

# Habitats and Hillforts



Hi, I'm Ralph... I've been learning about the fragile habitats (natural environment) and the hillforts on the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. The ridge has lots of historical and archaeological remains and some pretty special habitats too. *Come along and join me.*

There are 4 important habitats on the ridge. These are:

1. *Broadleaf Woodland*
2. *Meres and Mosses*
3. *Rich Grasslands*
4. *Lowland Heath*

There is also a chain of 6 Iron Age hillforts which dominates the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. These are:

- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. <i>Helsby</i>    | 4. <i>Kelsborrow</i>    |
| 2. <i>Woodhouse</i> | 5. <i>Beeston</i>       |
| 3. <i>Eddisbury</i> | 6. <i>Maiden Castle</i> |



## Habitats

The ridge and its surrounding areas are rich in wildlife supporting a range of plants, birds and other animals.

Our broadleaf woodlands on the ridge are amazing and they are home to rare and threatened species. At least 13% of the ridge is covered in woodland, including 343 hectares of ancient woodland.

*Located towards the northern end of the ridge is Delamere Forest which is what remains of the royal hunting forests of 'Mara and Mondrem'. Not only was this once a medieval royal hunting ground, but it even had its own Master Forester called John Done.*

### Where do I nest?

Tick where I normally nest.

Cliffs

Rocky crags

Woodland

On the ground

Answer: Woodland



Buzzard

*The old oak, ash, birch and holly woods provide rich habitats for insects, bats and birds. You might even spot a woodpecker, flycatcher, redstart or buzzard.*

They are also great areas for reptiles such as the common lizard, slow worm and adder.



Common Lizard

On parts of the ridge such as Bickerton Hill, where the soil tends to be poorer, lowland heath thrives. These areas provide a different habitat and it is here that heathland birds such as the nightjar or plants like heather, gorse and bilberry can be seen.



## Wetlands

Important wetlands are also found within the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. These meres and mosses are shallow and boggy wetland areas containing a range of wildlife and plants such as frogs, ducks, geese, dragonflies and sphagnum moss.

### What am I?

Which category do the following belong to? Write the correct letter in the boxes below.

A. Amphibians B. Waterfowl C. Invertebrates D. Moisture-loving plant

Sphagnum  Frogs  Ducks  Dragonflies  Geese

Answers: D, A, B, C, B.

## Beavers

Beavers were reintroduced to Hatchmere in 2020 and are now successfully breeding.

*Beavers are water-loving rodents and they are known as nature's 'environmental engineers'. They are great for conservation because they can change the wetland landscape by building dams and channels and that's great for other species too.*



Did you know?

Young beavers are called kits.

## Grasslands

The lower slopes of the ridge with their more fertile valleys have always supported species-rich grasslands, particularly hay meadows. These areas are home to wildflowers like ox-eye daisy, buttercups and orchids, along with lots of invertebrates such as butterflies, moths, beetles, grasshoppers, bumblebees and spiders!



## Hillforts

The Cheshire Sandstone Ridge is rich in archaeological sites, particularly our Iron Age hillforts. There are 6, but let's take a look at just 3 along the ridge.

Our hillforts help us understand how early settlers used our landscape to their advantage.

## Maiden Castle

*One of the best examples of a hillfort on the ridge is Maiden Castle, which is located on Bickerton Hill, and is the southernmost hillfort on the ridge. The west side of the hill is defended by the cliff edge and on the south and east sides are 2 semi-circular ramparts from cliff edge to cliff edge. The protective enclosure which was created provided over 1.2 hectares of land for its inhabitants.*



### Did you know?

Strictly speaking Maiden Castle was not a castle, it was an enclosure.

## Beeston

Perched on a massive sandstone outcrop, almost midway along the ridge, is Beeston Castle. It is one of our most famous landmarks. Ranulf de Blondville, the 6th Earl of Chester, built this state-of-the-art medieval castle in the 1220s. However, did you know that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the site was used as a hillfort long before the castle was ever built? We know this because of a series of banks and ditches which have been found that would have provided a defensive enclosure.

### True or false?

The Stone Age and the Bronze Age come before the Iron Age.

True

False

Answer: True

### Did you know?

Stone Age flint tools have been found at Beeston as well as Bronze Age hut circles and tools such as axes.

*There's so much history here!*

## Helsby Hillfort

Helsby Hillfort is another of our amazing Iron Age hillforts. It is protected by sheer cliffs on the northern and western sides and nearly 3 hectares of the hilltop were enclosed by a curved, stone-faced defensive rampart and parallel banks. This location offers spectacular views towards the Mersey Estuary, Liverpool and the Welsh hills.

