


Walking North East

FEBRUARY 2013



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Well February was a bit of a let-down walking wise. Barely managed to set foot on peat so to speak. However, managed to get to Upper Teesdale last weekend and even managed to leave some foot-prints on the small patches of snow that were left. Mind you the big hills of Cross Fell and the Dun Fells still looked as if they had a good covering.

One aspect that did please me though was the volume of bird song. The lapwings are back on the hills in quite large numbers and the noise that they were making could have woke the comatose. But on the bright side it shows that Spring is definitely on it's way, however slow it is moving.

In this issue of Walking North East we have all the walking news from February plus details of a new publication that we have released. There is also the results of February's caption contest and for March we have a bit of a brain-teaser, see further in for more details. And for details on this month's special offers on our books, as usual, have a look at the last page.



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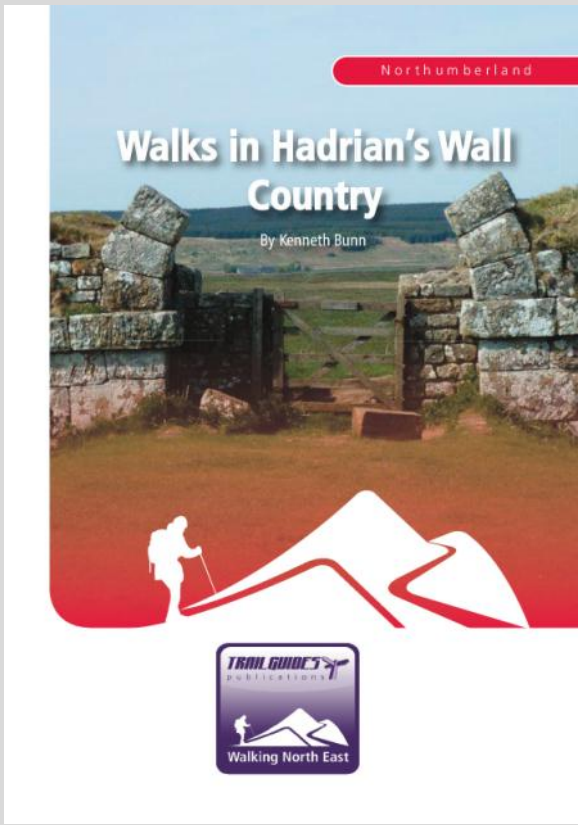
FRONT COVER PHOTO.
The Robin Hood Tree at Sycamore Gap on Hadrian's Wall.

NEW PUBLICATION

February saw the release of our second new book this year with Ken Bunn's "Walks in Hadrian's Wall Country", his second book in our Walking North East series. As you might expect from the title, this book explores the countryside and history surrounding Hadrian's Wall, one of the most recognised landscapes in Britain. Standing for almost two thousand years, this structure was designated a World Heritage Site in 1987 and over the centuries has rubbed shoulders with both history and legend. Here Roman legionnaires lived, marched and fought to hold back the barbarian hordes to the north and, according to myth, King Arthur met his doom at the hands of Mordred at the Battle of Camlann.

This is a dramatic and varied country, full of surprises for the inquisitive and a joy to walk through. Join the author in a series of eight walks as he explores the country, history and myth that surround this part of Northumberland.

This new book is now available, both as a book and a PDF download, from our website at www.trailguides.co.uk or ask at your local bookshop.



SEE OUR SPECIAL OFFERS SECTION AT THE BACK OF THIS NEWSLETTER.

Walking News :

Water voles could soon make a return to the Kielder Water & Forest Park. The endangered species, which was made famous by the Ratty character in the *Wind in the Willows* children's story, was once a common sight in the Northumberland forest until predatory mink invaded its stronghold and wiped out the population. The last local sightings of water vole was back to the 1970s. Now the numbers of mink numbers at Kielder are thought to be very low with only a few being spotted by rangers in recent years. The reason for their decline is thought to be the expanding otter population, the two species do not co-exist although no one knows the reason for this.

The Forestry Commission has now linked up with the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Tyne Rivers Trust to devise a two year project to survey the forest and establish whether mink still remain and to also look for any traces of lingering water vole populations. Initial discussions have been held with the Heritage Fund about potentially funding the work. If the project gains funding, then the survey will search for mink through sightings, droppings and the use of floating rafts which mink climb aboard to investigate, leaving behind tell-tale foot-prints.

This project is the first of a two part plan which will hopefully see the voles return to former haunts in areas like the Kielder Burn and the North Tyne. The first part of the plan being to establish whether any mink remain as this was the main reason for their previous decline. The second part would then see wild water voles relocated to Kielder as part of a wider North East reintroduction project. Water voles have suffered big declines across England over recent decades and so returning them to what was part of their natural range will help the re-establishment of this endangered species.

A plan has been proposed to send 44-tonne timber wagons down a section of the Pennine Way. The owners of Cam Forest, situated near Hawes, in Wensleydale, have applied to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to create a new track to run between the 240-hectare spruce forest and the Roman track-way of Cam High Road and from there into the road system. According to the forest owners, the Forestry Commission require the felling and replanting of the land to protect red squirrels and if they route the timber wagons along the Pennine Way, Pennine Bridleway and Dales Way routes, then the number and length of journeys to and from the forest would be reduced.

