

Hay Time

Walk 1

Make hay while there's still time...

Take a 5 km (2 hour) walk around South Wooley Farm in Allendale – and get close to one of the world's rarest and most endangered habitats.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

NORTH PENNINES

Geoparks

GLOBAL NETWORK

Compiled and designed by Neil Diment & Marcus Bryon in association with the North Pennines AONB Staff Unit, Oct. 2006. Cover photo of slugs making. Neil Diment



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The information on this leaflet is available in large print on request.

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To find out more
This is one of a series of hay meadow walks leaflets in the North Pennines AONB. If you enjoy this one, why not try one of the others? For details and more information about the Hay Time project, contact:

- Teamrooms, open 7 days
 - 4 pubs, most offering food and accommodation
 - The Village Shop, which also offers tourist information
 - A Co-op store, Post Office & newsagent, chemist, butchers and gift shops
- There are a good range of facilities in the town, including:
- In Allendale



Upland Hay Meadows

An internationally important habitat

When we think of the world's rare, endangered and fragile habitats we tend to think of tropical rainforests in the Amazon and coral reefs off the coast of Australia. Here in the North Pennines we have an internationally important habitat that survives thanks to the careful farm management practised in the area.

Rare?

There are only about 11 square kilometres of upland hay meadows left in the whole of the UK. Just under half of these are here in the North Pennines AONB.

Endangered?

Ploughing, re-seeding, fertilisation and drainage have led to the complete loss of hay meadows in other parts of the country. They are an unusual habitat as they are entirely made and managed by people.

Fragile?

Hay meadows are declining even here and will only continue to survive if farming remains viable. Their future now depends on the continuation of traditional farming methods with grant support from reformed agri-environment schemes.

Wood crane's-bill is one of the special and most colourful species of North Pennines hay meadows.

Illustration: Sarah Ingwersen

Hay Time

Working together

Working with its partners, the North Pennines AONB Staff Unit has developed the Hay Time Project to conserve and enhance the remaining hay meadows in the area.

- Working closely with farmers, the project aims to:
- Ensure the survival of existing hay meadows, and
 - Collect and distribute local hay meadow seed to revitalise those that have become degraded.



Harvesting the hay seed

The harvested seed is spread the same day on the fields of a neighbouring farm.



Plodging the fog!

Allowing cattle to graze the 'aftermath' or 'fog' after the hay has been cut allows them to trample - 'poach' or 'plodge' - the meadows, breaking up the surface and creating great sites for seeds to germinate.

Nesting lapwing

In the North Pennines, farmers are encouraged to spread manure, harrow and roll the meadows earlier than elsewhere so as not to disturb ground-nesting birds.



A sure sign of poverty

Having yellow-rattle in your fields was once a sign of poor grass – so the plant came to be known as 'Poverty'. Now it is one of the key plants that need to be spread early in the restoration of a hay meadow as, by restricting the growth of grass, it helps a greater variety of other plants to get established.



The Hay Farming Year

September–October
Lambs being fattened.

November
Tups (male sheep) out with the ewes.

December–March
Meadows left clear.

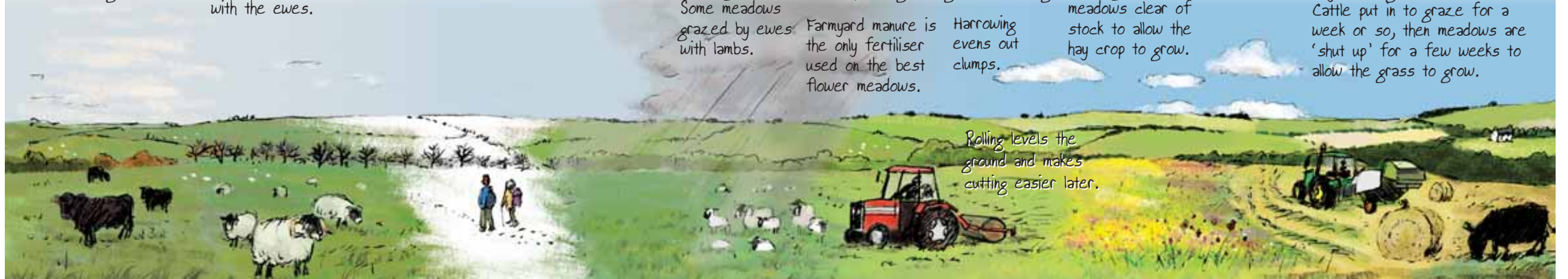
early March
Lambing starts. Some meadows grazed by ewes with lambs.

early March
Muck spreading, rolling and harrowing. Farmyard manure is the only fertiliser used on the best flower meadows.

Harrowing evens out clumps.

mid May
Lambing ends. All meadows clear of stock to allow the hay crop to grow.

July–August
Hay (or silage) cut & baled. Cattle put in to graze for a week or so, then meadows are 'shut up' for a few weeks to allow the grass to grow.



Autumn

Winter

Spring

Summer




A Hay Meadow Walk around South Wooley Farm

This walk takes you along country lanes and public footpaths through, or alongside, several hay meadows on the farm. Please keep to the paths, leave gates as you find them and keep dogs under close control, preferably on a short lead.

How to spot a hay meadow

For most of the year, to the casual passer-by, a hay meadow looks just like any other field of grass. A closer look reveals that there could be over 30 different species growing in every square metre, and in a whole field maybe up to 100. There may be 10 or more different species of grass alone.

 Hay meadows on South Wooley Farm passed on this walk.



