

Rooksbury Mill

Local Nature Reserve

Educational Visitor Guide

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Welcome to Rooksbury Mill Local Nature Reserve

About Rooksbury Mill Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Rooksbury Mill LNR is situated South of Andover town centre and covers an area of approximately 9 hectares. Designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), the site was also declared a LNR in 2008 by Natural England. The site supports a variety of plant and animal species including otter, water vole, kingfisher and lesser stag beetle, as well as rare plants such as the bee orchid.

The reserve is carefully managed to look after its wildlife – through a combination of mowing, weed cutting and scrub clearance. This maintains a range of habitats, including short grass for orchids and other wild flowers, longer grass for insects such as butterflies and moths, lakes and river for fish and mammals and water fowl and scrub for insects and birds.

At Rooksbury Mill LNR you will find a blend of natural landscapes and the aftermath of industrial activity that has created additional wildlife habitats. The site largely comprises of two lakes which were created through gravel extraction soon after World War II. There is also areas of wet woodland, chalk grassland, scrub, riparian habitats, ponds and a stretch of the River Anton. The old mill straddles the main channel of the River Anton with most of the smaller channels appearing to have been constructed to drain the floodplain or to serve the one time watercress beds. The more recent usage of the site as a trout farm lead to the development of streams and channels to provide oxygenated water to the hatchery.

The combination of open water and terrestrial habitats provide opportunities for studies into plants and animals and comparisons can be made between communities and adaptations. The waterfowl on the lakes are easy to see and relatively undisturbed by the presence of the public so can be relied upon to be present during the visit. All habitats can provide a great deal of inspiration for visits by younger children, or offer opportunities to measure changes in physical and biotic environment factors brought about changes in the underlying geology to topography. Easy access to the course of the River Anton through the reserve can be used for stream studies. Land use issues are also a key feature, with modern housing developments, past use for gravel extraction and as a trout farm, as well as the bordering A303.

Local History studies can make reference to settlement evidence dating back to the Neolithic and through to the Iron Age, which was uncovered by excavations at the hill fort of Balksbury Camp. The mill itself stands on the site of one of the six mills recorded in Andover in the Domesday Book.

Plenty of inspiration can be found for language, literature and arts projects, and maths projects can be independent of the environmental studies or be used to analyse the data that is collected. The role of the reserve within the leisure facilities of the Borough and how the community utilises the facility can be part of the citizenship education.

Local community groups are also encouraged to use the site for educational visits.

History

Settlement evidence dating from the Neolithic through to the Iron Age has been uncovered by excavations at the adjoining hill fort of Balksbury Camp. This fort occupied a low promontory overlooking the confluence of two rivers and is 400 metres away from the present mill buildings.

The mill itself is a much altered post-medieval structure which was still in use at the turn of the twentieth century but is now a private residence. The present mill is likely to be standing on the site of one of the six mills recorded in the Andover in the Domesday Book. The present mill first appears on Isaac Taylor's 1759 Map of Hampshire, where it is named "Rooksberry Mill". The land below the mill then appeared as water meadows whilst the nearby trout hatchery appears on the 1910 Ordnance Survey map.

The Lakes were created through gravel extraction in 1969 after there was a surge in demand for gravel for the construction of the A303 bypass. In 1966 the owner of the site put forward a project to extract 32,000 tons of gravel and extraction by the contractor 'Mixconcrete' started in 1969, too late for the bypass. The two deep pits were located with non-extracted strips alongside the River Anton exactly as the Barlows and Mill lakes exist today. The processing plant and bins stood where the new car park lies today.

The site has been used as a pig farm and until 2001 when Test Valley Borough Council purchased the site, a trout fishery. The site has since been managed for nature conservation with public access.

Geology

Andover lies within an area of undulation terrain on the upper chalk deposit that covers much of northern Hampshire and extends into neighbouring counties.

