

# Derwent Reservoir and Pow Hill Country Park

Self-guided trail

Living North Pennines  
supporting our landscape together



NORTH PENNINES  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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This multi-user path was created through a collaboration between Northumbrian Water and the North Pennines AONB Partnership through its Living North Pennines Project.  
Working together for the North Pennines  
NORTH PENNINES AONB PARTNERSHIP  
NATURAL  
The North Pennines AONB Partnership holds a Gold GTBS Award for its corporate office and tourism activities.  
10/08/27500

We can provide the information contained in this publication in large print, different formats and other languages on request. Please call 01388 528801 for details.

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**Public transport:** Weardale Motors 773 service from Consett to Pow Hill Country Park four times a day. For more information: telephone Traveline 0871 200 2233.

To find out more



How to get there

Welcome to Derwent Reservoir and  
Pow Hill Country Park!

This leaflet is one of a number of ways in which you can find out about the wildlife and history of Derwent Reservoir and Pow Hill Country Park.

## About the walk

Derwent Reservoir is 2km (just over a mile) north of Edmundbyers on the B6306 Blanchland road off the A68. It is north east of the B6278 Consett to Stanhope road.

**Start/finish:** Derwent Reservoir car park/ Pow Hill Country Park car park. The walk can be followed in either direction.  
Grid reference: NZ023511/NZ010517

**Walk distance:** Approx 3km (2 miles)

**Walk length:** 1 hour

**Walk grade:** Easy, comfortable walking. Multi-user path suitable for cyclists, walkers, wheelchairs and pushchairs.

**Useful maps:** OS Explorer Map 307 Consett and Derwent Reservoir. OS Landranger Map 87 Hexham and Haltwhistle.

**Facilities:** A shop and public toilets can be found at Northumbrian Water's fishing lodge (NZ032514). The nearby village of Blanchland has public toilets, a Post Office and shops, a hotel, art gallery and a tea room. Blanchland also has a website - [www.blanchland.org.uk](http://www.blanchland.org.uk)

## A changing landscape

Look at the dam, at the water, close your eyes and imagine what the view looked liked before the dam was built. If you could have stood here in 1960, before the dam was built, you'd have seen a very different view.

What did you imagine? A steep-sided valley with a river meandering through?

Actually the area now under the water was very similar to the rolling fields you see around you. The whole area had to be dug out to create a reservoir 30 metres deep at its deepest point. The earth removed was used to build the dam and the sand and gravel went into making the concrete.

## A damn fine dam!

With three quarters of a million bricks, this dam took six years to build and cost £5.5 million in 1967. That's equivalent to about £71 million in today's money.

The dam holds back the River Derwent and allows the reservoir to fill with 11,000 million gallons (50,000 litres!) of water. Can't picture this? Try 625 million bathfuls, or 20,000 Olympic sized swimming pools. Still struggling to imagine this? Then picture 44 Wembley Stadiums filled to the roof!



## Changing lives

Three farmsteads, a cottage and a beautiful old house known as Millshield Mill were demolished to make room for the reservoir.

In addition two miles of public road were submerged, to be replaced by a further four miles of new road.

Many people still living in the area today worked on the building of the dam or farmed the land now under water.



Millshield Mill (top) and building the dam (bottom)  
Photographs courtesy of Northumbrian Water  
Illustration: Janet Curtis



**Audio Trail**  
Further information about the area is available along the route at our "U-Turn" stations. These are environmentally friendly hand-powered listening posts.  
They don't need mains power, batteries or clockwork mechanisms; look out for them where you see the symbol and wind the handle to hear more!  
Each channel has a different message, which you can select to hear more. Wind it clockwise and hear information about the route, wind it the other way and hear local people talking about their area.  
**Download**  
For those planning ahead, or if you simply want to learn more after your visit, download our audio MP3 file or the audiovisual MPEG from the following websites:  
[www.northpennines.org.uk](http://www.northpennines.org.uk)  
[www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk)

Photograph courtesy of Northumbrian Water



Adders: from their tongues to their sun lounge!

