

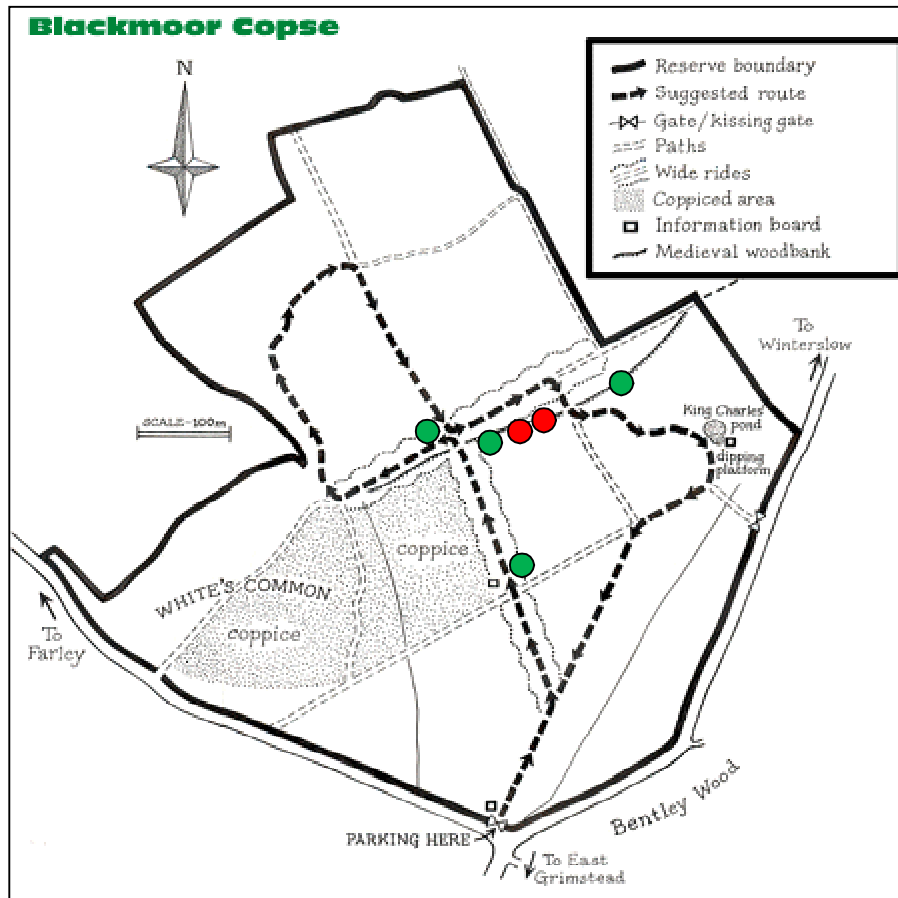
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Yews of Blackmoor Copse

Peter Norton
Wiltshire Yews

Yews of Blackmoor Copse

- Male yew
- Female yew



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The reserve OS184/SU2329 is found east of Farley village and lies on a band of London Clay, which produces a sandy loam suitable for deciduous woodland. From its northern edge the site slopes away to a damp, low lying part in the east and south-east, which includes King Charles' pond, and is drained by a minor tributary of the Dun, which in turn is a tributary of the Test. The major part of the reserve has been managed for wildlife conservation since 1956. In 1996 the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust acquired 'Whites Common'.

Of the six yews that grow within this area, four are found along the woodland bank that divides the northern and southern areas. The remaining two grow near to the junction of footpaths.

Early estate maps show that the southern area used to be arable common land with some cottage dwellings, while land to the north of the woodbank was forested. The exception to this was a coppice around the pond.



Starting from the reserve's main entrance, follow the arrowed path from the car park and at 200 paces take the left hand path heading north. After a further 200 paces a young male yew with a girth of 8' at 1' and 7' 2" at 2' 6 grows near to the information board.

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Continue northwards for 175 paces and at the footpath junction is a large male yew with a girth of 13' 5" at the root crown. At the time of my visit the tree had a memorial picture lodged in its branches, acknowledging a local artist and photographer whose work can be seen on the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust information boards.



This junction of footpaths marks the start of the main northern ride and is shown on an early map as a 'cock rode drove made 1667'. A cock road was a glade or clearing where woodcock made their territorial flights (roding) and were sometimes netted.



At this junction turn right and walk eastwards for 45 paces and look for a faint path on the right. Turn off the main track and after 20 paces through the undergrowth the next tree (left) is found growing directly on the woodland bank. This male yew, with a girth of 9' 10" at the root crown, is in good condition with no obvious signs of lower branch removal or height reduction.

As indicated earlier this bank would have been the boundary to the open common land which was not planted for coppice until 1821.

Still heading east follow the woodland bank for 50 paces and find two female yews growing side by side. The first (below left), measuring 12' 6" at the root crown, is a fine yew with minimal evidence of lower branch removal. The smaller of the pair has a girth of 8' 1" at the root crown.



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Head back north to the main track and continue east for 180 paces. Just before the pine plantation on the left the last yew, a male girthing 11' at 1' and 10' 5" at 3' is found on the right, (below) some 20 paces from the track.

Although not the largest, this tree is a fine example of a wild unmanaged yew, storm damaged and full of character. Many of its branches reach in a downward arc towards the ground and some have rooted, although closer inspection reveals that much of the new growth has died. Branch layering is a phenomenon of yew regeneration and in time can produce a grove.

The site is also home to a Badger Sett, which I am told has recently become active after a gap of some fourteen years. The sett has several burrows with one directly beneath the roots (L/H photo) but it will hopefully do no damage to the tree.



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References:

Chandler, John 1999 - *Historic Land Use Assessment of Trust Reserves – Blackmoor Copse*.