The water that feeds the River Anton and the lakes comes from springs that occur in the North of the valley. Beneath the ground, the porous chalk rock allows rainwater to percolate through it and springs occur when the water table coincides with the surface of the ground. The water table is usually higher in the winter than in the summer and so springs will occur throughout the valley system. In the summer the water table falls and only the lower springs are active and there will be no supply of water to the upper reaches of the river. This is typical of many chalk streams and the upper reaches are known as "winterbournes".

The course of the River Anton begins in the North of Andover at Anton Lakes LNR near Enham and Penton Mewsey, and travels southward through the town centre and on to Rooksbury Mill LNR, before joining the River Test at Wherwell.

The water quality is high, providing good conditions for invertebrates and fish. The river carries very little silt although the high calcium content can lead to deposition in the form of chalk gravel.

Wildlife importance

The rich mosaic of chalk grassland, scrub and riparian habitats leads to diverse communities of both flora and fauna.



Roach

Grassland is very important for the protection of different moths and butterflies, such as the peacock, comma, marbled white and small and holy blue butterflies. There are also reptiles such as slow worms (a legless lizard). The River Anton which flows through the reserve is home to brown trout which can be seen throughout the River, as well as bullhead and other fish species including European eel. Demoiselles, Caddis fly and Mayfly also breed in the river. Water voles and water shrews can also be seen along the river banks throughout the reserve. Otters and kingfisher also frequent the site using the cover of the riparian vegetation to hunt. They can also be found in the clear unpolluted waters of the lakes, which support populations of fish, water birds and invertebrates.

Ongoing management



Bee orchid

The reserve is carefully managed for both wildlife and people. Promoting a high diversity of plants and animals (biodiversity) and ensuring that the right conditions are maintained for rare and unusual species whilst maintaining balance against the need to encourage people to make use of the reserve for recreation and education. The major feature of management is zoning where some areas are fenced and others are left open for public access. Most habitat management tasks are carried out during the winter months when it will cause fewer disturbances to the animal life and less damage to the plants. Without management, the whole reserve would soon become an area of woodland, heavily shading the lakes and river. This would benefit some species of plant and animal, but a lot of biodiversity would be lost. The habitat maintenance programme will preserve the mosaic of different habitats that exist on the reserve and provide the right conditions for a wide range of plants and animals to flourish. The tasks carried out in winter include orchard pruning, faggoting (use of hazel bundles to narrow the river and speed up the flow, as well as stabilise the river bank), tree felling and tree planting. Major fencing work and path building or repairing would also tend to be done at this time of year.

In order to know if the management of the reserve is successful, it is necessary to carry out regular surveys of the plants and animals. This process is called monitoring. The vegetation is used regularly and butterflies are monitored every year. Dragonflies, birds and freshwater invertebrates are also used as indicators of the reserves status.

The River Anton Enhancement Scheme



River Anton

The River Anton is one of Andover's most important features. It is a chalk stream fed by water of exceptionally high quality and supports a rich and diverse array of wildlife. As the river flows through town there are many opportunities for the public to enjoy it with riverside paths and open spaces.

However, all is not well in the River Anton. Historic development and river management has had a serious effect on its wildlife and amenity value. The Borough Council, County Council, Environment Agency and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have formed a partnership to tackle the changes being experienced by the river. A strategy has been prepared which identifies the key issues and puts forward some actions which are aimed at improving the river and its environment.

The River Anton Strategy has 4 broad objectives which are:

- To improve the river and its value for wildlife
- To involve public access along the river
- To involve the community in projects to improve the river
- To ensure the full potential of the River Anton as a chalk river habitat is realised and secured for the future.



Water Avens

Getting to the reserve and parking

Green travel

When visiting this precious reserve, it is important to think about the environmental impact of your travel choices.