▲ Deep purple
Great burnet adds an unusually intense deep purple colour to the meadows in late July.

▼ Sweet smell
Sweet vernal grass gives the hay its typically sweet smell.



When's the best time to go?

This is a lovely walk at any time of year, but...

- May, June and July are when the meadows are at their best
- March and April are good for seeing wading birds
- September and October bring out the autumn colours

Making Hay for Generations

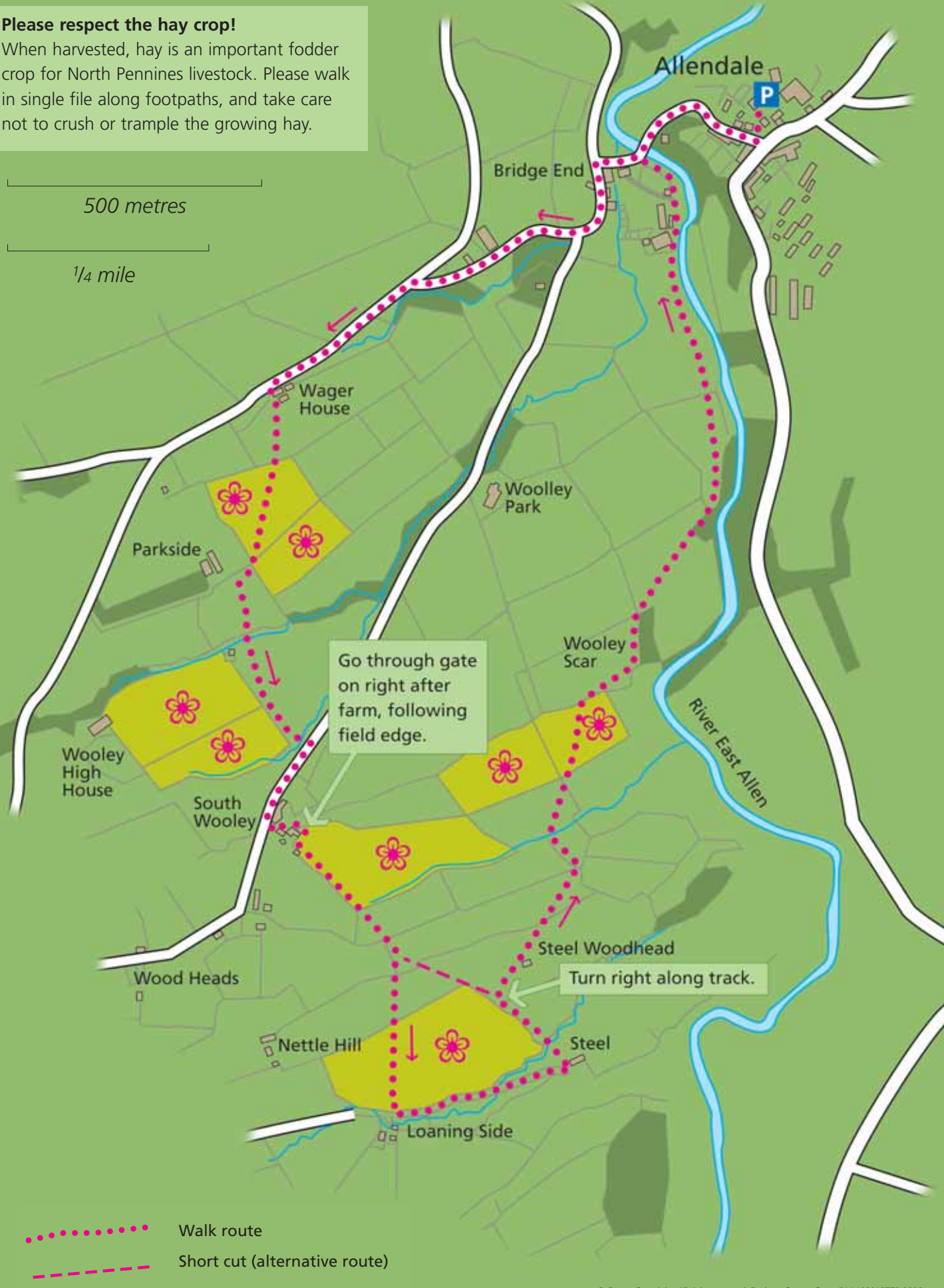
John Nevin's family have farmed here for 500 years. Today the farm stretches to over 400 acres. He keeps about 450 sheep and around 70 cattle, which is about all he can manage on his own. Contractors are brought in at busy times of year to help with things like hay and silage making.



"Hay meadows don't just happen. It's a complex system - not just grass growing! These days, under our agreement, we don't make the first cut until mid-July to give the later-flowering plants a chance to set their seed. I'll be glued to the weather forecast then. If we get 4 to 5 days of fine weather we'll make hay, but long periods of sunshine in the uplands of the North Pennines are rare! If it's too wet the crop is baled while it is still green and wrapped for silage instead."

Please respect the hay crop!
When harvested, hay is an important fodder crop for North Pennines livestock. Please walk in single file along footpaths, and take care not to crush or trample the growing hay.

500 metres
1/4 mile



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- 
One man went to mow...
- 
The crop is turned to help it dry quickly.
- 
Next, the crop is 'rowed up' ready for baling.
- 
Once dry, the hay can be baled and stored ready for use. When silage is made, as shown here, the grass is baled damp.
- 
Two men and their machines today do the work that once involved dozens of people and horses from local farms and villages.