Follow this trail and you will spot a number of wildlife gems, with different characters emerging at different times of year. Some of these are shy and dislike human disturbance, but if you are quiet and have a keen eye, you might be rewarded with some special sights!

4. This grass is cut for hay, so the sheep are excluded from it for certain parts of the year. The meadow is cut in mid to late July after the plants have produced their seeds.

You can see many traditional hay meadow species here, including great burnet, wood cranesbill and wood horsetail.



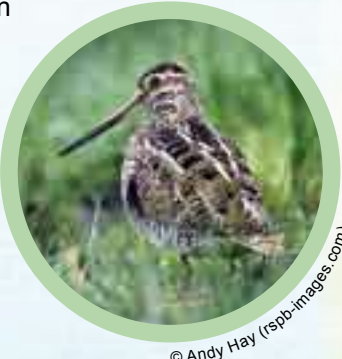
3. Sit here and listen for a while. Close your eyes and just take in the bird calls from the hawthorn tree. A little effort will reward your ears with a barrage of sound, from the repetitive and mimicking call of a song thrush to a passing warbler, from a great tit to a reed bunting.

2. Listen carefully in the spring and you will hear a host of unusual noises, from space invaders to drumming! These are the sounds of the wading birds that breed in the fields next to the reservoir.



You'll not mistake a curlew amongst the waders here; you can recognise it by its large size and distinctive, down-curved bill.

Snipe too can be found breeding in the fields, although you're more likely to hear than see them. The cry of the birds resembles the sound 'scape-scape', and during the breeding season they make a strange drumming or bleating noise by holding out their tail feathers in their downward flight.



You may see lapwing carrying out their aerobic displays whilst making their sometimes "peewit", sometimes space-invader-like calls.

1. Rigg and furrow grassland.



Here you can also see adder's tongue fern. This plant is unlike any other fern, with its single oval frond which pushes up through the ground in March or April and is best seen in spring. In traditional medicine it was believed to be a cure for snake bites!