The plans put forward by the owners have been actively designed in ways that reduce visual impact on the landscape and the application has won backing from scores of residents and firms, with Hawes and High Abbotside Parish Council saying the trust's preferred transport route would "lift the threat of ten years of daily timber wagons using roads totally unsuited to this traffic through Gayle and Hawes". Supporters of the plan to build a new section of the track from the forest to Cam High Road say it would mean wagons would not have to pass through 20 miles of roads in the heart of the park.

However, opponents of the plan say that the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, which is due to discuss the plan in February, should reject it for being in direct conflict with the statutory duties of a national park, and being totally incompatible with the wilderness quality and tranquility of the area. They point out that the plan is also in conflict with the Traffic Regulation Order placed on the route by the Authority in 2008, to stop 4x4s and motorcycles using and damaging this enormously important recreational route.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park are seeking volunteers to join a focus group that will have a big say in the look and content of the park authority website. The Authority is planning to re-organise it's existing site, making it easier to find information while making it more enjoyable to look at. The site is also intended to be more interactive, with opportunities for visitors to both provide feed back about the National Park and also provide content for the site, for example by submitting photographs, videos and comments. A small focus group was set-up in 2009 when the current website was designed and this idea is now being re-established to collect opinions. Details about the focus group and how to join can be found at www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/web-focus-group.

A route in north Northumberland has been named as the number 2 best coastal walk in the country by a national newspaper. The article in The Independent names the ten mile walk from Craster to Low Newton as one of the nation's best and describes it as a 'must' for those that like their food. It recommends dropping into the Jolly Fisherman pub/restaurant in Craster before heading past Dunstanburgh and Embleton Bay and finishing with a pint at the Ship Inn and Brewery at Low Newton. No surprises here then and is something that we all knew, the Northumberland coastline is one of the country's most beautiful stretches of coast and has been an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for a number of years now.

The North York Moors National Park is to develop a new 4.5 km cycle way close to its visitor centre at Sutton Bank, near Thirsk. The proposed cycle way will use a combination of existing bridleways as well as a newly created off-road trail. The route will run through a softwood plantation using forest management tracks and then over an area currently covered by heather, crowberry and grass where the new track will be made from local limestone.

The House of Commons will be hearing about the value of the outdoor industry to the nation this week. MP David Rutley, who is co-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on mountaineering, will speak for fifteen minutes on the subject with the speech being followed by a ministerial response and then a short debate. Andrew Denton, chief executive of the Outdoor Industry Association, said: "The OIA has a close working relationship with David Rutley MP and the British Mountaineering Council. Together, we have been lobbying for some time for an opportunity to address the House on the subject of the value of the outdoor economy to Britain and the myriad ways in which our industry contributes to health, tourism, sport and other aspects of society. We were delighted that the Speaker has called for this speech and debate. I am now liaising closely with our colleagues at the British Mountaineering Council and Ramblers to support David in his preparation and ensure the maximum possible impact for the outdoor industries."

An 18 metre high wind turbine at Brusselton near Bishop Auckland in County Durham has had all three of its blades snapped off last week after a night of heavy wind and rain. The turbine, which was only erected last year, had a blade diameter of 16 metres and debris was scattered all across the field with some pieces at least 36 metres away from the tower.

One of Britain's rarest birds has been sighted at a North East nature reserve. The Bittern, a relative of the heron, has been spotted at Durham Wildlife Trust's Low Barns Nature Reserve at Witton le Wear. The bird, which has pale brown plumage, can be seen in the west pasture reed beds of the reserve.

A decision to examine the controversial plans to expand the boundaries of two national parks before a public inquiry sits has been welcomed. Minister for the natural environment, Richard Benyon, said that Natural England's proposals to extend the boundaries of the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Parks would be examined at a four-week public inquiry to be held in June. The hearing into the plan, which would increase the combined area of both parks by 193 square miles, was triggered after five councils lodged objections. In total over 3,000 objections, representations or expressions of support have been received in response to the proposals, including the objections from five local authorities. There is a statutory requirement for a public inquiry to be held if at least one local authority with land in a proposed extension raises an objection to a relevant variation order.

No venue has yet been announced for a pre-inquiry meeting, which will take place in March. Following the inquiry the inspector will make recommendations to the Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson, who will then decide whether to modify, approve or reject the plans.

The Government has announced that it has finally abandoned plans to sell off England's public forests and woodland. The news marks the end of the Government's disastrous plan to sell off the Forestry Commission, which prompted widespread protest and a half-million-signature petition against former Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman's proposals. The resulting outcry also led to the setting up of the Independent Panel on Forestry led by the Bishop of Liverpool, many of whose recommendations the Government has accepted in full.

As well as announcing the abandonment of the sell-off, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced that a new independent body will be set up alongside the Forestry Commission to own and maintain the public forest estate. The new, independent body ensuring that the public's woods are held in trust and managed for the long term benefit of future generations, nature and the economy.