Access

Local people use the reserve regularly as a place to exercise themselves and/or their dogs, to fish or enjoy the wildlife. A network of paths, many suitable for wheelchair access, is maintained across the reserve. Most visitors have little impact on the site, but some leave litter that has to be cleared and cause damage to fences, signs and life-preservers which has to be put right by the Countryside Officers. Educational visits by schools and other groups are an important part of the reserves function and besides discovering the wildlife, it is hoped that these visits will increase the understanding about the management of the reserve and create a greater appreciation for this valuable resource.

The car park is accessed off of Barlows Lane (SP10 2BF). Pedestrian access is from Barlows Lane, along the cycle path from Rooksbury Road, Watermills Park and also from Sainsbury's Close.

Parking

The car park is located to the south end of the site off of Barlows Lane. From the A303, exit towards Wherwell, turn right at Winchester Road (following signs for Andover). Take the first left onto Wellesley Road then at the T junction turn left onto Barlows Lane. Then take the 3rd exit on the right past the allotment and into the car park for Rooksbury Mill LNR.

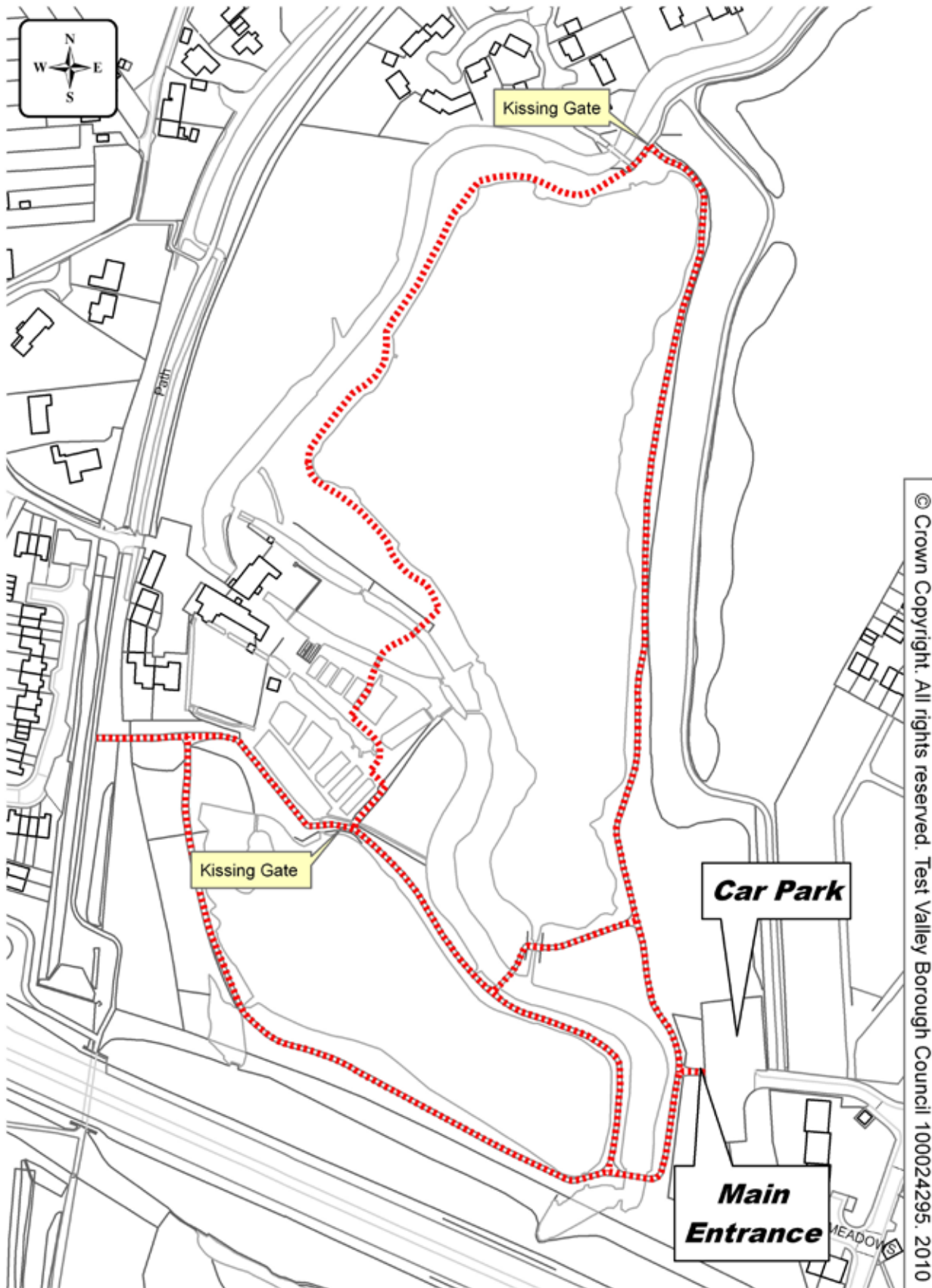
If travelling by coach or mini bus the height barrier will need to be opened by prior arrangement with the Countryside Officer.

