



WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



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SAMPHIRE HOE

SAMPHIRE HOE is an amazing place. Many of you will have followed the story of its creation in recent years. For those who haven't, it was created from just over half of the seven million cubic metres of chalk marl excavated from the Channel tunnel (the rest went to France). Situated below Shakespeare Cliff it covers about seventy-five acres (thirty hectares). Part of it is occupied by service facilities for the tunnel, with the rest being managed to create an attractive place for both wildlife and people.

Habitat creation on this scale in such conditions has not, to our knowledge, been done before. For young plants Samphire

Hoe is a horrid place – the chalk marl is sticky and poorly drained when wet and baked solid when dry, it has low fertility and the plants have to cope with winds and salt spray!

Six seed mixes, using seed collected from local sites, were chosen for different areas of Samphire Hoe. These mixes and their use are outlined below. Some plant species (for example Red Fescue, Viper's Bugloss and Birds-foot Trefoil) are in several mixes and have not been mentioned in any specific one.

Cliff Crevice mix was used in a narrow strip immediately above the sea wall. Its nine species include Sea Beet, Rock

The grassland habitat created on a mass of chalk marl by W.C.C.P.



Samphire, Rock Seas-lavender and Sea Mayweed. On the slope just above this and around the brackish pools at the western end a *cliff grassland* mix of Creeping Bent, Kidney Vetch, Tall Fescue, Nottingham Catchfly and seven other species were sown. At the top of the seaward facing slopes *chalk grassland* mix of fifteen species was sown. Meadow Oat Grass, Tor Grass, Sainfoin, Restharrow, Common Cat's Ear and Salad Burnet are some of the more obvious plants here. *Amenity grassland* was sown by the car parks, in which Hedge Bedstraw, Rock Rose, Rough Hawkbit, Cowslip and Small Scabious can be seen. A very steep area of the bund around the buildings was sown with a mixture of *native grasses*.

Of the remaining area, most is sown with *rye-grass*. This is only expected to survive a few years, but will serve to create better conditions for naturally-invading seed to establish (Prickly Sow-thistle and Bristly Ox-tongue are two plants that already have established themselves). Finally the shores of the ponds have been left bare for natural colonisation.

Other wildlife is already finding its way onto Samphire Hoe. Flocks of gulls can be regularly seen enjoying the seawall with Cormorants or sharing the ponds with visiting Wigeon. The grassland is popular with Skylarks and Meadow Pipits. Stonechats flit around the foot of the cliffs and Fulmar soar overhead. Rabbits and other small mammals have also moved in.

Samphire Hoe is also a place for people. It has always been the intention to open it for visitors. The major factor influencing this is the vegetation growth, as in places there have been problems with plant establishment and soil erosion. Obviously we want people to be able to use and enjoy Samphire Hoe at the earliest possible time, but if the grass will not survive pressure from visitors then we must consider delaying the opening.

We do not want this to happen and are busy working towards opening Samphire Hoe in the late summer. In addition to improving the grass growth, we are making the site safe and accessible for visitors, preparing interpretation panels and information leaflets, sorting out the sea angling and leading monthly guided walks.

Involvement by the local community is important for the future of Samphire Hoe. We have been talking to local people to find out how they would like us to manage it, and discussing ways in which they can become involved. If you would like to contribute to this or just see for yourselves the exciting things happening at Samphire Hoe, please join one of the monthly walks. Alternatively, if a group of people is interested we can arrange a special visit.

For information on these, or just a chat, contact me at the White Cliffs Countryside Project, telephone 01304-241806. I look forward to hearing from you.



The access tunnel opening on to Samphire Hoe.

The twin openings further left are for the railway tunnel under Shakespeare Cliff