



longhorn © Peter Roworth

Site management

Longhorn cattle, Hebridean sheep and Exmoor ponies graze the site, helping to reduce coarse grasses, scrub and tree saplings on the heath and allowing small wildflowers and insects to thrive. Wetter areas are kept from scrubbing over and larger, woodier scrub is removed by hand. This low level management to conserve the habitats occurs in rotation, with deadwood purposefully left for lizards and invertebrates.

How do I get to Skipwith Common NNR?



Front cover image: Cross-leaved heath © Theresa Gittins

Further information

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Friends of Skipwith Common: www.friendsofskipwithcommon.org.uk
info@friendsofskipwithcommon.org.uk

Lower Derwent Valley and Skipwith Common
National Nature Reserves Office, Bank Island, Church Lane, Wheldrake,
North Yorkshire YO19 6FE

Find out more at www.naturalengland.org.uk/skipwithcommonnr
or by calling the Natural England switchboard on 0845 600 3078 (local rate)



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Skipwith Common National Nature Reserve



Introducing Skipwith Common National Nature Reserve

Skipwith Common is one of the last remaining areas of northern lowland heath in England. An incredible variety of plants and animals depend on the Common for their survival. The 270ha of open heath, ponds and mire is an ancient landscape, with its roots in pre-history.

Skipwith Common's heathland has stayed almost the same for thousands of years – with evidence of its use by man for at least 4000 years. The common is dotted with Bronze and Iron Age features as well as much evidence of its more recent use during the Second World War. These features mean there are good paths to use all year round.

For thousands of years the heathland was kept open by people grazing their animals, taking birch, gorse, and cutting turf and peat for fuel. This digging peat has created the many ponds on the site. Today, the site is a National Nature Reserve owned and managed by Escrick Park Estate, in conjunction with Natural England and the Friends of Skipwith Common.



Riccall aerodrome

An airfield was built on Skipwith Common in 1942, to train pilots to fly bombing missions over Germany during World War II. Today the runways and bomb storage bays are still visible, although wildlife is taking over. Look for the metal rings attached to the brickwork on the Bomb Bays loop. These were used to tie down the tarpaulins that protected the stored bombs from the weather. After the war, the airfield was abandoned and woodland started to take over the whole common.

