

Post 6

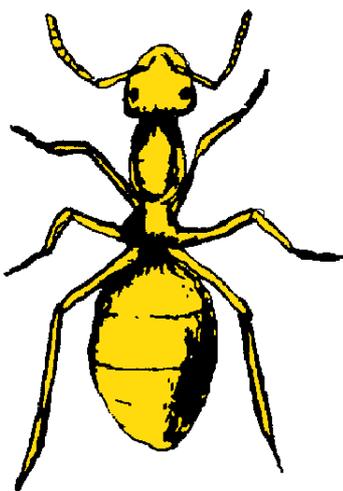
ANT HILLS

Looking at the ground on either side of the path as you head towards post 7 you will see many small mounds

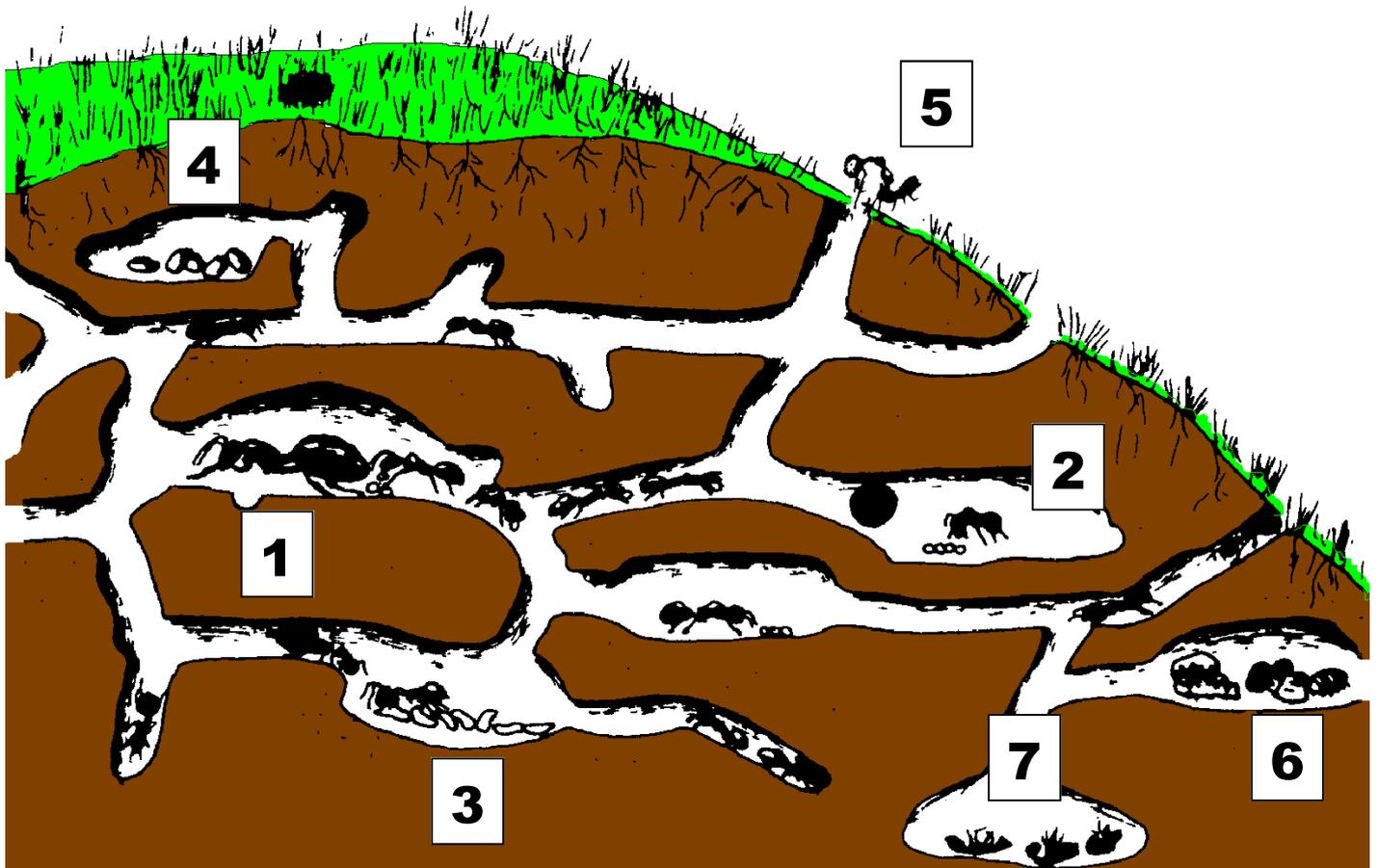


within the rough grassland. These are the homes of the yellow meadow ant and are distinctive of grazed downland.

These ant hills can last for many years, because the ants continually add to their structure, packing the earth firmly down.



A cross-section through an ant hill



(1) The queen produces eggs which are collected by workers and stored in chambers (2).

The larvae (3) and pupae (4) are moved around the nest according to the outside temperature and moisture.

Foraging ant (5) returning with prey which will be deposited in the food store (6) until required.

The ant deposits its dead in a cemetery chamber (7).

This species constructs its nest below ground level in the early stages but later extends it into a mound of waste material above. This mound has a larger surface area than the flat ground and so warms up more quickly and can be as much as 10°C higher than the surrounding air. This is a good place to look for grasshoppers or the common lizard, as they like to rest on the dry, warm surface. The mounds are elongated and up to roughly 30cm high, with one flatter side facing east to catch the early morning sunshine.

Livestock grazing creates the optimum conditions for the ant hills to survive; notice that there are none on the mown paths.

The yellow meadow ant, along with the earthworm, is very important in maintaining porous soil conditions.

The green woodpecker is frequently seen on the Downs and often feeds on the ground, particularly on ants. Some of the ant hills have also been plundered by badgers in search of ant eggs.

Continue up this diagonal path, crossing over a mown path by a bench, to reach post 7 (see map below).

NATURE TRAIL MAP