5. Common lizard, slow-worm and adder are all found on the heathland at Pow Hill.



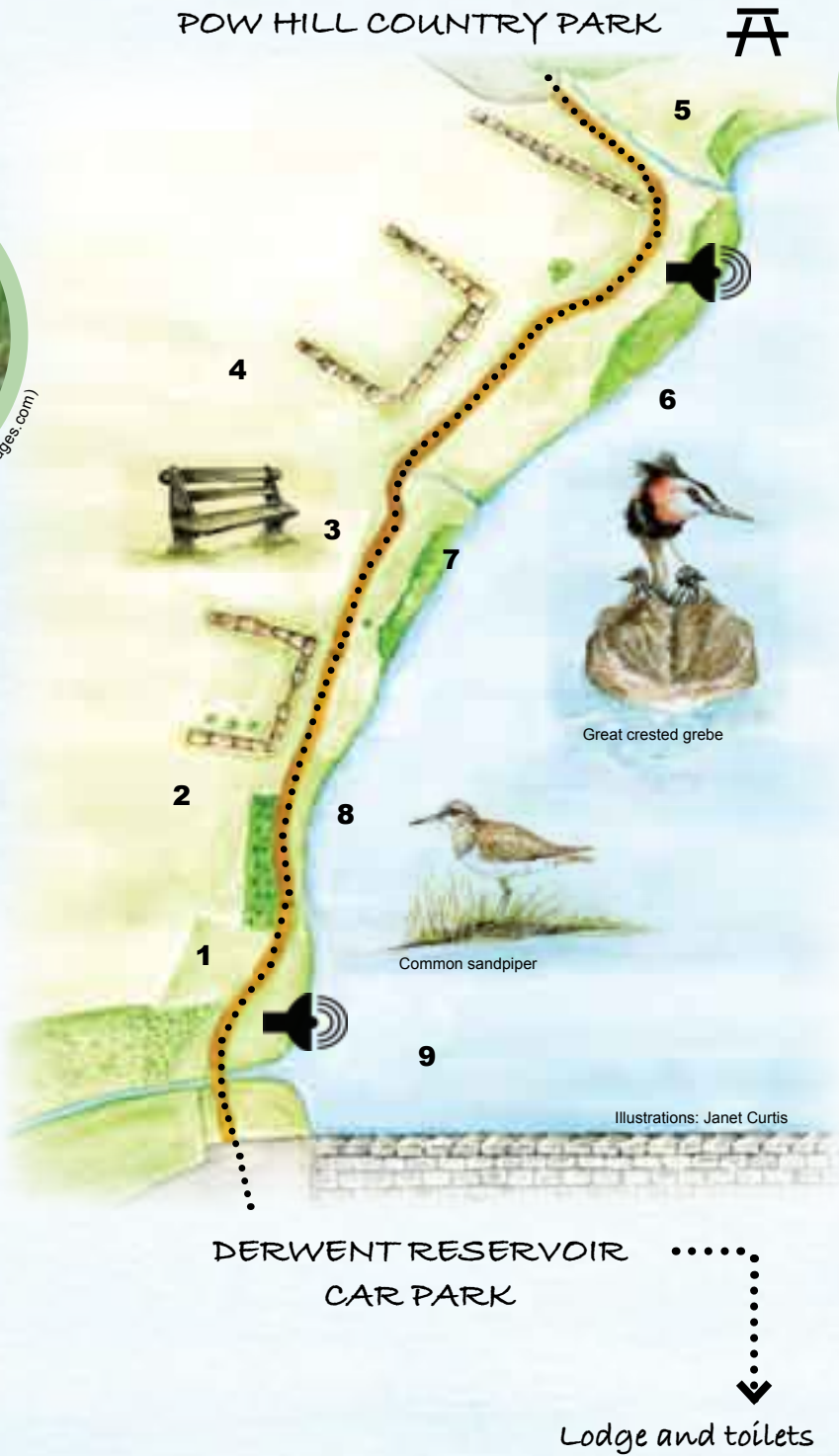
Common lizards have long bodies and short legs. These reptiles stun their prey by shaking it, and then swallowing it whole.

At first glance slow-worms look like snakes, but they're actually lizards, it's just that they're legless! They're very secretive creatures but if you're lucky enough to see one close up, look it in the eye. If it winks at you then you'll know it's a lizard as, unlike snakes, lizards have eyelids!

You are most likely to spot adders on grassy areas such as paths. They are active during the day, basking until they are warm enough to hunt for food. Adders are Britain's only poisonous reptile but they are not aggressive and will only strike when threatened. Fascinatingly adders are one of the few viviparous snakes, that is, they give birth to live young!



Stop and listen at the U-turn



6. Great crested grebes, beautiful and elegant birds with ornate head plumes, are always present during spring and summer. Their delightful appearance led to them being killed for their feathers. As a result they almost became extinct in the UK, but are thankfully more common now. Various factors, including disturbance, mean they rarely breed on the open reservoir but the off-limits nature reserve provides a sanctuary.

Breeding birds are easy to spot with their elaborate courtship display, during which they rise out of the water and shake their heads. When the youngsters arrive they can often be seen riding on their parents' backs!

7. Derwent is a welcome stopping point for migrating birds in spring and autumn. Many birds also breed here.

Wheatears are spring visitors and are easily spotted by flashes of their white rump. The name 'wheatear' comes from the corruption of its more descriptive Saxon name "white arse!"



Look out for stonechats. You can often hear these birds before you see them, with their call, sharp and loud like two stones being knocked together.

When you do see them, they are pretty little birds with striking black heads and white around the side of their neck, an orange-red breast and a mottled brown back. Stonechats are sometimes called "the vicar" because they appear to be wearing a dog collar!

8. Teetering at the water's edge, bobbing up and down, you might find the common sandpiper. These tuneful little birds arrive at Derwent in March or April and leave again in July and August, with the young following in September.

9. The reservoir has the largest common gull roost in County Durham!

Although common here in winter, these birds are not as numerous as their name suggests. Common gulls are smaller, gentler versions of the herring gull, with greenish legs and a yellow bill.