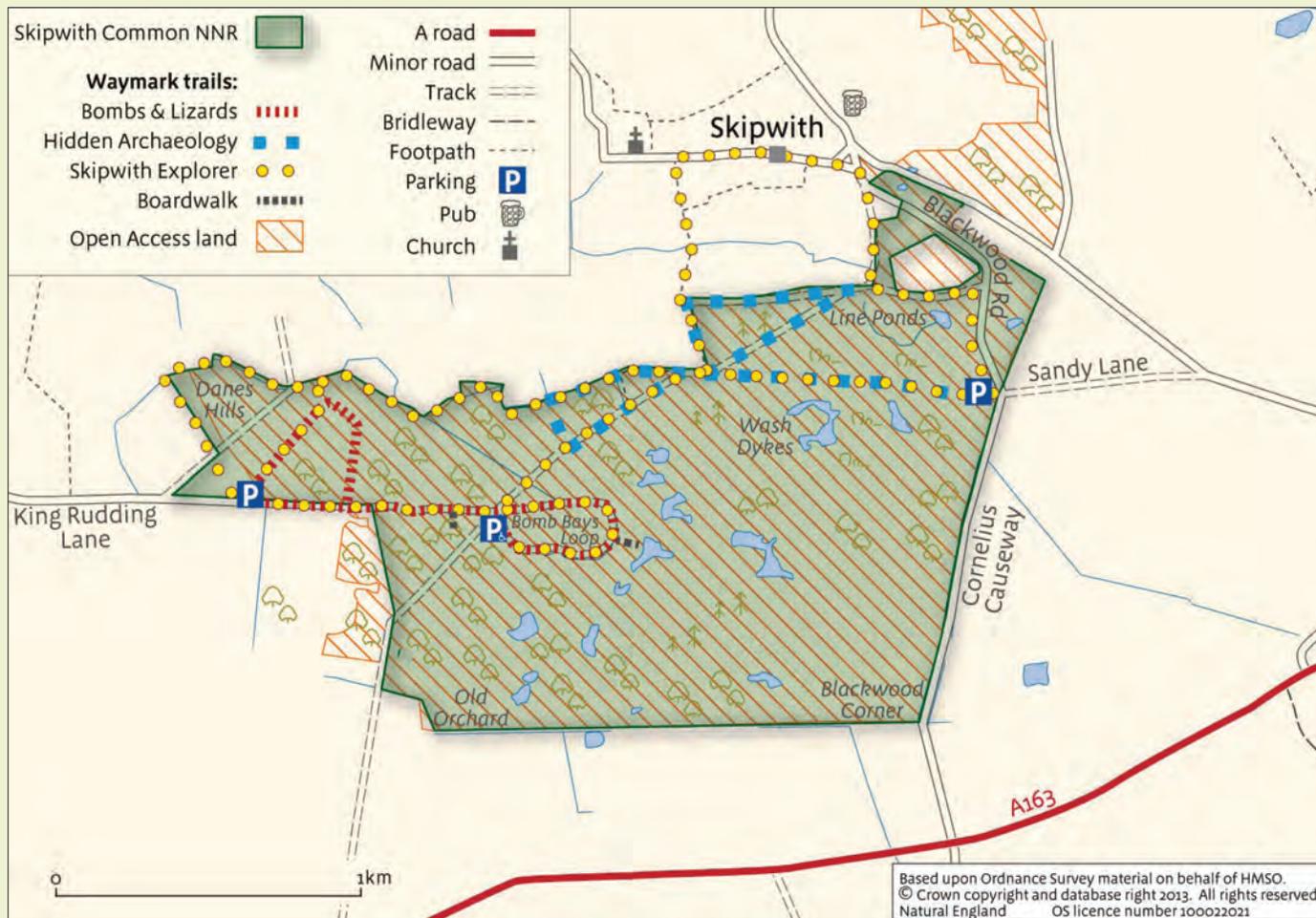
Wildlife on the Common

Skipwith Common is a network of interconnected wildlife habitats, with wet and dry heaths, ponds, mires, woodland and scrub, and pine trees which are descendants of a Victorian plantation. Early in summer large tracts (or swathes) of cottongrass blow in the wind and later the heather makes a spectacular display when its pink and purple flowers carpet the reserve. Delicate marsh gentians occur on site and flower during August and September, whilst the insect-eating sundew can be found in wet areas. Autumn too can be a special season when the autumn sun can highlight the changing colour of the birch trees and bracken and a large variety of fungi can be seen.

Approximately 76 species of birds breed on the site with many more winter or short visitors. In addition to many commoner woodland birds, heathland specialists include green woodpeckers, woodcock and in some years, nightjars. The wetter parts of the site hold a selection of ducks, whilst water rail and grasshopper warbler are more often heard than seen. Over the heaths, tree pipit and woodlark sing as part of aerial displays.

Popular with children and adults alike are the common lizards, grass snakes and adders which may be seen sunning themselves on warm days around the bomb bays. Whilst the wetland areas also play host to a healthy colony of great-crested newts.





Visiting the reserve

There are two main access points to the reserve: from the A19, near Riccall, along King Rudding Lane; or from the A163, Market Weighton Road, near North Duffield up Cornelius Causeway.

The single-tracked Common Lane, which is another remnant from RAF Riccall, bisects the Common from Skipwith to Riccall and you may come across the odd vehicle quite unexpectedly while visiting the site, or find one of the Longhorn cattle lying on the road! Skipwith Common has many marshes and bogs that can be dangerous and away from the main paths it

is easy to get lost. The site also has a good population of ground nesting birds living within the heathland and birch scrub which are sensitive to disturbance, so for the benefit of wildlife, and to keep safe, we ask that dogs are kept on leads.

To help visitors, three waymarked trails have been developed for the site, together with route leaflets to accompany the walks which are available on Natural England's and the Friends of Skipwith Common's websites. Enigmatically named, our three new routes are entitled; Bombs and Lizards, Hidden Archaeology and Skipwith Explorer!



Marsh gentian © Sue Boyes

Getting involved

The Friends of Skipwith Common are a local community group who contribute a large number of hours of practical management, help look after the animals which are used to graze the site and take a particular interest in the archaeology on Skipwith Common NNR. They have a programme of guided walks and events both on the common, and at local community functions. They welcome new members who can find out what is going on through a quarterly newsletter and a website.