**

**Short walk - 1.4 miles/2.2km**

*If you are taking a dog with you, please clear up any mess – thank you!*

**Walk away from the car park and to the left of Kings Standing Clump. Behind the Clump, turn right and then left ① to join a ride.**

The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Although there is evidence of Iron Age and Roman occupation of the site, Kings Standing takes its name from the practice, from Tudor times onwards (i.e. 16th century), of hunting deer from standings. Rather than pursuing deer, hunters stood on elevated structures past which the deer were driven from nearby enclosures and shot at from close quarters.

In about 1825, the clump (like others, e.g. at Crows Nest) was planted with Scots pines by the De La Warr family who owned the Forest – a move that so angered local commoners that they destroyed many of the trees! In January three years earlier, William Cobbett had

crossed the Forest and he described it, in his famous book Rural Rides, as “a heath, with here and there a few birch scrubs upon it, verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in England”!



The small pond before the junction of rides

**Follow the ride across the heath for 700m. Views open up left towards the North Downs and right to the South Downs. Just past a pond on the right, a junction of rides is reached ②. For a short, fairly level walk turn sharp right and turn right again after 700m to return to Kings Standing; for a longer walk, turn half right and descend on a steep wide ride.**

During World War One much of this area was used as an anti-gas attack training school. Aerial photographs from the 1920s also show trench systems nearby and, a century after Cobbett, a continuing paucity of trees.

Only since World War Two have trees, and woodland, become abundant, expanding from 5% to 40% of the Forest area, largely at the expense of heathland. Most conservation work by the Conservators is devoted now to preventing further loss and to improving what remains. The mechanical control of trees, scrub and bracken can be effective short-term management options but they are expensive, inherently unsustainable, and in the end cannot emulate the benefits of livestock for heathland. In 2007 the Conservators established a flock of Hebridean sheep to help rectify this.



Hebridean sheep below Crows Nest Clump  
(© Louise Amos)

**The ride crosses two streams ③. Some 50m after the second stream, turn right onto a ride and ascend through open heathland.**

The main heather here, cross-leaved heath, shows how wet the ground can be. Other indicators of such a condition are the yellow-flowering bog asphodel and the bog cotton, whose white fluffy ‘heads’ appear towards the end of summer. Pools formed by the stream are home to the small red damselfly, a rare species in Sussex but one that, benefitting from climate change, is gradually expanding northwards in Britain.



Small red damselfly  
(© cwardphotography)

**After 700m, the ride reaches a second historic clump of pines, Crows Nest Clump. Pass to the right of the Clump and, on reaching a ride junction ④, turn right to follow the fence-line.**

