

The Mens

A large wild area of ancient woodland in the Low Weald

The unusual name of this area comes from the Anglo-Saxon word 'ge-mæennes', meaning common land. Although it lies fairly close to Ebernoe Common this reserve is quite different in character: there are fewer glades and open areas, but it has instead a wild and untamed feel, having been largely unmanaged for many decades. There are great towering cathedrals of beech, their high canopy filtering bright green light to the forest floor in the spring sunshine. Elsewhere oaks of different shapes and sizes form a more intimate atmosphere with typical ancient woodland trees such as wild service, midland hawthorn, and spindle. Here and there are tiny streams lined with mosses and ferns, and in places clumps of holly create a giant maze.



Highlights

A woodland reverting to a natural state; fungi and meadow flowers.

The determined may find Badlands Meadows in the south-east of the reserve, where a stunning succession of wild flowers will greet the summertime visitor. Plants such as betony, dyer's greenweed and lady's mantle all flourish here.

In the Great Storm of 1987 parts of this reserve were ravaged, with many trees succumbing to the gales, but the policy here is to let nature take its course, and the result is an immense variety of fungi and insects that depend on rotting timber — all too frequently 'tidied up' in many woodlands today. The gaps that have opened up provide the nursery for new young trees to grow. Here the saplings are able to take full advantage of the newly created space and increased exposure to sunlight. Natural development continues with the cycle of growth and decay being allowed free rein in this Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation.



Clockwise yellow antler fungus, wild service leaf, badlands meadow