

Down House

Places to visit

Visit Down House in Kent, the home of Charles Darwin, to find out more about his life and work.

When he was a young man Charles Darwin voyaged for 5 years around the world on the *Beagle* as ship's naturalist. He studied the plants, animals and geology as he travelled. However, after his return to England he never left these shores again. He married Emma Wedgwood, and purchased Down House, a few miles east of London in the Kent countryside.

The ground floor rooms have been restored to look as they would have done when it was Darwin's family home. The first floor houses an exhibition about Darwin's life and works, and his formulation of the theory of evolution by natural selection, an idea that still creates controversy today.

Darwin's study

At the heart of the house is Darwin's study. To step inside is to be transported into a bygone age where the focus of biology was on classification and description, and naturalists studied whole organisms. All the important original items of furniture remain.

If you half-close your eyes you can imagine Darwin sitting on his large black leather chair. This was specially modified by the addition of wheels to enable him to propel himself from one side of the room to the other, perhaps from the large table that occupies the centre of the room to his microscope in the window and back again.

Darwin's work

After publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 Darwin continued to write and to experiment. He was a meticulous observer, recording everything in a series of notebooks.

Outside the house you can amble through Darwin's garden and around the Sandwalk, his 'thinking path' which he would walk several times a day, no matter what the weather. You can also visit his greenhouse where he cultivated the orchids and carnivorous plants that formed an important part of his later investigations. Not only was Down House his home for 40 years, it was Darwin's experimental station.

He published many other books, including *The Movements of Plants* in 1880 and *Vegetable Mould and Earthworms* in 1881, the year before his death. Much of the content of these books was based on observations he made in the grounds around Down House.



Volker Steger/SPL

Darwin's home and workplace at Down House and the surrounding area in Downe, has been nominated as a World Heritage site. This will be considered by UNESCO in July 2007.

There will be many events in 2009 to celebrate the bicentenary of Darwin's birth.

- Read 'Evolution in the news' on pages 18-19 to find out more about Darwin's theory of evolution.

Box 1 Visiting information

Opening times

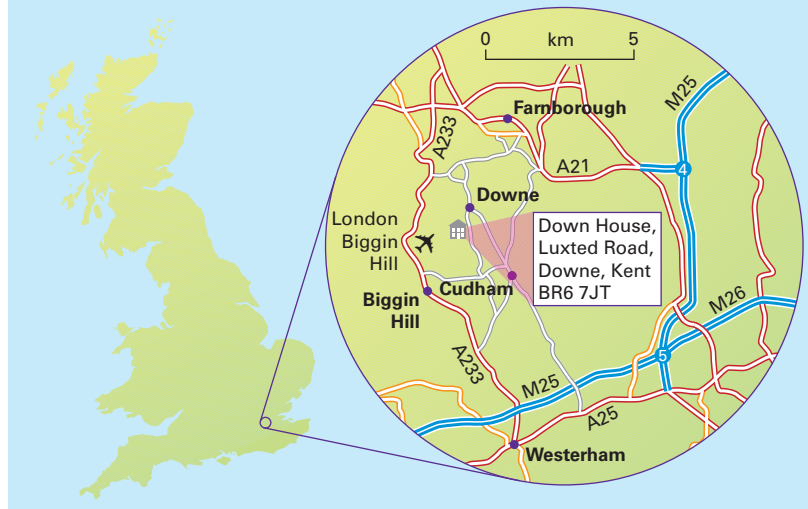
April to September: Wednesday to Sunday, 10.00-18.00

October: Wednesday to Sunday, 10.00-17.00

November to March: Wednesday to Sunday, 10.00-16.00

Find out more at: www.darwinatdowne.co.uk

or at: www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/ConProperty.102



Philip Seaton taught biology for more than 30 years. He now works full time in orchid conservation and visited Down House recently.