

Castlemorton Common Malvern Hills



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COMMON LAND

Castlemorton Common once formed part of Malvern Chase, which became a royal hunting ground after the conquest of 1066 and lay roughly between the Hills and the River Severn and Cowleigh and Birtsmorton. In the 17th century, Charles I divided it up and sold many parts of it. Following the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries, vast tracts of common land were enclosed. However, Castlemorton Common remained as the last relic of Malvern Chase, probably due to its relatively poor soils and high water table, which made agricultural improvements difficult.

Common land has its origin in the manorial system of agriculture which flourished in the Middle Ages. The Lord of the Manor (the owner of the land) allowed the inhabitants to graze animals; to take underwood, small branches and bracken for fuel, fence repairs and animal bedding; to dig turf or peat to use as domestic fuel; and to fish. Over time, these privileges were formalised into rights of common. These common rights were attached to particular properties and are still written into the deeds of many of the houses you see on and around Castlemorton Common today.

The Common has been an important part of local life for centuries, particularly those Commoners who have exercised their rights and, more recently, to walkers and horse riders. Today, however, few people with common rights actually exercise them, due to the economics of small-scale agriculture and the risk to their animals from busy roads and dogs. As a result, scrub and trees are rapidly encroaching on the open land, making access more difficult and altering the delicate ecological balance of this special place. The Malvern Hills Conservators (who own and care for Castlemorton Common) carry out regular scrub clearance and are looking at ways to encourage more grazing on the land, as this is the best way to manage the Common and ensure its long-term survival.

MANAGEMENT OF BLACK POPLAR POLLARDS

The Black Poplar, a native species once common along rivers, streams and ditches, is now one of Britain's rarest trees. Black Poplars are a characteristic feature of Castlemorton Common, with more than 80 recorded specimens, some of which are thought to be over 200 years old.

The Black Poplars on Castlemorton Common are all pollards and can be recognised by their short, squat boles, with a large number of stems arising from the pollard head, about 2-3 m above the ground. Historically, the Poplars would have been pollarded by the Commoners; this produced a large number of leafy shoots which could be used as fuel and as animal fodder. The Conservators continue this practice to maintain the trees, pruning them back to the pollard head every 10-15 years.



Black Poplar Pollards

NATURE CONSERVATION

A substantial part of the Common has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in recognition of its nationally important wildlife value, mainly due to its unimproved open grassland. The SSSI is rather different from the other parts of the Common, in that it was not ploughed during the Second World War; this results in a wide variety of habitats in a relatively small area. Around the streams and marshy wetlands, sedges and orchids flourish; but amongst these, the dry tops of the many anthills provide the perfect environment for wild thyme to thrive. The ants are an important source of food for woodpeckers, whilst the ponds near the car park are home to the nationally important Great Crested Newt, a species protected by law due to its decline in numbers.



View from British Camp



Gullet Quarry



WALKS FROM SWINYARD CAR PARK

The map above illustrates three walks that start from Swinyard car park and incorporate a number of points of interest. At Gullet Quarry, you are able to view a spectacular spring water-filled quarry. Eastnor Castle's fairytale turrets are surrounded by a beautiful deer park, arboretum and lake; the Obelisk in the park commemorates members of the Somers family who fell in battle. The Iron Age hill forts of Midsommer Hill (owned by the National Trust) and British Camp are impressive earthworks that afford far-reaching views as far as the Cotswolds and the Black Mountains.



KEY	
	Malvern Hills area
	Woodlands
	Built-up areas
	Public Toilets
	Swinyard location
	Main roads
	Railway
	GARDINER'S High capacity car park
	BRITISH CAMP Low capacity car park
	EASTNOR CASTLE Eastern Access Path