## Habitats and hillforts word search

H E S C A R P M E N T M R B  
A C B K N S A N D S T O N E  
B A I L D F O N B A E S T A  
I S R H I L L F O R T S R V  
T T D P T J S H R U Y K I E  
A L E N C L O S U R E U G R  
T E M L H M W O O D L A N D

Habitat Moss  
Trig Woodland  
Beaver Ditch  
Hillfort Enclosure  
Bird Castle  
Escarpment Sandstone





# The Cheshire Sandstone Ridge story

The story of the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge is written in its landscape and rocks. It can be told by the shape and arrangement of the hills and the colours and textures of the rocks that build those hills. The ridge is made up of layers of red and brownish sandstone rocks.

The rocks date back around 250 million years - *that's a long time ago!* This was a period of geological time called the Triassic period. Since then, the sandstone rock has weathered creating lots of cliffs, caves, steep slopes and ridges that you can spot when you are out and about.

## Did you know?

The ridge has played an important role in shaping both the natural environment and where humans have lived for thousands of years.

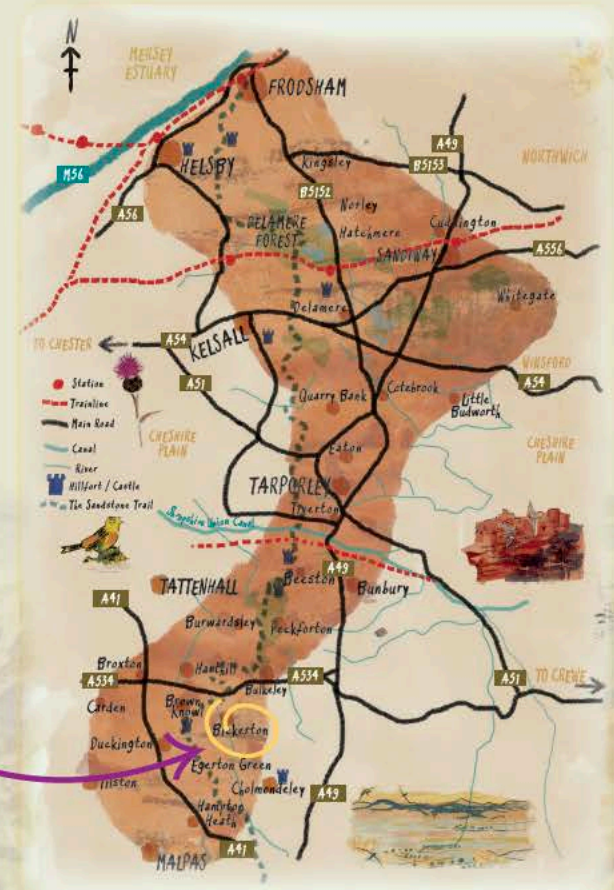


The ridge stretches from Frodsham and Helsby in the north to Malpas in the south. The ridge is an important feature of the Cheshire landscape and provides fantastic views of the surrounding areas.

You can see the Cheshire Plain to the west, the Shropshire Hills to the south, the Mersey Estuary to the north and the Peak District to the east.

The highest point on the ridge is at Raw Head, 227 metres above sea level. This summit, on Bickerton Hill, is a favourite for walkers and visitors.

There is also a Trig Pillar (Triangulation Pillar) at this spot. In fact, there are two accessible Trig Pillars on the ridge; the other is at Helsby Hill. Trig Pillars were used for the early mapping of Britain.



## Trig Pillar

Tick which colour and symbol shows a Trig Pillar on an Ordnance Survey (OS) map.

- A. Red square  B. Blue triangle  C. Yellow circle

Answer: B. Blue triangle.

A word to show off to your teachers...

## Escarpments

The word escarpment originates from the Italian word 'scarpa' and the French verb 'escarper', meaning to make into a steep slope. There are lots of sandstone escarpments on the ridge.





*So now you know!*

The Cheshire Sandstone Ridge is rich in habitats and hillforts – it is a magical landscape with a rich geological history. Don't forget, the clue is in the name, 'sandstone'. We want you to get to know and enjoy it, because it's one of the most important features of the Cheshire landscape!

## What can you remember?

1. What is the ridge made from?

A. Red and brownish sandstone rocks

B. Grass and moss

C. Sandy rocks and grass

2. Where does heathland thrive?

A. In boggy areas

B. In rocky areas

C. In areas of poor soil

3. Maiden Castle is the southernmost hillfort on the ridge.

A. True

B. False

Answers: 1.A,2.C,3.A

### Did you know?

The Sandstone Trail is one of the most popular walks on the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. It's 55 km long! That's a long way, so make sure that you walk it in sections with your family and friends.

*Please respect the Countryside Code. Wildlife can easily be disturbed by your dog, please help us to help them by keeping your dog on the path or a lead.*



Take a look at our website  
[www.sandstoneridge.org.uk](http://www.sandstoneridge.org.uk)



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