

**County:** North Yorkshire **Site name:** Vessey Pasture Dale and Back Dale

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Ryedale District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SE 832622      **Area:** 26.8 (ha) 66.2 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50,000:** 100      **1: 10,000:** SE 86 SW

**First Notified:** 1985

**Description:**

The series of dales west of Raisthorpe supports chalk grassland representative of several of the types found on the Yorkshire Wolds.

The dale sides are, in the main, close-grazed and free from scrub. In Back Dale there are numerous ant hills amongst the short species-rich turf on the south-facing slope, in which abundant species include sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, quaking grass *Briza media*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, rock rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, thyme *Thymus praecox* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*. The more local autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella* and clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata* also occur. The underlying chalk has been exposed in stretches along this slope, corresponding with the site of an old plantation which has now been felled. An impressive earthwork with a species-rich, even turf, occupies the valley bottom.

In Vessey Pasture Dale, the grassland contrasts with that of the south-facing slope in Back Dale. Absence of grazing has favoured rank growth of upright brome *Bromus erectus* although the herbs salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris* are still abundant.

The north-facing slopes in Back Dale and those at the western end of Vessey Pasture Dale are less species-rich, indicative of a lower calcareous influence, but herbs such as pignut *Conopodium majus*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta* are present.