In addition, after the occurrence of the Chalara ash dieback, Defra has stated that tree health would become a priority. The Forestry Commission's budget has been increased by £3.5 million next year specifically to make up for lost income from sales of woodland and an extra £2 million has been allocated to recognise any additional pressures arising from Chalara.



A picturesque green lane in the North York Moors National Park at Ugglebarnby, near Whitby, is to be closed due to serious damage caused by 4 x 4 vehicles. A total of 200 metres of the route, which is known locally as Seggimire Lane, has suffered serious surface damage as a result of the incident which included having at least fifteen stones of an old, historic 'trod' or pathway being pulled up and thrown into the ditch. Now due to the vandalism, North Yorkshire County Council is to close the unsurfaced lane to all motor vehicles until a long-term solution is found. The surface of the lane and the historic stone trods are now in a very fragile condition due to the deep ruts and churned up mud and are quite likely to suffer more serious damage by any future use by vehicles.

Once regularly used, the North York Moors' stone pathways, which are known as 'trods', have been fast disappearing since 1900. Archaeologists, cartographers and historians now view these trods as an integral feature of the area's economic and industrial history. Some of the trods date back to the medieval monks, while others may have been linked to the inland distribution of salt and fish from the harbours of the coast and many were used to link the farms, churches and villages across the moors.

Britain's biggest walking charity, the Ramblers, has handed a petition carrying thousands of names in to the Government, asking it to rethink its plans for the national trails of England. The Government is proposing to change the way the trails are looked after, handing their management over to hard-pressed local authorities and voluntary groups and leaving them without any national co-ordination. The charity argues these plans pose a real risk to the quality of the trails and will also prevent the country from collectively harnessing the tourism, economic and health benefits that result from having these trails. Instead of the Government's proposals, the Ramblers suggest the creation of a national charity to protect these national assets and unleash their full potential. As well as the 18,000 signatures on the petition, the Ramblers call for a national trails trust has already received endorsements from the Outdoor Industries Association; British Council for Archaeology; British Horse Society; Sport and Recreation Alliance; Long Distance Walkers Association; CTC – The National Cycling Charity and a number of celebrity outdoor enthusiasts including Janet Street-Porter and Sir Chris Bonington.

The North York Moors National Park Authority has received a planning application for the development of a new potash mine at Dove's Nest Farm, to the south of Sneaton village, near Whitby. This is a major proposal for the National Park and would involve the construction of two deep mine shafts along with their associated developments on land at Dove's Nest Farm and Haxby Plantation. The company involved, York Potash, proposes to extract polyhalite mineral from underneath an area covering 253 square kilometres to the south and west of Whitby. This is a significant proposal and the Authority will need to carefully assess the both the potential economic benefits as well as the environmental impact.

The Wensleydale Creamery in Hawes, producers of Wensleydale Cheese, has signed a three-year sponsorship deal to support the Swaledale Festival. The festival which features music, poetry, drama, art and walks will run from May 25 until June 8 this year. As part of the two week festival, towns and villages around Swaledale, Arkengarthdale and Wensleydale will host dozens of events this summer, with artists including a BBC Young Musician of the Year finalist, classical guitarist John Williams, Northern Sinfonia, comedian Barry Cryer, poet Roger McGough and the Leyland Band. The Creamery will specifically support a performance of William Walton's Façade, given by the instrumental ensemble Contraband conducted by Graham Coatman, and featuring a group of 30 local children from Askrigg and Bainbridge Schools and Richmond Youth Theatre. The Swaledale Festival dates back to the 1970s and this year is set to attract £350,000 of direct economic benefit into the three Dales and bring 7,000 festival-goers to the region.

Teesdale is set to host its own walking festival later this year in a bid to attract more visitors to the area. The organisers hope that the new festival, which has been inspired by similar events in the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District, will draw attention to what the Durham Dales has to offer walkers and will boost tourism by attracting more people to the dales. The festival, which is being led by Teesdale Marketing, will see a number of themed walks around both Teesdale and Weardale with the events being held over a week and having a range of themes, including heritage, the local environment and the link between Charles Dickens and Teesdale.

The first festival will happen this autumn and will coincide with the 75th anniversary of Alfred Wainwright's

Pennine Journey, an 11-day 211-mile walk through the Pennines from Settle to Hadrian's Wall. It is intended that the festival will be held twice a year, every spring and autumn with, possibly, a "mini festival" this spring to get things started.



One of the most endangered insect species in Britain has been given a big boost towards survival by a team of conservationists and volunteers led by North Yorkshire County Council's countryside service. The rare tansy beetle (*Chrysolina graminis*) is only found at the one location in the UK and that is along 45 kilometres of the River Ouse near York and even at its other habitats around the world, it is also classified as an endangered species. Known locally as the Jewel of York, the tansy beetle feeds on the tansy plant, whose habitat along the Ouse is being overrun by invasive plants like Himalayan balsam, and shaded out by dense willow.

