

Post 9

CATTLE GRAZING AND GRASSLAND RESTORATION



Farthing Downs was probably grazed continuously from the end of the Romano-British period until the 1960's. The decline in grazing after this time allowed small trees or 'scrub' to invade the lower slopes and this gradually spread over much of the Downs.

The grassland began to be cut for hay which, although beneficial to some species, was too harsh for others. This led to a gradual decline in flora and fauna and enabled scrub to spread.

To restore this habitat to its former glory, grazing animals were reintroduced in 1992. Scrub, which can shade out grassland plants, was cut down and treated to prevent it from re-growing. Once low growing vegetation returned, grazing animals were used to maintain the open area.

Grazing management helps to conserve the chalk grassland, which is a rare and nationally threatened habitat. It creates conditions which support a wide range of flowers, grasses, insects, birds and

other animals, including national rarities. An extra bonus of the livestock is their dung, which attracts many beetles and other invertebrates. These provide food for birds and small mammals which, in turn, attract birds of prey to the Downs.



TENDING THE SHEEP (FROM A SAXON CALENDAR)

Carry on down the diagonal path, towards the wooden electricity pole. Go past the four-fingered waymarker, through the gate and into the belt of trees, you will see post 10 to the right. You are following a route which is probably as old as the Iron Age field system. In later years the line of yew trees was planted to mark this boundary (see map below).

NATURE TRAIL MAP

