



Not just any old woods...

The woodlands at Allen Banks and Staward Gorge are part of the largest area of ancient woodland in the North Pennines AONB. Like almost all woodlands in Britain, they have been managed for centuries.

The National Trust, with support from the Forestry Commission, are working on a long term woodland management project to:

- remove introduced species of trees and shrubs
- encourage the re-establishment of native species.

There are three main woodland types described here, each needing its own special management.

Many of the plants and animals living here are quite rare. The long term aim is to restore the ancient and historic woodlands for wildlife – and for people to enjoy.

'Woodland management' speak

We foresters have our own specialised words for the things we do. This is what we mean when we talk about managing the woodlands:

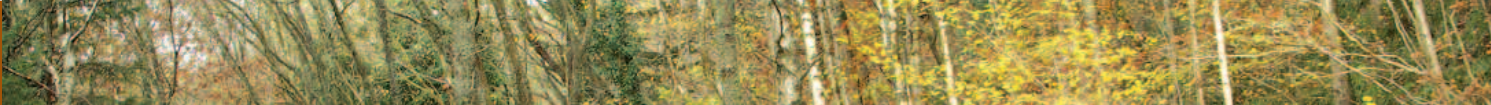
'thinning' – removing some trees to give more space for others to grow.

'selective felling' – removing a group of trees, or a certain type of tree (see photo).

'clear cutting' – completely clearing a whole area of trees, to allow regrowth or replanting.

'coppicing' – trees cut to near ground level every 5-25 years and then allowed to regrow.

'regeneration' – the growth of new seedlings in a cleared area.



Ornamental woods

Allen Banks has long been appreciated for its natural beauty, but less well known is its historical importance as the 'wilderness area' of Ridley Hall's Victorian garden.

Many of the trees were planted, features created and walks laid out by the former owners. This historic landscape is being maintained, for example, by ensuring that there are healthy young trees growing to replace ageing ones.

Regeneration

Rhododendron bushes support little wildlife so they have been cleared in places to stop them spreading and to allow other plants to grow.



Ancient semi-natural woodland

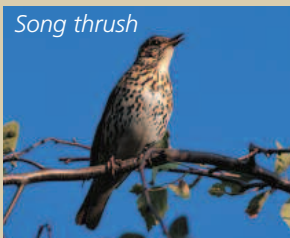
Long term management is needed to look after semi-natural woodlands on the estate. We call these woods 'ancient' if the site has been wooded since the 1600s or longer. Pockets of these woods remain in places, rich in animal and plant life. Small areas are felled to improve wildlife habitats. Dormice still live here, the only known colony in the entire region, and the most northerly in Britain.

Woodland refuge?

In recent years the number of British woodland birds like the spotted flycatcher and song thrush has declined. But thanks to active woodland management you can still see them here.



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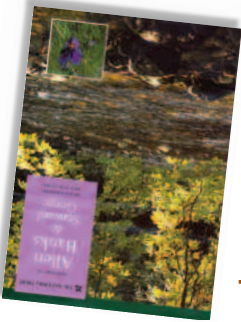
An inspiring landscape

The North Pennines conjures up images of purple heather covered moors, lead mining remains and remote dales where traditional ways of farming still survive.

But there are delightful pockets of woodland to explore too. Along the banks of the River Allen near where it joins the River Tyne, you'll find the largest concentration of woodlands in the North Pennines – with a network of paths to help you explore!

Many miles of woodland walks
Enjoy the many walks – long or short through light and shade – with stunning views over the river valleys.
If you look closely, you can discover different types of woods, from the ornamental woodlands planted in Victorian times, to ancient woodlands that in places seem to have been undisturbed for centuries.

A great place for a family day out...
Explore one of the trails through the woods at Allen Banks; there are many quiet spots for picnics and paddling.



...your guide awaits!
Pick up a map and guide from the Allen Banks car park.



Younger members of the family can join me on a Family Tree Trail through the woods.

Dare they cross the spring suspension bridges?

No. 685 Newcastle-Carlisle bus stops at the road end on the A69 (½ mile) tel: Traveline on 0870 6082608
To find out more
This is one of a series of walks leaflets to help you discover the North Pennines AONB. Why not try one of the others?
Contact the AONB Partnership on the tel no below.
info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk www.northpennines.org.uk
We can provide the information contained in this leaflet in large print, different formats and other languages on request. Please call 01388 528801.



