

Earth Energies Special Interest Group – Visit to Downham Hill 19th September 2026

Introduction

Downham Hill, often referred to locally as Smallpox hill, is located to the Southeast of Cam Peak and is 199 metres high. Cam Peak with its distinctive conical shape is probably better known due to its visibility from the Severn Vale. It is only when one stands on the top of Cam Peak do you become aware of Downham Hill which stands apart from the main Cotswold escarpment. but still offers stunning views in all directions.

History

According to a notice board at the bottom of the hill the area is steeped in history. It goes on to say that near the summit of the hill lie the remains of an ancient tower-like cottage built in the reign of King Edward III around the time of the Black Death in 1346. Although not in evidence today, the Uley Society are aware of an 1882 painting of a nearby farm showing the hill in the background with a crenelated tower. The Society also have accounts from previous residents, one of whom recorded that her family had owned Downham Hill since 1776 and knew the tower to date from the Black Death.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the hill was also the site of a smallpox isolation hospital, hence its local name. It is believed to have played a part in Edward Jenner's studies of the disease and aided his eventual discovery of the smallpox vaccine. It is believed to have been one of the earliest isolation hospitals in the country. Hollows on the summit are believed to be the remains of the hospital.

Apparently, there are various small mounds on the slopes of the hill which the Gloucestershire County Historic Environmental Record Archive describes as pillow mounds. These have long been identified by archaeologists as rabbit warrens or structures built during the medieval and post-medieval periods to manage rabbit populations for fur and meat. Interestingly the earliest Ordnance Survey map of 1830 describes it as Warren Hill.

Description

Downham Hill is distinctive like Cam Peak for being isolated from the main Cotswold escarpment. It is also distinctive for having an avenue of trees on its summit which were established in the late 19th century and believed to possibly have been planted in the 18th century.

Dowsing at Downham Hill

Interestingly Downham Hill has already made itself known to us via its connection to other sites we have already visited. When we visited Cam Peak it transpired that there was an energy line connecting them both, and that Downham Hill appeared to be the Yang energy in balance with the Ying energy of Cam Peak. Furthermore, there have been indications that Downham Hill is also energetically connected to both Uley and Selsley Long Barrows. So, one task is to see if we can verify this information whilst there.

A concern picked up when at Cam Peak was that the suffering and the deaths of smallpox victims was negatively affecting the balance of energy with Cam Peak. If this is indeed so, then any healing we can give to the area would be extremely beneficial.

I am sure we will find energy nodes near to the top and look forward to finding other information so far denied to us.

One member also suggests some other questions:

What structure once existed here both B.C. and A.D.?

What can be found out about the early people, if any at Downham Hill?

What became of the early people, if any of Downham Hill?

If there were people at this time, are there any interesting aspects of their society and were there any specific situations that caused them to leave?

All intriguing.

Location and Access

Downham Hill is located about half a mile due Southeast of Cam Peak. By car it is reached via the road from Farfield. Just before the end of this road, where the Hydegate Pet resort is located (GL11 5AN), there is a kissing gate on the right-hand side from which the path leads up the hill. However, please note there is no car parking in the area at the bottom of the hill. It will be necessary to ferry people from Cam Peak car park to a local farmer's yard and then to the hill itself.

It is possible to walk from Cam Peak car park. Taking the path to the left-hand side of Cam Peak follow the path down to join the Cotswold way heading Southeast. Follow the Cotswold way until it reaches a road (the Farfield road). Turn left onto the road and continue for another 15 minutes until you reach the kissing gate on your right. Altogether about a 30-minute walk.

Once at the kissing gate walk up to the next gate. From there the path branches both left and right, but continue straight on passing a large tree and continue on this path until reaching the top. The path is steep so sturdy walking shoes and ideally walking sticks are recommended.