On-site facilities

There are wooden benches around the lakes connected by a network of gravel paths with shallow gradients. These comprise of gravel paths with shallow gradients, making this a particularly good site for those in wheelchairs or others with mobility difficulties. All entry gates are wide enough for wheelchair access. Raised boardwalks have been constructed where water levels rise and create water logged areas. There are three interpretation boards situated at each entrance to the site. These contain information about the reserve and contact details for the Countryside Officer/TVBC.

There are no toilets, shelters or hand washing facilities on site. Groups coming from a distance may be able to arrange the use of facilities at the neighbouring allotments.

Location



Scale: NTS @ A4 P
Date: 24th December 2010
Drawn: Ian Moodie
Dept: GIS
Doc:

**Map Showing Rooksbury Mill Local
Nature Reserve Permissive Paths**



About this Educational Visitor Guide

Educational visits to this site can meet the needs of a wide range of the curriculum or can be designed as a stimulating and enjoyable event for those engaged in less formal learning. The aim of this guide is to indicate what this site has to offer and to provide some suggestions for its use. It is hoped that creative users of the site will devise many schemes of their own and be prepared to offer these for display on the Test Valley Borough Council website for the benefit of others.

This guide and activity sheets cover key topics in the curriculum and offer ideas on preparation, site visits and follow up activities. Activity sheets for pupils are available to print out, but activities can also be easily completed without worksheets via discussion and teacher-led questioning.

Schools or other groups are welcome to use the site at any time, although it is advisable to contact the Countryside Officer so that two groups do not try to do the same thing at the same time. A pre-visit to the site is essential in order that the necessary risk assessment can be made, as there are obvious hazards such as open water and injurious plants. Visitors should also be advised to dress appropriately to guard against rain, cold or sun and to wear suitable footwear. The Countryside Officer can meet you on site during your pre-visit to advise you on these and other matters regarding your visit. You should take this opportunity to assess mobile phone network coverage in case it is needed in an emergency. First aid is also the responsibility of the group organiser. If an ambulance is called, use the site map to determine which access point is closest to the patient and advise the emergency services of the road adjacent to that access point.

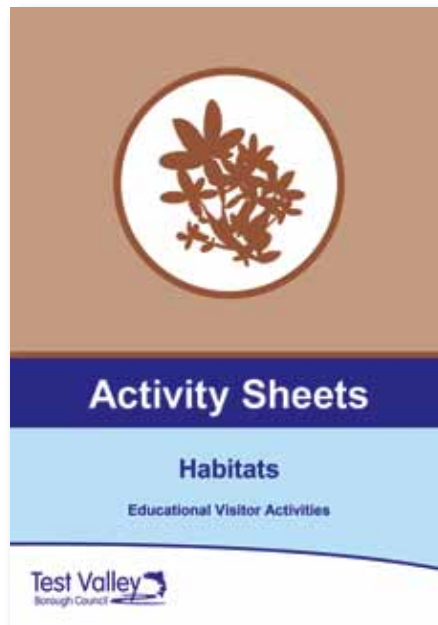
The Countryside Officer can be present during the visit to act as a guide or to describe the work that is done to manage the site, but the organisation of the visit and control of children or students remains with the group organiser.

