Welcome to the East Allen Valley within the North Pennines AONB and Global Geopark

In the past, the landscape here would have been dominated by the industrial trappings of lead mining but now it is a tranquil, unspoilt landscape with a rich history and vibrant natural beauty. In recognition of this it is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The area is also a Global Geopark – an accolade endorsed by UNESCO.

A lovely 5.5 mile (9km) walk from Allenheads exploring the wonderful wildlife of wildflowers in the East Allen valley. Precious edges - the banks and margins of the rivers that flow through the North Pennines are of vital importance to our wildlife. Long-recognised as crucial corridors along which different creatures move through the landscape, they are now often the best places to see wildlife that has all but disappeared elsewhere. A walk along the River East Allen clearly shows the richness and value of this narrow strip of land.

Bee lines

Many wildflowers bloom along the banks of the East Allen, their colours and shapes subtly changing as spring moves through summer. Look for the soft whites and creams of wild garlic, apples, plums, sweet chestnut and meadowsweet and the soft whites and creams of wild garlic, apples, plums, sweet chestnut and meadowsweet. These species can be invasive and may out-compete other plants but, if you’re a bee, they are nonetheless good places to forage.

Walking the rivers

A lack of pollution ensures an abundance of invertebrate life within the fast-flowing waters. Stoneflies and mayflies hatch out to dance in the dappled sunlight and lurking on the riverbed, the larvae of caddis fly build miniature tubular igloos which hatch out to dance in the dappled sunlight. As spring moves through summer. Look for the soft whites and creams of wild garlic, apples, plums, sweet chestnut and meadowsweet. These species can be invasive and may out-compete other plants but, if you’re a bee, they are nonetheless good places to forage.
From the car park, take the track with Allendale Inn on your right and go through the gate ahead. Follow the footpath sign to the left off the track and onto a small path.

Go straight ahead towards a gate leading up to a cottage and just before the gate, cross a bridge and turn right onto a path between trees and a wall. Continue in the same direction as this path joins a track, heading uphill past buildings on the right.

Take the right hand fork in the track by the large house, following it downhill to a cottage. Take the small path to the right of the cottage, leading downhill and over the river to join the road.

Turn left along the road and continue out of the village; cross the bridge on the left.

Take the first footpath on the right and continue ahead with the river on the right.

After passing a bridge and ford the track bends to the left. Go straight ahead over a stile and continue along the bank with the river on the right.

Pass the churchyard on the left and join the road.

Turn left and follow the road past buildings. Go through the gate and follow the footpath sign to the right heading towards a building.

Cross the road and walk down the road opposite with the river on the right.

Cross the bridge and turn left through a gate onto a stony track up the hill. Follow the track left round the house and take the small stone steps on the right, through a gate into the field.

Turn left and walk around the edge of the meadow to the farm. Turn right and then go through the gate on the right.

Walk directly across the meadow and cross the stile, then head left across the next meadow and go through the gate. Follow the track down to the road.

Turn left at the road and take the first track on the right towards a house. Walk in front of the house and cross the footbridge on the left.

Go diagonally right up the field to cross the stile, then head to the buildings at the top of the field and cross the two ladder stiles.

Turn immediately left along the wall and follow this, going through a gate and over a stile to exit the field through the gate at the bottom.

Cross the road and go through the gate ahead, head diagonally right to cross the stile. Continue diagonally across the fields to a stile in front of some buildings.

Cross the road and the stile opposite. Then cross the next two fields and head to the track to the right of the building.

Cross the bridge and turn left through a gate onto a stony track up the hill. Follow the track to the left of the building.

Turn right and follow the track to meet the road. Turn left, cross the bridge and then turn right and walk back to the village.

Heavy metal fan
You may notice the bright faces of mountain pansies growing amid the grass along the riverside path throughout the summer. These lovely flowers vary considerably from pale yellow to deep purple and pink. Many of the soils here contain high levels of lead and other heavy metals – a result of mining in the past. Though toxic to most plants, the mountain pansy is able to thrive in these lead-rich soils.

Buzz pollination
"Look out for a large Rugosa rose bush next to a cottage..." If you pause to enjoy its sweet scent, you may notice a bumblebee frenetically buzzing as it turns round and around inside the flower. By vigorously vibrating its body, the bee causes the flower to release its pollen. This provides the bee with a nourishing source of food and when it transfers some to adjacent flowers, pollination is ensured.

Please freeze!
Wood crane’s bill is one of the most characteristic plants of North Pennines upland hay meadows. Now largely restricted to the few remaining species-rich meadows, it can nonetheless be easily seen growing on the riverbanks and track verges on this route. In order to germinate, the seed of wood crane’s bill must be exposed to frost. The freezing action partially breaks down the hard protective seed coat to enable the first tender root to emerge.

Drumming above
You may hear a strange whirring noise as you walk through the damp meadows beyond Elpha Green. Look up and you might see a small bird with a long bill diving earthwards. This is a snipe and it is drumming. As it dives, the air rushes past its outer tail feathers generating a unique sound. This display serves to attract a mate and lay claim to a nesting territory.

Where is the wood?
As you pass for breath while climbing this steep bank in spring, you might notice a delicate white flower with its face turned to the sun. This is a wood anemone. Most typically found carpeting the woodland floor, it is nonetheless not unusual to find this lovely plant out in the open in an upland hay meadow. Long ago there would have been many more trees in this landscape and plants like wood anemone, wood crane’s bill and bluebell would then have flourished within sunny woodland glades. Though the trees have disappeared, these plants remain to brighten a different view.

Humming trees
In May, as you walk below the sycamore trees that line the edge of a field, pause and listen. The trees may be humming! The flowers of these trees are good sources of nectar and many of the bees that you see busy above you will be queens industriously feeding before they lay their first eggs. Most bumblebees set up their colonies in abandoned mouse or vole burrows. Here they lay their eggs on a small mound of pollen mixed with wax and incubate them like a tiny bird.