

Ordnance Survey National Grid References

Ordnance Survey grid references are made up of a two letter prefix (e.g. SU) followed by an even number of digits (e.g. 436249). Grid references can be a variety of lengths depending on the accuracy of the recording, but typically range from two figures (e.g. SU42) relating to a 10km x 10km grid square, to eight figures (e.g. SU43672498) relating to a 10m x 10m square. Two figure grid references may also be suffixed with a letter (A to Z, excluding O) relating to a 2km x 2km square (see [The “DINTY” system](#)).

The United Kingdom is divided into 100km x 100km squares, each of which is identified by a two letter code. Hampshire lies within two such 100km squares; SU (north and mid Hampshire) and SZ (south Hampshire). The two letter prefix of a grid reference corresponds to one of these 100km squares and so all grid references in Hampshire will start SU or SZ. The digits in a grid reference identify a location within this 100km square. The first half gives the distance East from the western edge of the 100km square. The second half gives the distance North from the southern edge of the 100km square.

Locating a grid reference on an ordnance survey map

To locate a grid reference on an ordnance survey map, first identify the 100km square based on the two letter code. Each two letter code corresponds to a 100km square which is denoted by the first number on the x axis and the first number on the y axis:

Map sheet **SU** corresponds to **4** on the x axis and **1** on the y axis

Map sheet **SZ** corresponds to **4** on the x axis and **0** on the y axis

Note: The map sheet appears in blue in one corner of most ordnance survey maps.

Next, divide the digits of the grid reference into two parts. The first half relates to the x axis (east-west position) and the second half relates to the y axis (north-south position). Using the first half, locate the correct 10km square by finding the first digit number along the bottom of the map (west to east) and then continue to sub divide the square into 1km squares, 100m squares and 10m squares based on any remaining digits.

Finally, repeat the above using the second half of the digits up the side of the map (south to north). The point of intersection between the x and y axes will give the actual square indicated by the grid reference.

The “DINTY” system

This system is often used in species recording when a recorder can only estimate the position of a species or may wish to keep the location of a record cryptic. It may be that a 2 figure grid reference (10km square) is too coarse and a 4 figure grid reference (1km square) is too precise.

Each two figure grid reference (e.g. SU42) relates to a specific 10km square known as a hectad. The DINTY system breaks up a 10km x 10km grid square into 2km x 2km squares, known as tetrads. The DINTY indicator relates to one of the 25 tetrads within the 10km grid square (see the table below).

E	J	P	U	Z
D	I	N	T	Y
C	H	M	S	X
B	G	L	R	W
A	F	K	Q	V