

# *France Down & France Firs*

## *A survey of the yews*

Peter Norton 2013

Car parking is available at ST879095.

France Firs is a small Forestry Commission woodland growing on a south facing slope of France Down. It forms the south eastern perimeter of the village of Stourpaine's parish boundary with Camp Down, in the parish of Pimperne. In the first series ordnance survey maps (1800's) this area was known as Furze (gorse) Downs but there are no records to indicate when the name change took place.

The area also forms part of the open chalk downlands of the southern downland belt within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The woods are predominantly young beech, possibly planted in the post war years around the 1950's, with a scattering of older yew.

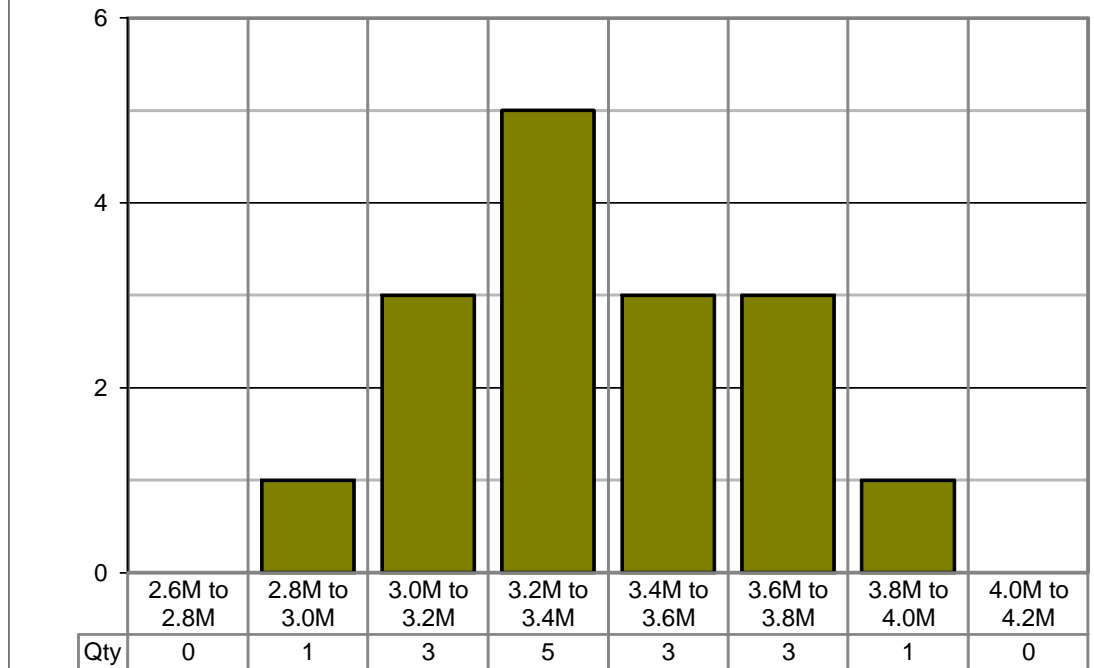
This area of Dorset has been used by military forces for many centuries, but the first recorded use of the site was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when local volunteer units used it as a training ground. Camp Down was an ideal location for a winter camp, with fresh water being available in the area now known as France Firs. The summer of 1757 saw the French making extensive preparations for an invasion of England and there was a concentration of cavalry in the South and the camp on Camp Down would have been in frequent use. Military activity ceased here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after permanent buildings were erected a few miles away.

The age range of the yew generally falls between 100 and 300 years with one or two that are obviously regeneration from seed, while one yew has started branch layering. Some seedlings were observed.

Observations of the sex of the trees was carried out by examining the ground close to the tree for either seeds (female) or the remains of pollen sacs (male). Where the evidence was inconclusive no sex was recorded.

Measurements were taken at the narrowest point in order to obtain the minimum girth and therefore exclude branch swell which would inflate the readings. A total of thirty seven yews were observed, of these sixteen had their girths recorded and ten are seen in the photographs below.

### Measured Yew Trees by Girth Range



Grid Loc (ST)	No of Yew	Sex	Girth			Height measured	Observations
			Ft	Ins	Mtrs		
8793709268	1	Male	11	7	3.53	1'	
8792609255	10				0.00		Grouping of some ten young yew
8779408080	1	Female	11		3.35	1'	From top of bank
8776509029	1	Male	10	8	3.25	2'	(Tree # 5026) Buttress below 2ft
8775209028	1	Male	13	1	3.99	1' 6"	Low 4' to break of crown - Recent surgery to lower branches + Young holly being coalesced
8770308991	1	Male	10	7	3.23	2'	
	1				0.00		Close to above yew but not measured - has an interesting distorted bole
8767008934	1		11		3.35	1' 6"	From the top of the bank - including side limb girth of 13' 3"
8777308970	1	Female	10		3.05	1' 10"	
8780108957	1	Male	10	2	3.10	Root crown	Low break of crown, seedlings noted close by
8781308953	1	Female			0.00		(Tree # 5021) Unable to measure
8786309077	1	Male	11		3.35	Root crown	Large side limb
8795009119	1	Male	10		3.05	Root crown	
8791009192	6				0.00		Group of six - around 9'
8797909242	4		9	10	3.00	2'	Group of four, this was the largest
8798309288	1	Male	11	6	3.51	1' 6"	
8801309322	1	Male	11	4	3.45	Root crown	
8808309299	1	Male	12		3.66	Root crown	
8799909460	1	Female	12	1	3.68	1'	Two successful layering's
8797709563	1	Female	12	4	3.76	2' 6"	

ST8793709268 Male 11' 7" at 1'



ST8775209028 Male 13' 1" at 1' 6"



ST8770308991 Male 10' 7" at 2'



ST8767008934 11' at 1' 6"



ST8777308970 Female 10' at 1' 10"



ST8786309077 Male 11' at root crown



ST8801309322 Male 11' 4" at root crown



ST8808309299 Male 12' at root crown



ST8799909460 Female 12' 1" at 1'



ST8797709563 Female 12' 4" at 2' 6"