There are no toilet facilities on site. Hand washing is essential before eating or drinking and preferably before leaving the site. Anti-bacterial gels are now widely available and offer the simplest solution to this problem provided that there are no allergy issues. There is no roof shelter on the site and only limited cover under trees. Good waterproof clothing is important if rain is forecast.

During the summer term a programme of half-day visits are set up involving Countryside Officers and the Hi-Tech Wild-Trek trailer (a mobile ecology lab). Schools within the Borough are eligible to participate. Details are circulated to schools during the spring term.

Activity sheets to accompany this guide

All of the activity sheets listed below are available to download from www.testvalley.gov.uk



Landscapes

- If I were a Countryside Officer
- Write your own 'Discovery Trail'
- Warmer-warmer-cold!
- Natures pattern
- A special tree
- Talking points
- Foreign plants – friend or foe?

Habitats

- Somewhere to live
- The moving shadow
- Dragons and damsels
- Spotting for points
- Something beginning with...

Plant and animal lifecycles

- Plant and animal tales
- As old as the trees
- Water, water everywhere
- Fruiting time
- Dabblers and divers
- Mr and Mrs
- What will I be where I grow up?

When visiting Rooksbury Mill Local Nature Reserve

please follow the Countryside Code!

- Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

Health risks

Although there are minimal risks involved when visiting a Local Nature Reserve you should be aware of the following:

Lymes Disease

This is caused by infected ticks which are found in grassy or wooded areas. Initial symptoms may include a red rash around the bite, and a fever. Consult a doctor if symptoms appear. Precautions include wearing long trousers tucked into socks and long sleeves.

Leptospirosis/weils disease

This is caused by infected rats' urine being present near waterways. Symptoms may initially appear flu like. Consult a doctor if symptoms appear. Precautions include covering cuts if working in or near water and washing hands before eating and drinking.

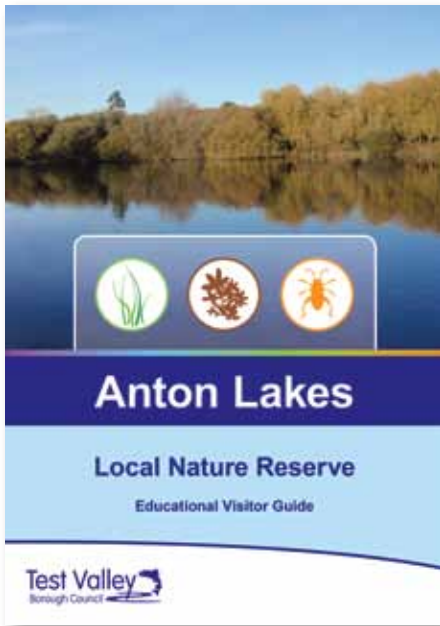
Toxocariasis

This is caused by a parasite in animal faeces. Humans can catch the disease from contact with grass, plants or soil where infected animals have been. Precautions include washing hands after touching soil or playing on grass.

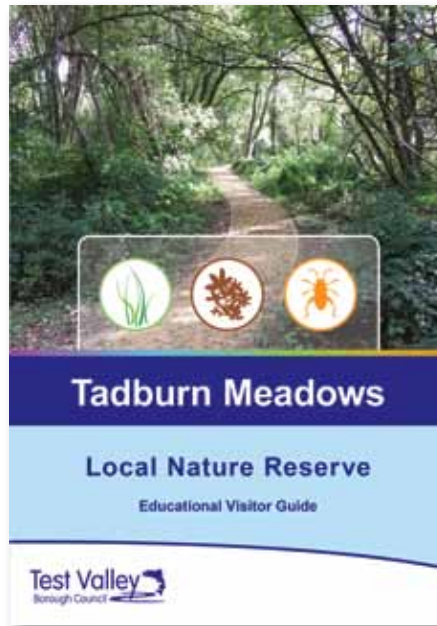
Further learning opportunities

As well as Rooksbury Mill LNR, Environmental Visitor Guides are also available for three other reserves within Test Valley: Anton Lakes LNR; Tadburn Meadows LNR and Valley Park LNR. Together these sites provide children with an enhanced opportunity for learning and a rich personal experience of nature.

