

Ditchling Common Country Park Nature Trail



Welcome to Ditchling Common Country Park

This nature trail has been designed to take in as many habitats as possible on the Country Park. These range from open water to mature woodland. It is suitable for all ages. The circular walk is about 1 mile (1.6 km) long. To use the trail look for posts featuring “Dizzy the Ditchling Dragonfly” (see right) and follow the direction of the arrow above.



When to go

To get the best from the trail it is probably best to visit between March and September. The annual highlight is the carpet of bluebells and wood anemones during the spring. These are relicts of the woodland flora before the trees were cleared, they are now shaded by bracken cover through the summer months. On a good year the bluebells can make the whole field appear purple.



Succession – after only one year without mowing, gorse is already encroaching into the open field.



Tall grasses
and herbs

Brambles

Ecological succession

The Country Park covers 76 hectares (188 acres) of a once larger area of common land. It was traditionally grazed by cattle which created an open landscape interspersed with trees and scrub. Grazing declined during the 1940s and more scrub and woodland encroached into the open areas.

Most land, if left, would naturally revert to woodland over time. The Park contains all of the stages of ecological succession ranging from open water to mature woodland. Silt would build up in a pond allowing plants and grasses to grow, followed by brambles and scrub. Trees would eventually grow to produce woodland. Much of the rangers' work is concerned with managing this succession, through scrub clearing, grazing, mowing, coppicing and pond clearance. You will see some of the results of this work on the nature trail.

We have fenced some areas of the Common to allow grazing. Traditionally cattle and sheep were allowed to wander at will, during the early days of cars roads were not busy and local children used to earn a penny for opening gates to traffic in and around the Common. It would be hard to imagine opening the gates for every car nowadays!

Ecological succession



Blackthorn
and hawthorn

Mature oak and willow trees

Nature Trail

The Dizzy waymark posts lead the way around the trail. The panels provide information about the ecology of the site and how it is managed.



Turn left at the car park, following the first arrow next to the welcome board. Cross the bridge and turn right at the second post. Follow the path along the bank of the pond. You will soon find an interpretation panel called Pond Life.

Ditchling Common in the spring.

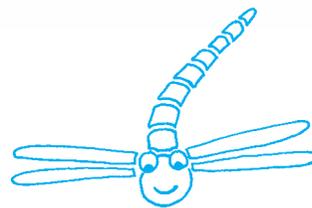
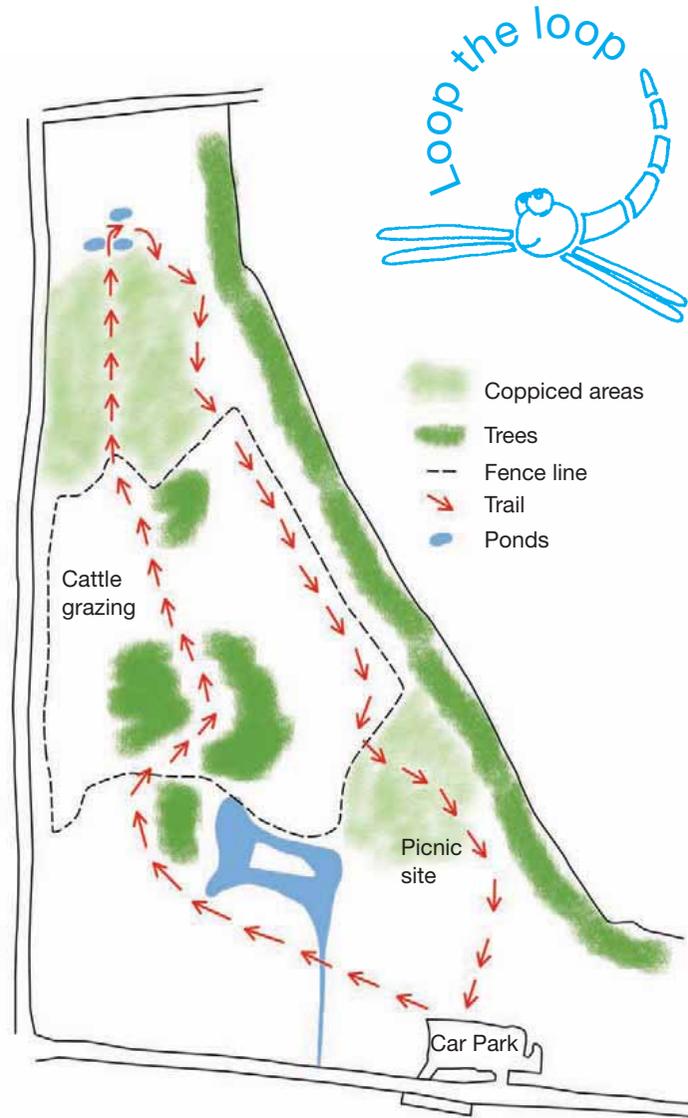


Follow the path until you reach a bridge. Cross it, go through the kissing gate and then turn left into the woods.

This large field is grazed by cattle through the summer.



Follow the path through the woods and onto the main field. Follow the arrow pointing up the hill and you will see the next one pointing through the kissing gate and into the coppicing area.



A coppice stool after one year's regrowth. Coppicing was reintroduced to the common in the 1980s.



Follow the path through the coppicing area and turn left at the next post. This path takes you to the focal point of the trail. You are roughly half way round the trail. This is a particularly interesting area, take time to explore it before continuing on the rest of the journey.

This tunnel has been planted using willow cut from the regrowth of the surrounding coppice.



Follow the post near to the large oak tree to continue on the trail. Continue in the direction of the next post, follow the path through the next kissing gate. Follow the next post pointing to the top of the field.

A lot of our work is done with the help of volunteers. These gentlemen are pictured helping to install the nature trail.



Follow the arrows along the top of the field, turn right and go through the next kissing gate and turn left. You are on the way back to the car park. You will pass a number of picnic tables. If you stop for food please clean your hands before eating.