Now with the aid of a grant from the SITA Trust, North Yorkshire's countryside service has just completed the co-ordination of a four-year conservation programme designed to protect the remaining tansy beetle population and create the right conditions for its survival. The work was delivered and supported by partners including the City of York Council, University of York and the Environment Agency. The programme has cleared Himalayan balsam and coppiced willow from 11 sites along the Ouse between Beningborough and Riccall, planted new tansy and also provided protection to prevent grazing cattle from eating the plant leaving it available to the beetles.

Primitive tools hidden for thousands of years have been unearthed during a project to remove overhead electricity poles in Malham, in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority is working with Electricity North West, the company that manages and owns the power network around Malham, in order to reduce the visual impact of overhead power lines and electricity poles on the beautiful landscape of the National Trust's Malham Moor Estate by laying these cables underground. During the first phase of the £300,000 project, which will remove twenty-three electricity poles and replace them with 2.2 km of under-

ground cable, dozens of prehistoric flints were found. Work was temporarily halted while archaeology students from Bradford University carried out an investigation under the supervision of Dr Randolph Donahue.

The excavations have provided evidence of how the Yorkshire Dales have been attracting visitors for thousands of years. Malham Tarn itself, was a summer hunting ground in the Mesolithic period due to the number of wildfowl on the water and the range of good-quality grazing that attracted game around the tarn, and was a site that was visited again and again over the course of thousands of years. The hunters of the Mesolithic lived in a very sustainable manner and used materials extremely sparingly so the majority of the items Dr Donahue's team found were tiny parts of small flint tools. This discovery highlights the fact that Malham is one of the most significant areas within the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Ofwat, the regulatory body for water utilities, has announced plans to offer incentives to transfer water across regional and company boundaries from where it is plentiful to where it is scarce. The aim is to encourage water-rich regions like our own North East with its Kielder, Cow Green and other smaller reservoirs, to transfer their resources to dryer areas of the country. However, a spokesman for Northumbrian Water has said that while the North East was well placed for water, it would be impractical to transport this directly to drier parts of the United Kingdom. Instead people rather than water would have to move if droughts continued in the South.

Northumbrian Water has supplied water to other areas before, but only in times of severe emergency. In 1995, a drought in Yorkshire led to around 1,000 tankers a day taking water from Long Newton reservoir near Stockton on Tees, down to Eccup, near Leeds. The operation transferred six million gallons of water a day, but at a cost to the Yorkshire utilities of £1 million a week and this lasted for several weeks.

A scheme to remove overhead power cables and improve the landscape of upper Teesdale has hit problems with residents in the area labelling the scheme as being 'daft'. Under the £180,000 project Northern Powergrid is putting electricity lines underground at Langdon Beck and Holwick but it has emerged that while the electricity cables will be placed underground, many of the redundant posts will not be taken down because they also carry telephone lines and BT is not burying its cables.

The highest and longest public forest road in England celebrates its fortieth birthday in May this year. The 12-mile Kielder Forest Drive rises to over 1,500 feet as it links Kielder village with Blakehopeburnhaugh in Redesdale crossing a landscape inhabited by wild goats, deer and birds of prey. The road took many months to



build in 1973 and provided unprecedented access to one of northern Europe's largest man-made forests. To mark the anniversary the Forestry Commission will, on 11 May, stage the annual Kielder Vintage and Classic Vehicle Show where scores of antique vehicles from the past years of motoring will hit the trail. Anyone who owns a car, motorbike or van from yesteryear is invited to join in.

40,000 trees are being planted in Guisborough Forest over the coming months and all by hand. A small army of Forestry Commission workers will be planting the trees including Sitka spruce and Serbian spruce in a race against time as trees must be planted before the weather gets too warm and sapling roots become active. Unlike many aspects of forestry, tree planting has not been mechanised and is still all done by hand. Fortunately a skilled operator is capable of planting more than 1,000 trees per day and given the size of the job and limited time, that's just as well. The planting is a trial scheme while the forest is undergoing a long-term plan to increase its diversity.

A three year campaign aimed at attracting tourists into County Durham has been launched. Visit County Durham, is the team behind the campaign, whose aim is to attract more visitors to County Durham from around the UK and encourage them to spend longer in the county. The £650,000 campaign, which has been funded by Visit England and County Durham businesses, will start by promoting the county for walking and cycling, especially in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the launch was held. Tourism makes up 10 per cent of the County Durham economy with more than 11,000 jobs relying on tourism, around 650 accommodation based businesses and more than 80 visitor attractions across the area. This is the first time there has been a campaign like this for the county and it is being supported by the North Pennines AONB Partnership, Hamsterley Forest, Northumbrian Water, Durham Heritage Coast Partnership and Dalton Park as well as 70 smaller businesses.

A public inquiry will be held later this month to finally determine a long-running dispute over a footpath. Hurworth Parish Council hopes to see the footpath, which runs along the River Tees, from Croft Workingmen's Club to Rockcliffe Hall Hotel, used as a public right of way.

The dispute started when the parish council applied to add the footpath to the definitive maps of the area, after a locked gate was put across the route. Croft WMC disputes the parish council's claims and states that there has never been any legitimate public access to the path. At a Darlington Borough Council rights of way panel in 2011, the parish council submitted 164 witness statements in support of its claim, detailing use of the footpath going back for more than 70 years. The panel found in favour of the villagers, but the club subsequently appealed the decision and the path has remained closed off. The appeal by Croft WMC led to the matter being referred to the Planning Inspectorate, which will decide whether or not the footpath will be declared a public right of way at a two-day inquiry to be held on February 26 and 27 when both sides will be invited to put their arguments across.

