



Viewpoint

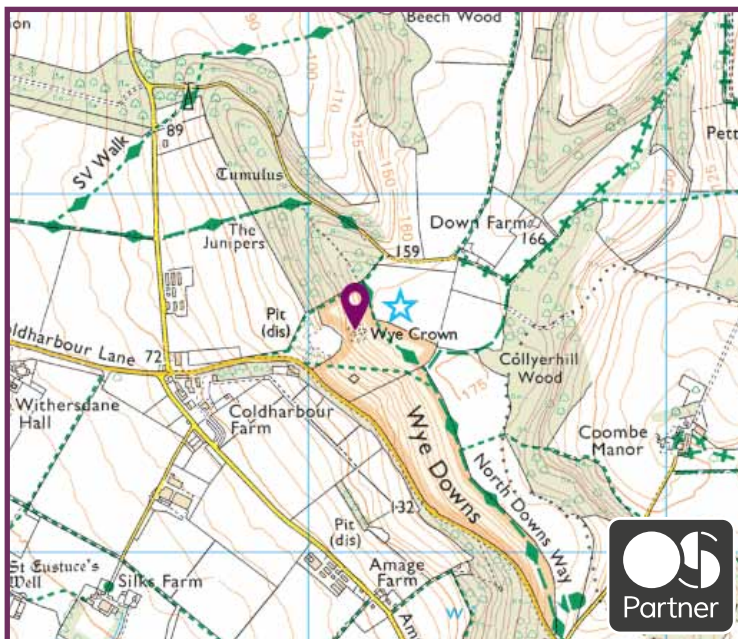
King of the hills



Time: 15 mins

Region: South East England

Landscape: rural



Location:

Wye Crown, Wye (near Ashford), Kent, TN25 5HX

Grid reference: TR 07128 46618

Getting there:

From Wye village, follow the signs for the North Downs Way and Stour Valley Way. Continue on the straight path up through The Junipers and ascend the crest of the downs into the Crown field.

Keep an eye out for:

The hollows behind the viewpoint - they are believed to be pits dug for mining iron stone and may be over a thousand years old.

The downland hills around the village of Wye are well known for their rare wildlife. They are best visited in the spring and summer months when the flower-clad grasslands burst into life with bees and butterflies.

But what makes one of these hillsides particularly unusual is the carving of a huge crown in the face of it which can be seen for miles around.

Why is a huge white crown carved into the hillside at Wye?



The iron pits above the Wye Crown
© Dan Tuson

The origins of the Wye Crown go back over a hundred years to the early days of the twentieth century when Wye was home to a thriving agricultural college.

Nestled on the footslopes of the Kent Downs above the fertile Stour valley, the varied soils of the college land made the perfect outdoor classroom for a wide range of agricultural and horticultural studies.

Keen to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902, the college's principal came up with the brilliant idea of carving a crown into the hillside above the village.

Far easier to say than do, the credit for the mammoth task of putting this idea into practice - from design to drawing board to digging - goes to 'Tommy' J. Young, the college's Lecturer in Surveying. Laying out a symmetrical design on an irregular surface was a tricky challenge, but Young had the idea of plotting the outline from a vantage point from the fields below the hill.

While a team of students armed with flags stood in readiness on the hillside, Young signalled to them from his vantage point in the field below, getting them to move positions until the right shape was achieved. Some say he copied a drawing of a crown from an 1887 florin (a coin worth 10p in modern terms) and stuck this to his surveying tools, but it seems the perfect shape was simply achieved by his good eye.

With the outline marked, the back-breaking task of removing 7,000 barrow loads of turf, soil and chalk took 35 students four days to complete over the spring of 1902. In the event, the coronation was postponed with the king suffering from appendicitis, but this did little to dampen the spirits of the college and a bonfire was lit beside the new crown on the evening of 30 June.

On the night of the actual coronation, 9 August 1902, the Crown was illuminated by 1,500 fairy lights. The King was able to view the spectacle of the illuminated crown himself two years later when he stayed at nearby Eastwell Manor.

But the crown is not just a historical artefact from another time, the Wye crown has been used for bonfires and other illuminations right through to the present day, including the coronation of King George VI in 1937 when it was lit by electric lights. During the First and Second World Wars it was covered with heaps of brushwood to camouflage it from enemy aircraft and prevent it being used as a landmark.