Wildlife and Landscape

The majority of access land within the North Pennines AONB is designated Special Protection Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest, in recognition of its internationally important habitats and species.

The access land of the North Pennines is important for many special birds including black grouse, merlin, golden plover, curlew, and ring ouzels. Seventy-five percent of the remaining upland moorland in the world is found in Britain, making conservation of the moors of the North Pennines a critical objective.

Ground nesting birds, which threaten all display defensive behavior such as flapping their wings, flapping their body and distracting people away from nest sites. It is bad to ignore anything unusual that a bird is doing and continue walking giving the area a wide berth.

A crossland is managed for upland farming and shooting. These activities have helped to form the landscape, which we consider important today. Please respect the role of the people who depend on access land for their livelihoods. Be mindful that fires and other livestock may be controlled as part of the management of moors and hilltops. Such fires are restricted by law and are only allowed between 1 May and mid-Autumn.

Access land is on land where there is a right to walk, sightsee, picnic, birdwatch, climb and run. The right was introduced under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Access land includes mountain, moor, heath, down and regulated common land.

The routes in this leaflet have been devised to help you experience the right to walk on access land within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Walking on access land is a very different experience to following public rights of way. It means that you are free to explore interesting features such as streams and hill tops and that you can decide your own route.

By using the suggested routes and following the advice given in this leaflet, you can be confident that you are helping to minimize disturbance to some of England’s most important wildlife habitats. The route descriptions are brief, reflecting the spirit of open access, which is the right to wander responsibly over large areas. This leaflet helps you to enjoy open access and gives advice on where to find essential or data information.

Where you can go, what you can do

You can walk, sightsee, birdwatch, picnic, run and climb on access land. There is now a new right to ride a cycle or horse (except on byways open to all traffic or other legal routes crossing access land), camp, drive vehicles (except on byways open to all traffic or other legal routes crossing access land), hang gliders, paragliders (with a metal detector), use boats, collect downy plants on wood, light or cause fires or swim in any non-tidal rivers. Existing access rights are unaffected.

Some areas are restricted

Access land is not necessarily available for you to walk on at all times. Permanent restrictions may be in place for a wide range of reasons including nature conservation, land management and public safety. In addition, local restrictions may be in force.

Details of restrictions including those relating to dogs can be found at www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk or call 0845 105 3268 for current information.

Dogs may also be excluded for up to 6 weeks a year on land used for lambing and in areas important for ground nesting birds.

Dogs restrictions do not apply to trained guide/hunting dogs and dogs on land with the landowner’s permission.

Your rights to take dogs on public rights of way are unaffected by access land restrictions, but dogs must be kept under close control on public rights of way, preferably on a fixed short lead.

Dogs and cattle

Cattle may be injudicious and approach you, especially if you have a dog.

Avoid walking through a herd of cattle and never come between a cow and her calf.

If you have a dog with you feel threatened by cattle, let the dog go and retreat.

In any other circumstances dogs must be kept on a short lead near livestock.

With rights...

...come responsibilities

You are welcome to explore access land in the North Pennines but please remember that most of the area is privately owned and it is important for wildlife and is a home and place of work for many people. Please exercise your rights responsibly.

You should always follow local restrictions and signs and follow the Moorland Visitor’s Code.

The Moorland Visitor’s Code

Respect... Protect... Enjoy

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Prevent uncontrolled moorland fires.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Consider other people.

Be careful. Access land may involve rough and challenging terrain.

Keep your eyes open for hidden holes and old mine workings.

Safety on Access Land

Access land in the North Pennines is remote and often challenging terrain. Your walk will require forward planning to ensure that you keep safe.

- Take a map and compass (land know how to use them), spare food, drinks and clothing.
- Tell somebody where you are going and when you will return.
- If you are inexperienced or unsure of your own ability never walk alone.
- Check the weather forecast, but be aware that the weather in upland areas can change greatly.
- Keep an eye out for potential dangers such as mine and quarry workings.

We provide the information contained in this publication in large print, different formats and other languages on request. Call 01398 529801 for details.
If you are intending to walk on access land, it is important that you have up-to-date information about what you can do and where you can go. Use:

- Ordnance Survey Explorer series maps. The Explorer series of maps printed after May 2005 will show access land. The main maps that cover the AONB are OL19, OL31, and OL43, other areas of the AONB are covered by maps OL5, OL30, OL307 and OL315.
- Visit www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk for current information on any restrictions to walk on access land, and for general countryside access information.
- Access Helpline (0845 100 3298) gives current information, including any restrictions.
- Primary and Secondary Information Points. The Primary Information Points shown on the map and additional secondary information points provide general information on access land, and may include information on local restrictions.
- Contact the relevant County Council for further information or to report a problem on access land:
  - Cumbria County Council 01228 601022
  - Durham County Council 0191 3706000
  - Northumberland County Council 01670 533000
- Full time Rangers and voluntary Wardens and other access staff are helping to manage access land within the North Pennines.
- To find out more about the North Pennines AONB/UNESCO Global Geopark, visit www.northpennines.org.uk or call 01388 528801.

For accommodation, places to visit and things to do in the North Pennines, ring 01388 528801 to request a North Pennines Discovery Guide, or contact a Tourist Information Centre.

Self-guided Walks

The walks shown on the area map and described here have been devised to allow you to explore access land responsibly and with confidence.

- You will need an Ordnance Survey map to follow these routes on the ground, as this leaflet is not detailed enough to use alone.
- The routes may be subject to restrictions at certain times of year, please check before attempting to walk them.
- Access land is difficult terrain - note that these are not easy or surfaced routes.
- The access land that these routes cross is managed for grouse. As a result, dogs are permanently restricted.

Route 1: Hartside to Tom Smith’s Stone
Start/finish: Hartside Cafe (A686)
Approx distance: 4 miles, 6.5 kilometres
From Hartside Cafe ➔ head north along the western side of the allotment boundary ➔ cross onto the eastern side of the boundary at Hartside Height ➔ follow the boundary north across Black Fell to Tom Smith’s Stone ➔ return via the same route.

Route 2: Shacklesborough and Goldsborough
Start/finish: Balderhead Reservoir
Approx distance: 4 miles, 6.5 kilometres
From Balderhead reservoir ➔ follow the public right of way to Water Knott ➔ head uphill to Shacklesborough ➔ head east across Cotherstone Moor to Goldsborough ➔ return to Balderhead following the Pennine Way and the public right of way via Blackton.

Route 3: Coldberry Gutter
Start/finish: Bowlees Picnic area
Approx distance: 5 miles, 8 kilometres
From Bowlees ➔ follow the public right of way to Coldberry Gutter ➔ head east through the gutter and across the southern edge ➔ follow the public rights of way to Knowlegh returning to Bowlees.

Route 4: Shacklesborough and Acton Fell
Start/finish: Shacklesborough
Approx distance: 8 miles, 13 kilometres
From Shacklesborough ➔ follow the minor road past Shildon to Tom Smith’s Stone ➔ return via the same route.

Route 5: Afterheads and Middlehope Moor
Start/finish: Afterheads
Approx distance: 8 miles, 13 kilometres
From Afterheads ➔ follow the public rights of way west via High-Shield and up the track onto Middlehope Moor ➔ follow the County boundary road to the Crayven Hill ➔ cross the road and head up to the fell top ➔ head towards the Middlehope road following the boundary to the east side of Flagg Moss ➔ return to Afterheads via the right of way and route.

How to find out more