The Forestry Commission has disclosed that a second case of ash dieback disease has been identified in Northumberland. The disease was found on a tree near Shilbottle, south of Alnwick, and was initially labelled as a major "wider environment" red alert, which is contagious and can be spread. However, since then the case had been downgraded to a lower-level non-contagious yellow alert on a recently-planted site. Details of the exact location were being kept quiet while further investigations are being carried out.

Northumberland's first "red alert" case occurred three months ago and was discovered at Wooler, in north Northumberland, close to the edge of Northumberland National Park and led to a full-scale alert, with a team of National Park officers sweeping a six-mile radius before giving the all-clear. Nationally the disease has been concentrated almost totally on the eastern side of the country, confirming the theory that the disease has been carried on the wind from mainland Europe and in the last month the number of cases nationwide has risen from 291 to 369. The first identification in the North East was near Newcastle Airport, where a non-contagious site was identified in early November. Further cases at Seaham and Newton Aycliffe in County Durham have also been found.

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, a huge network of wagonways in the region transported coal from the collieries to the North East's rivers and ports for shipment. Now more of these wagonways which once underpinned the industrial North East are to be turned into cycle and walking routes. A couple of years ago North Tyneside Council successfully bid for more than £2 million worth of funding and transformed more than thirty miles of these historic wagonways into routes used by cyclists, horse riders, runners, joggers and walkers. Heritage and orienteering trails were developed including signposts and information boards telling people about local history and wildlife with full lighting being installed along 14 km of the most urban sections of the wagonways. Where appropriate, new planting was introduced to encourage biodiversity and benefit wildlife in the area while wildlife underpasses and bridges were also installed at appropriate points.

This is now being followed by Groundwork South Tyneside and Newcastle launching its own Wagonways and Waterways project in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund. A consultation process is currently under way to help decide which routes which will be developed. One possibility is the route from the Bowes railway site at Springwell Village between Gateshead and Sunderland, which transported coal through Jarrow to the Tyne staithes for loading on to collier vessels. Another targeted route is the wagonway which ran from Fawdon in Newcastle to Seaton Burn and the Tyne. The plans of the project include improvements to the old wagonway routes, such as installing way markers and heritage information boards documenting the history of the wagonways and the collieries in the area.

The mysterious black cat of Tynedale has been spotted for the first time this year. Seen last week by a man walking his dog in woodland near Haltwhistle, the elusive feline is said to be around knee height and much larger than a normal domesticated cat.

A series of small riverside caves that, according to local legend, were carved out by fairies is to be restored. The Fairy Cupboards, next to the River Tees between Romaldkirk and Cotherstone, are in fact a rare geological feature and have been popular with families, children and walkers for generations. However, over recent years tree growth and the spread of rhododendron bushes have masked the views of the river. Now the Tees Rivers Trust is about to embark on a project to improve the riverside walk by restoring the views. Scrub, including an excessive number of tree seedlings, will be removed from along the footpath along with the rhododendrons and this will allow native species to re-establish themselves. The project will also install a number of nest boxes for pied flycatchers. The project is being funded by the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Project and it is now recruiting volunteers to help with the work.

A seaside town in Northumberland has announced that it is to hold a two-week festival in honour of its local puffin population. The town of Amble has 36,000 puffins living locally and in the last two weeks of May thousands of young, known as pufflings, will be newly-hatched. The event which aims to boost tourism in Amble, will feature boat trips close to Coquet Island, which is situated a mile out to sea, and which is run by the RSPB as an important haven for seabirds. There will also be street entertainment, arts and crafts, a food and drink festival, nature walks and bird watching. The festival will take place in Amble from Saturday May 18 to Saturday June 1.

The annual planting programme for the forests of the north east is going to see a race against time to plant two million trees, all by hand. Over 700 hectares of land will be replanted, mainly in Kielder Forest, but also in Hamsterley Forest, and parts of Rothbury Forest. A wider variety of different tree species are going to be planted in a move to ensure forests are more resilient to climate change and the growing problem of tree diseases. Sitka spruce, which is best suited to wet ground conditions, will continue to be the commercial mainstay at Kielder but elsewhere, where conditions will allow, new species will be trialled, including the Wellingtonia, otherwise known as the Giant sequoia. In Hamsterley Forest and nearby Slaley Forest, 130,000 trees will be planted, including, in a move to diversify the forest habitats, 25,000 broadleaves such as rowan, birch and alder.



However, this has all got to be done within a narrow time window as the trees must be planted before the weather gets too warm and the roots of the saplings become too active causing stress to the young trees during their relocation from the nursery to the wood. Unlike many aspects of forestry, tree planting has not been mechanised, it is still all done by hand but a skilled operator can plant over 1,000 trees per day. North East forests are crucial to the UK with Kielder alone producing 25% of all the timber grown in England plus they also provide a haven for endangered wildlife like red squirrels and many birds of prey.

