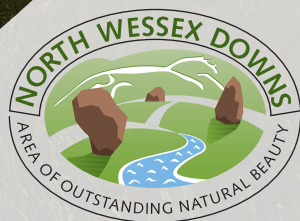




Dark Skies

of the
North Wessex Downs





Rediscover

your sense of wonder

Looking up at a starry sky or across a moonlit landscape is a memorable and magical experience.



15%

of the North Wessex Downs' skies are as dark as any in the country

An additional

58%

are significantly dark

As many as

3000

stars can be seen from the darkest areas

Dark skies add to the beauty, tranquillity and sense of remoteness of a place.

The North Wessex Downs is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for its distinct landscape rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage. It has significant areas of dark skies with some that are as dark as any in the country. Whilst the land has legal protection, the sky above is not protected in the same way.

The more of us that experience the magic of the night sky, the more value we place on it and want to protect it for future generations.

So, look up! Dark skies are definitely outstanding, natural and beautiful...

Light pollution



We all rely on artificial light to live our lives. But light shining where or when it is not needed pollutes our dark skies.

Dark skies are important for our health, nature and preserving the character and beauty of rural landscapes.

Too much light can disrupt our sleep and potentially lead to more serious health issues. It also plays havoc with the feeding and breeding cycles of birds, bats, insects and nocturnal animals too. Wasting light, wastes energy, money and adds to the impact of climate change.

The human eye can pick out light from a distance of about two miles on a flat landscape, so light can have far reaching visual effects beyond that intended.



YOU CAN HELP Turn off outdoor lights when not needed, point them downwards and use bulbs under 500 lumens.



Stargazing

get the best from the night skies

STELLAR FACT

If you could travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) it would take 100,000 years to cross our galaxy, the Milky Way

STELLAR FACT

Light from the sun takes eight minutes to reach the North Wessex Downs here on planet Earth

How to stargaze

Stargazing is easy – with a bit of information and advice, going out on a clear night to see the stars can be a truly magical experience:

- ★ Adjust – take about 20 minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dark
- ★ Wear warm clothes – it gets very cold standing or sitting still
- ★ Snacks – take some food and a hot flask
- ★ Seating – take a chair to be comfortable, or a blanket to sit on
- ★ Stay safe – don't go alone, always tell someone where you are going, and take a fully charged mobile phone
- ★ Take a torch – with red film across the lens or use a red bike light
- ★ Take binoculars (if you have them) – they will show 25 to 50 times more than the naked eye.

When to stargaze

The position of the stars and planets is constantly changing with time and location.

To plan your trip, download a Starchart or App to show you what is visible when. The best time are the days before, during and soon after each new moon, when the skies are darkest. Never look at a bright full moon without a filter, it is very harmful to your eyes.

Of course, a cloudless sky is best, otherwise you are going to see very little!

Where to stargaze

With the lovely chalk hills and open views in the North Wessex Downs, there are plenty of 'big skies'.

Head for one of the Stargazing Spots shown on the map, or find a safe, dark place away from the glare of lights.



Stargazing spots in the North Wessex Downs

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ① Wittenham Clumps car park, near Little Wittenham – SU567923 | ⑥ Pewsey Downs car park for Alton Barnes White Horse – SU115638 | ⑩ Barbury Castle (main car park shut at night) – SU157761 |
| ② Bury Down car park, Ridgeway National Trail – SU479840 | ⑦ East Kennett, on road near Boreham – SU132663 | ⑪ Uffcott, on road between Uffcott and Broad Hinton – SU117771 |
| ③ White Hill car park, near Kingsclere – SU516565 | ⑧ Occasional stargazing events at Avebury World Heritage Site, see National Trust website – SU099696 | ⑫ Ashbury Hill, parking area, Ridgeway National Trail – SU273843 |
| ④ Combe Gibbet and Walbury Hill car park – SU369620 | ⑨ Hackpen White Horse car park – SU129747 | ⑬ Regular stargazing events at Uffington White Horse Hill, see National Trust website – SU293865 |
| ⑤ Wilton Windmill – SU276617 | | |





Find out more

at northwessexdowns.org.uk

Other useful websites:

- ★ British Astronomical Association: workshops, tutorials, and information – britastro.org
- ★ Commission for dark skies: campaign and promote good lighting – britastro.org/dark-skies
- ★ CPRE Night Blight: maps of light pollution and dark skies – nightblight.cpre.org.uk
- ★ Dark Skies Discovery: star maps, information and tips – darkskydiscovery.org.uk
- ★ Go Stargazing: promote events and astronomy widely – gostargazing.co.uk
- ★ Skymaps: see what's happening to the sky each month – skymaps.com
- ★ Stellarium: open source planetarium for computer and mobile – stellarium.org



Meet new friends!

- ★ Local astronomical societies are a great source of advice, find your nearest one: Wiltshire, Newbury, Swindon Stargazers, Reading or Friends of the Marlborough Telescope.

Take action!

- ★ Why not nominate the best stargazing place where you live as a *Dark Sky Discovery Site*? See darkskydiscovery.org.uk

For the latest info on dark skies, sign-up to our e-newsletter at northwessexdowns.org.uk and follow us on social media



@NorthWessexAONB



@northwessexdowns



@NorthWessexDowns

Leaflet kindly supported by



North Wessex Downs

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

T: 01488 685440 ★ E: info@northwessexdowns.org.uk

Units 3-4, Denford Manor, Lower Denford, Hungerford, Berkshire, RG17 0UN