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NORTH PENNINES
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Explore the woods around Allen Banks and Staward Gorge

A walk for all seasons

Allen Banks and Staward Gorge are lovely to visit at any time of year:

spring – the trees are in bud, birds are singing and early woodland flowers like bluebells can be seen.

summer – the trees are in full leaf, butterflies abound, bats flit along the river at dusk, and later flowering plants like wood avens appear.

autumn – colourful trees, fruits, seeds and smelly fungi!

winter – the trees are bare and views are less obscured. Down by the river, look for animal tracks in the snow.

Trails





from Allen Banks:


- **Morralee Wood**
1½ miles (2 km) – 1 hour
- **Walks Wood**
2 miles (3.5 km) – 1½ hours
- **Plankey Mill***
3 miles (4.5 km) – 2 hours
- **Staward Peel**
5½ miles (9 km) – half day


from Haydon Bridge:

- **John Martin Heritage Trail**
10 miles (15 km) – all day

Woodland types

-  Ornamental
-  Ancient semi-natural woodland
-  Plantations
-  Other woodland

 Pay and display car park

 Toilets

----- Other paths linking with the estate

* At the time of going to print, Plankey Mill footbridge is closed for safety reasons. Northumberland County Council hope that the bridge will be reopened sometime in 2007. Please check information notices on the approach paths and in the car park.

Morralee Wood



Follow the trail from the car park to a small tarn, surrounded by many ornamental trees, including Scot's pine and larch, planted in the 1800s. Today rhododendron plants, also introduced at that time, have to be kept in check.

Walks Wood



The woods you'll see at Allen Banks have been influenced in many ways by previous owners. In the mid 1800s, long before they came into the care of the National Trust, they were owned by Susan Davidson who lived at Ridley Hall nearby. She devoted much of her life to 'improving' the woodland and creating many walks. The beech trees – which are not native to this area – were planted in her time.

Walled Garden



The car park was once the walled kitchen garden for Ridley Hall. The surrounding woods were its pleasure grounds.

1880s



Traditional woodland management at Carling Haugh

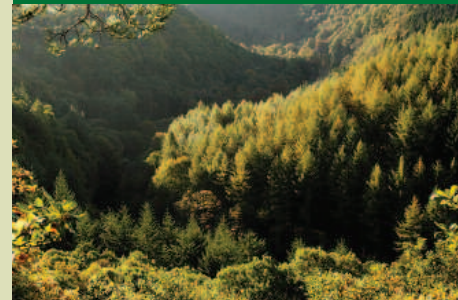
Woods were an important source of fuel in medieval times. Ash, oak, alder, hazel and elm would all have been managed as coppice here in the past. The National Trust are reviving such traditional woodland management in places on their estate. Compare these photos taken at Carling Haugh, near Staward Peel, taken over a century apart.

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Today



Pause for thought

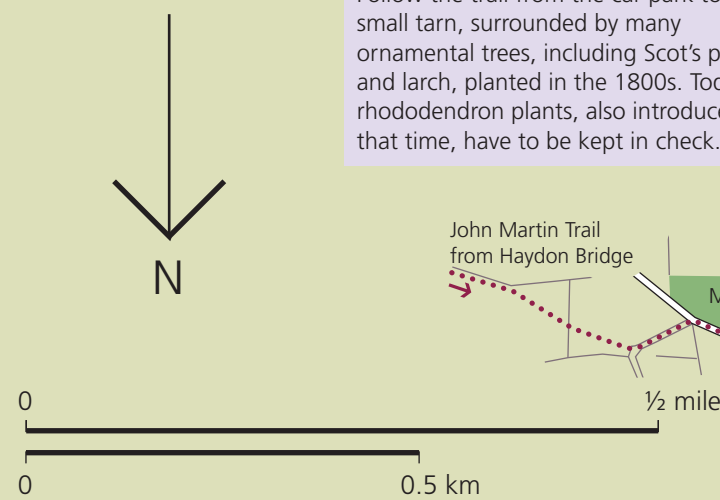


From Plankey Mill explore the wooded valley of Staward Gorge – much of it 'planted ancient woodland'. Climb high above the valley floor, reaching a ruined medieval peel tower with stunning views over the tree tops.

Hazel coppicing at Briarwood Banks



Briarwood Banks, an ancient semi-natural woodland, is now managed as a nature reserve by the Northumberland Wildlife Trust. But it is not as 'natural' as it seems: look for signs of human activity. Hazel, when coppiced, quickly sprouts many thin trunks to provide a valuable source of wood. Uses ranged from making charcoal to producing spars for heather thatching.



All that is 'grand, romantic and beautiful'

This is the place where locally born Victorian artist John Martin sought his inspiration. As a child he went on solitary rambles, 'seeking all that was grand, romantic and beautiful'. Follow his trail today from Morralee Wood to Staward Peel.