THE deadline for comments from the public on a scheme to build the UK's longest single-span footbridge across the River Tees near Barnard Castle has been extended. A decision was due by the end of the year on whether planning permission would be sought for the £1.3 million, 265-metre long suspension bridge. However, the consultation period has now been extended until March 10 and a dedicated website set up after a number of requests were made for all of the documents relating to the project to be made publicly available in the same place on-line. These details are all now on-line at www.durham.gov.uk/teesdalebridge and anyone who wishes to make their views known can now do so by completing a questionnaire on the site. The most recent surveys of opinion showed a 60-40 split in favour of the bridge. If and when the scheme is completed then the suspension bridge would be the centrepiece of a circular walk from Barnard Castle through the ancient woodland that surrounds the town and may also feature on other walks including the Teesdale Way.

The North York Moors National Park Authority's new management plan has identified the restoration of ancient woodlands planted with conifers as a key conservation priority. The National Park contains the highest concentration of these sites in the north of England. Significant numbers of these important conservation sites are at risk of decline or loss with many of the areas of ancient woodland that are planted with conifers coming up to the time when the trees are mature for harvesting as timber. In addition, many ancient sites have poor access and the resulting lack of management can be detrimental to their condition.

Ancient woodlands are areas that have been more or less continuously covered by trees for at least 400 years with some even having links back to the wild wood established after the last ice age. Most support a ground

flora consisting of some of the best known and loved of our woodland flowers such as bluebell, primrose, wood anemone and wild daffodil with these ancient woodland sites being some of our richest wildlife habitats. Although woodland covers 22% of the North York Moors National Park, only 4% is classed as ancient and of this 4% only half still consists of native trees and shrubs. The remainder being classed as ancient woodland sites but having been replanted, mainly with conifer trees. Whilst the impact of this can vary depending on the species planted and the management techniques used, this change has had a very detrimental impact on the wildlife and landscape value of the wood in many cases. Fewer invertebrates such as beetles and moths live in sites that contain non-native trees because the trees have not evolved here and most conifer trees cast a much denser shade than native species and so suppress plants and shrubs growing at a lower level and in addition, over a long term, their needles can acidify the soil which will change the type of plant that the area can support. There is also concern that the longer that an ancient woodland site is covered by conifer trees the less likely it is to regain some of its original wildlife and landscape value.

Opposition is growing to plans to site the largest wind turbine yet proposed in Coquetdale, at a farm just north west of Thropton. The 78-metre high wind turbine would be sited on the Cheviot Fringe, which constitutes the outlying foothills of the Cheviots, and to the east of the Northumberland National Park. The design and access statement describes the turbine as being of 'medium scale' and says that the overall impact on the character of the Upper Coquet area would be 'slight/moderate adverse'. But does add that this would not be permanent as the windmill's life cycle is around 25 years.

A campaign group is calling for a public inquiry after the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority granted permission for 44-tonne timber trucks to travel along the Pennine Way, Britain's most popular long-distance trail. The Yorkshire Dales Society said it would press the Government to hold a Planning Inspectorate hearing into the Cam Forest Trust's scheme to create a new track from the 240-hectare spruce forest in Wensleydale over the Roman way of Cam High Road for the heavy wagons to use. The trust, which had bought the forest last September, said the Forestry Commission requires the felling and replanting of the land to protect the red squirrel and that by allowing timber wagons along the a mile of the Pennine Way and three miles of the Dales Way routes, the number and length of journeys to and from the forest would be reduced.

The call to hold a public inquiry comes only days after a packed Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority meeting rejected the pleas by the society and the Wensleydale branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England to defer its decision. Members of the Authority unanimously granted the plan but placed conditions to allow only eight 10 mph wagon movements before 9.30 am and after 3 pm on weekdays, over two 40-week periods that are spread over a decade. The decision to permit the trucks to travel along Cam High Road to Far Gearstones Farm, near Ribbleshead, rather than pass through the villages of Gayle and Hawes has been welcomed by local residents.

According to new research by North-East scientists, a widespread badger cull will not solve the problem of tuberculosis in cattle. However, Durham University researchers say that it may play a part in controlling the infection levels in specific problem hot-spots within the UK. A cull of badgers is due to start this summer amidst claims that controlling badger numbers would reduce the spread of TB in cattle. Durham University's Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience has investigated the spread of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in new research and concludes that a badger cull is too simplistic. The research shows badgers almost certainly play a part in spreading the disease, but that their impact over the decades has been far less than suggested. Very carefully arranged culling may have a part to play alongside other measures in areas of particular prevalence such as South West England and South Wales, but this research suggests that extending the policy elsewhere may neither be justified nor particularly effective. As a disease bTB has been around for several hundred years but appears to have become more prevalent here in the UK because of the intensive cattle breeding and farming from the 18th century onwards. Indeed after the Second World War, bTB fell dramatically because of a policy of slaughtering all cattle that tested positive. The probability is that other animals do carry TB including badgers and deer, but cattle-to-cattle transfer is also likely to be an important factor and after the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 different parts of the country were restocked with cattle from the south west, a traditional breeding area of bTB. The extension of a cull could even possibly make the problem worse as when badgers are disturbed, they seem to perceive they are being attacked and move from their original area by a kilometre

or more and join other badger groups, thus spreading the disease. The research concludes that the government should take a more comprehensive approach to controlling TB by the improvement of cattle controls including improved testing, tighter movement controls and, eventually, a useable vaccine.

