

**County:** Isle of Wight      **Site Name:** Rowridge Valley SSSI

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

**Local Planning Authority:** Isle of Wight County Council, Medina Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** SZ 454864      **Area:** 39.8 (ha) 98.3 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 196      **1:10,000:** SZ 48 NW, NE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1951      **Date of Last Revision:** 1959

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 21.1.1987      **Date of Last Revision:** –  
**Confirmed:** 29 May 1987

**Other Information:**

**Reasons for Notification:**

The Rowridge Valley SSSI comprises heavily wooded slopes and associated areas of chalk grassland, bracken and scrub at the head of a dry valley. The valley is of considerable ecological importance as the largest and best preserved area of ancient semi-natural broad-leaved woodland over chalk on the Island. The site is also of special importance in containing the only known colony of wood calamint *Calamintha sylvatica*, a plant species of woodland edge on chalk, in Britain.

The woodland displays a typical coppice with standards structure in which the standard or canopy trees are widely spaced over a dense scrub or coppice layer. The canopy is composed largely of mature ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* with locally common silver birch *Betula pendula* where angular flint gravel caps the chalk on the eastern side of the valley. The shrub layer is dominated by dense hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice commonly with field maple *Acer campestre* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, while wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and elder *Sambucus nigra* are common along the woodland edge. The coppice has not been cut for many years (1986) and sheds a dense shade on the woodland floor which is dominated by dense carpets of ramsons *Allium ursinum*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* in spring, commonly with yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* and the local toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* a parasite plant of old hazel. The angular flint gravel of the upper eastern slopes is delineated by a lack of ramsons and an abundance of bluebells and red campion *Silene dioica* in the ground flora.

Chalk grassland occurs in scattered patches along the valley. The best example occupying a steep westerly facing but sheltered slope, heavily grazed by rabbits. The rich flora includes rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, wild strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, wild marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, cowslips *Primula veris* and burnet rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*. Several butterfly species also inhabit this grassland such as brown argus *Aricia agestis*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* and the local Duke of Burgundy fritillary *Hamearis lucina* in one of only three Isle of Wight locations. This area of grassland is fringed to the east by dense hazel scrub which appears to be actively invading the grassland. This invasive hazel scrub is unknown elsewhere on the Isle of Wight.

A small area of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occurs over angular flint gravel on the southern edge of the wood in association with bluebells, red campion and greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*.