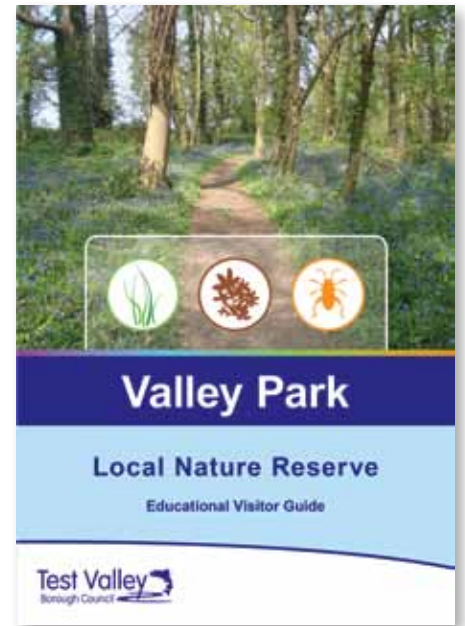
To obtain further information regarding the sites please visit the web address on the back cover of this guide.



Anton Lakes LNR is a site where the natural landscape combines with the aftermath of industrial activity to create a diverse range of habitats, from chalk grassland and fen meadows, to lakes and rivers and watercress beds and scrub. Providing ideal opportunities to study the natural environment as well as the effect of cultural and land use issues on a sensitive site.



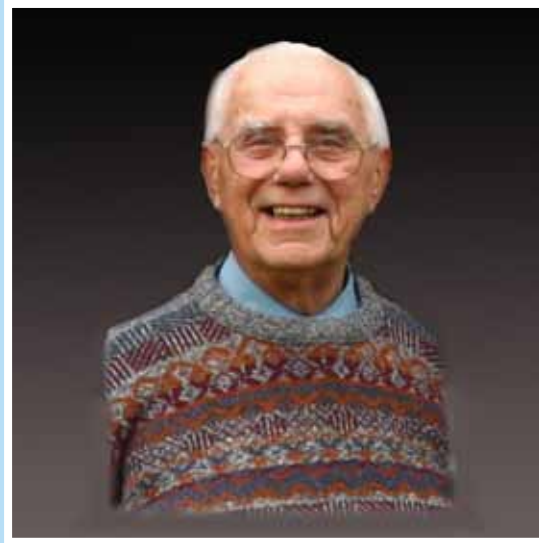
Tadburn Meadows LNR in Romsey provides a combination of running water and terrestrial habitats offering opportunities for studies into plants and animals and comparisons can be made between communities and adaptations.



Valley Park LNR is the remnants of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland located in Chandlers Ford. The expanses of woodland, open water and grassland habitats provide inspiration for visits by younger children, or offer opportunities to measure changes in physical and biotic environment factors brought about changes in the underlying geology to topography. Land use issues are also a key feature, with modern housing developments bordering the woodlands.

This publication is dedicated to the memory of:

Len Weatherly



Head Teacher
Shepherd's Spring Infant and Junior School, Andover
1967 - 1984

This guide accompanies a series of National Curriculum linked activities suitable for Key Stage 2 pupils. Some activities are adaptable for younger or older age groups, if necessary. The activities are suitable for use in the classroom or at a Test Valley Borough Council Local Nature Reserve. A detailed map of the site is included within this guide to help you find your way around the site.

This Educational Visitor Guide and activities sheets are available from our website: www.testvalley.gov.uk

For further information contact:

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