Walkers who visit the Ferryhill Carrs nature reserve in County Durham will see three Highland cattle which have temporarily moved in. The yearlings have been introduced to the reserve, which is situated on the edge of Ferryhill,, to graze on the rough scrub and grasslands. The cattle, which are generally considered to be one of nature's lawnmowers, are quite happy to eat most plants and so will clear parts of the 200 acre site of patches of aggressive vegetation thus encouraging wildflowers such as yellow rattle and birdsfoot trefoil to grow. These will in turn supports the food chain encouraging a growth in insect and bird life. Part of the nature reserve is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and managed by Natural England and the rest is managed by Durham County Council. The council received funding from SITA, which supports environmental and community projects, to bring the cattle from their usual home at Waldridge, near Chester-le-Street, to Ferryhill and to install fences at the site.

Part of the Kielder Observatory has been dedicated to astronomy legend and TV personality, Sir Patrick Moore. Sir Patrick's colleagues on the BBC show the Sky at Night, plus impressionist Jon Culshaw, a keen amateur astronomer, joined the observatory's bosses at a dedication ceremony at the obseratory, which tied in with filming of a new episode of the show. The observatory, which benefits from England's darkest skies, has dedicated its largest turret, home of one of the biggest public telescopes in the UK, to Sir Patrick, who passed away on December 9.

After the news a couple of weeks ago that a rare bittern, a relative of the heron, had been seen at the Low Barns reserve near Witton-le-Wear in County Durham, it now seems that two more of the birds have decided to take up residence in the reed-beds of the reserve. The secretive birds are difficult to see as they silently move through the reeds at the water's edge looking for fish but now three individual birds have been seen. The bittern's dependence on the reducing number of reed-beds coupled with a very small population make them a Red List species and despite a recent recovery in their numbers, they still remain one of the most threatened birds in the UK. The RSPB rates the bittern as one of the rarest birds in the UK with them being more often heard than seen, with the males having a distinctive booming cry that is heard during the spring. The RSPB's red-rating means urgent action is needed to ensure their long-term survival.

This year's edition of The Visitor, the free newspaper produced by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority as the official visitor guide to the National Park, is now available for 2013. The 40 pages include a comprehensive, month-by-month guide to events in the National Park as well as stories and features about some of the places, people and wildlife that make the park such a unique corner of the country. Over 200,000 copies of the newspaper have been printed and it is being distributed both locally and nationally. Locally the newspaper is available at the National Park Centres at Grassington, Malham, Hawes, Aysgarth Falls and Reeth as well as at Tourist Information Centres, libraries and other outlets up and down the country.

Reader's letters and emails.

We are always willing to print reader's comments and reply to questions. Both the email and postal address are on the Trailguides website.

Contributions from readers will always be considered for inclusion within this magazine. Please feel free to send any articles, news or other pieces that you feel would be of interest to our readers to trailguides@uwclub.net.

A gamekeeper working for an estate near Pickering in North Yorkshire has admitted to two offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, one of capturing a buzzard and another of using a cage for the purpose of injuring, killing or taking wild birds, the incident happening in August last year. The cage was discovered by a Natural England officer while carrying out a survey on the estate and the prosecution was brought by the RSPB. The buzzard was trapped in the cage with the cage being baited with a live pigeon. The gamekeeper, who has already lost his job on the estate because of the incident, was given a community order, requiring him to do 120 hours of unpaid work and ordered to pay £85 court costs. According to the senior investigating officer for the RSPB, North Yorkshire currently has the worst problems with wild birds being shot, caught or poisoned.

The Government's advisory committee on pesticides has advised that a European-wide ban on using the herbicide Asulam, which is used to control the growth of bracken, will be lifted for a temporary period during the bracken growing season over summer and autumn. The EU ban was introduced last year to stop the chemical entering the food chain through spinach, Asulam was widely used on continental spinach farms. The temporary lifting of the ban has been welcomed, but experts said they would continue to press for the rules to be changed to permit its use in combating the growth of bracken. If Brussels do re-register the herbicide for use against bracken then this will not happen until 2016 at the earliest and in the meantime emergency authorisation will have to be applied for every year.

