

Nature Reserves in Oxford

Shotover Country Park



On the eastern fringes of Oxford, Shotover Country Park is a whole hillside of hidden valleys, sudden views and varied habitats which are freely accessible all the year round. This beautiful and historic country park covers most of the 100ha of land between Shotover Plain and the Eastern Bypass and falls into two main parts, the southern slopes of Shotover Hill and the flat predominantly wooded land near the bypass.

The landscape of Shotover today is an intimate mosaic of different habitats. As you traverse the slopes you pass through a series of small valleys, woods and clearings. The park is a great place to explore - you could visit a hundred times and yet still see something new.

Shotover has been a place for play and adventure for generations of children for whom the most popular haunt is a natural sandpit in which they may spend hours building castles or damming the tiny stream. Shotover is also the venue for

many of the events run by the City Council's Countryside Service.

Shotover was once part of the Royal Forest of Shotover which covered a much larger area to the east of Oxford. During the Civil War so much timber was taken from the wood that in 1660 Shotover was "disafforested" and the slopes given over to rough grazing.

In the following 250 years the slopes were open heath and marsh and became a popular haunt for local naturalists who studied Shotover's rich flora and for many local people who came to explore the slopes and admiring the views. In 1908 the Rev A. H. Johnson raised enough money to buy Part of Shotover for the University a condition of the gift being that it be opened to the public forever. This land was later leased to the City Council who were also given much of the rest of Shotover on condition that it be kept as public open space.

In the absence of livestock the landscape of Shotover began to change. During the 20th Century trees and bracken became established over much of the slopes and the marshes and heaths began to disappear. In the 1970's the City Council took the first steps toward restoration of these important wildlife habitats. This work continues and it is hoped that an area of about 3 ha of heathland will be established by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Brasenose Woodland Shotover Country park are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