Asulam has proved to be the only effective herbicide against bracken and the government-approved chemical has been safely used on moorland for a number of years. Without the use of Asulam there are real fears that vast tracts of moorland would suffer from massive bracken infestation and this could change the face of Britain's countryside, devastating wildlife and destroying grouse moor management. Three-quarters of the world's heather moorland is found in the UK and without the use of Asulam, it is estimated that around 50 per cent of this would have already been lost. The decision to continue with Asulam is beneficial on many fronts such as: human health, bio-diversity, agriculture, leisure, historic environment etc. Research has shown that the environment created by bracken beds tends to favour the sheep tick *Ixodes ricinus* with up to 70 per cent of all tick activity in heath and dry moorland areas being in bracken dominated habitats. It has also been shown that bracken can completely re-establish its dominance within about three years if treatment is not continued.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Fancy a challenge walk in some of the best countryside that the Durham Dales has to offer ? Have a go at this year's Durham Dales Challenge. This event, organised by the Northumbria branch of the Long Distance Walkers Association, is now in its 24th year and is one of the most popular events in the North East. This year's Challenge is being held on Saturday, 22nd June and starts at Wolsingham in Weardale. Two options are being offered, a 16-mile route and a 30-mile one. Both routes are circular, starting in Weardale before travelling over the watershed into Teesdale and then looping back into Weardale and returning to Wolsingham. The event is open to both walkers and runners with entrants on both routes being set away at 09.00 am.

More details, and a downloadable entry form, can be accessed on the Northumbria LDWA website at <http://www.ldwa.org.uk/Northumbria/N/1475/2013-durham-dales-challenge.html> Or alternatively you can enter online via SPORTident at https://www.sientries.co.uk/event.php?event_id=909 Closing date for all entries is Friday, 14th June.

COMPETITION

All in all there were three entries to February's 'put a caption to the picture' competition and as there were only the three entries we'll send a copy of Ken Bunn's new book, 'Walks in Hadrian's Wall Country', out to each one of them. So copies of the book will shortly be winging their way out to Geoff Holland, Neil Wilson, and Rosalind Fish.

The winning entries that go with the photo below are.

The entry from Geoff is. **Quote from sheep in foreground: 'Love the hat but is it not a question of mutton dressed as lamb!'**

From Neil we have. **'I'm sorry sir, but I'm going to have to include this as an extra bedroom and tax you accordingly!'**

And finally from Rosalind. **From the sheep in the foreground: 'No thanks, I'll not bother with a sandwich, I'm vegetarian!'**



NEW CONTEST

As we've been doing over the last couple of months, we are going to have another contest to launch the release of one of our new books. The book in question this month is 'Walking around Osmotherley and the Cleveland Hills', our first book on the North York Moors.

This month the contest is a bit of a brain-teaser. The first person who sends an email to trailguides@uwclub.net with the correct answer to this question will receive a free copy of the book when it becomes available at the end of March.

And the question is

What are Starfish and what are they doing on the North York Moors ??

PUBLICATION LIST 01.03.2013

Below is a full list of all of our current Walking North East publications.

Durham

Ancient Stones.
Hamsterley Forest.
The Barningham Trail.
The High Hills of Teesdale.
Mid-Teesdale Walks.
Walks from Stanhope.
Walking in Weardale.

Northumberland

The Cheviot Hills.
The Hills of Upper Coquetdale.
Walks from Kirknewton.
Walks Around Rothbury & Coquetdale.
Walks from Wooler.
Walks on the Wild Side: The Cheviot Hills.
Walks in Hadrian's Wall Country. **New publication.**

North Yorkshire

Walks from Gunnerside.
Walks around Reeth and Upper Swaledale.
Walking the Hills of Upper Swaledale.

Coming soon:

Walking around Osmotherley and the Cleveland Hills.

All books can be obtained via our website at www.trailguides.co.uk or alternatively just ask your local book shop to order them.

FORTHCOMING BOOK

March sees the release of another new publication in our Walking North East series of guidebooks. 'Walking around Osmotherley and the Cleveland Hills' by Keven Shevels will be released on the 31st March and is the first of our books to be based on the North York Moors. The North York Moors is one of the country's most visited national parks and is an area visited by many of the regions walkers.

The new book is very much in the same vein as Keven's previous books, taking the reader on a series of nine walks in the countryside surrounding the village of Osmotherley.

“The village of Osmotherley lies on the edge of the North York Moors National Park, at the point where the rugged Cleveland Hills meet the more gentle, rolling Hambleton Hills. This is an area with a history that stretches back to the early days of human exploration and settlement. A history that has left it's mark right up to the present time.

Here the walker is presented with a mixture of landscapes to explore. The rugged, heather moorland, the rolling grassland of the lower hills, and the forests of conifer and broad-leaved trees that line the edges of the moors. Join the author on a series of walks as he explores both the landscape and the history of this part of one of the country's most popular national parks.”

MONTHLY SPECIAL OFFER

With the release of Ken Bunn's new book 'Walks in Hadrian's Wall Country' we now have two books on Northumberland within our publication list from this popular writer. The two books being 'Walks in Hadrian's Wall Country' and 'Walks Around Rothbury and Coquetdale'.

For March only, up to the 31st March, you have the opportunity of buying both books together and save 15% of the retail price. Instead of paying the normal £19.98, you only pay £16.98.

A saving of £3.00 on the normal list price.

This offer runs from the 1st to the 31st of March and only applies to sales direct from our website. See our website at www.trailguides.co.uk to order.

This offer does not apply to purchases of PDF's.

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Contributions from readers will always be considered for inclusion within this magazine. Please feel free to send any articles, news or other pieces that you feel would be of interest to our readers to trailguides@uwclub.net.

