



# Gait Barrows

National Nature Reserve





## Gait Barrows

Lying at the heart of the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve is one of Britain's most important limestone landscapes. The NNR contains an intricate mosaic of limestone habitats that are home to a rich variety of exciting and often rare wildlife. From open rock pavements to damp fen; from deep yew forest to the tranquillity of Hawes Water, there is much to see on a visit to Gait Barrows.

A number of public footpaths pass through Gait Barrows, and away from these there are also three way-marked nature trails of varying length and difficulty, which are open for pedestrian use at all times. The Hawes Water Trail is accessible for all and disabled parking can be found at the eastern end of this trail. The Limestone Trail is Trammer-friendly, but because of steep slopes and natural steps the Yew Trail make is inaccessible for trampers or wheelchairs.

The main NNR is at grid reference SD 483777 and is covered by OS Explorer OL7 map.

## A site for all seasons...

### Spring

In early spring, take a stroll along the Limestone Trail to look for the first flowers of **stinking hellebore** and hear the spring songs of returning migrant birds like **chiffchaff** and **willow warbler**. On a sunny spring morning you should see freshly emerged **brimstone** butterflies and the first flush of **primroses**. Around Hawes Water listen for the croaking of **frogs** at the lake edge, and the buzz of **bumblebees** as they gather pollen from the **willows** by Hawes Water. Later in spring, butterflies like **Duke of Burgundy** and **pearl-bordered fritillary** may be seen in the small sunny glades of the woodlands.



Brimstone butterfly



High brown fritillary butterfly on spotted orchid

### Summer

As spring slips into summer, look for increasing numbers of the very rare **lady's-slipper orchid**, which has been introduced at Gait Barrows, and way marked routes will direct you to the main viewing area in May and June. In the skies above the pavements, look out for the male **marsh harrier**, as he sky-dances over his territory around Hawes Water. Early summer sees the rich wildlife of Gait Barrows in its full splendour. Enjoy the richness of the butterfly life, and look for the spectacular but rare **high brown fritillary** which continues to thrive at Gait Barrows. Revel in the rich variety of flowers of the limestone pavements such as **angular Solomon's-seal** and **dark-red helleborine**.



Grass-of-Parnassus



Migrant hawker dragonfly

### Autumn

In autumn, walk the Yew Trail and enjoy the deep colours of the low afternoon sunshine on the trunks of **yew trees**. Enjoy the wildlife spectacular of the thousands of **redwings** and **fieldfares** which arrive in October to feast on the yew berry crop. In early autumn sunshine, the last of the **brown hawker** and **migrant hawker** dragonflies can be seen hunting for late-flying insects, while **speckled wood** butterflies can often still be seen in early November. A walk on the boardwalk by Hawes Water may be rewarded with views of the autumn-flowering **grass-of-Parnassus**. As the nights draw in, the peace of an evening stroll may be disturbed by the eerie barking of **roe deer**.

### Winter

Wildlife can still be found even in deepest winter, with birds like **hawfinch** and **bullfinch** likely to be seen perched in the tree tops. After snow, look for the signs of animals like **rabbit**, **stoat**, **roe deer** and



Great Crested Grebe on Hawes Water

**fallow deer**. **Badgers** will still venture out in the depths of a winter night, but all you will see is the distinctive five-toed paw mark in mud or snow. As late winter turns again to early spring, a walk around Hawes Water may reward you with sightings of **golden-eye** and **tufted ducks**, and you may be lucky enough to see the strange courtship 'penguin dance' of the **great crested grebes** on the lake.

## A landscape moulded by time...

The landscape at Gait Barrows has been shaped over many thousands of years. Much of the nature reserve lies on ancient Carboniferous limestone which was laid down in warm tropical seas some 300 million years ago. With the influence of more recent mountain building periods that created mountain ranges like the Alps, this bedrock has been flexed and uplifted to give the low hills and crags of the limestone landscape that we are familiar with today.

In the last Ice Age some 14,000 years ago, deep ice covered this part of Northern England and Hawes Water Basin was formed by the deeply scouring ice sheet as it passed from what today are the Cumbrian high fells to the Irish Sea. This deep trough in the limestone was then filled with groundwater to create the Hawes Water we know today.

The intricate features of the limestone pavements have been shaped and modified by glacial action in the last Ice Age, and more recently by rainfall and groundwater. On the open pavements you will see wide flat blocks called **clints**, separated by deep fissures known as **grikes**. Lying on the clint surfaces are shallow gutter-like **runnels** and pan-like **solution cups**, which collect and funnel rainwater from the rock surface. This ancient landscape is still home to many rare species of plant and animal, many of which can be found nowhere else in England. These include the tiny **narrow-mouthed whorl snail** and the very rare moss ***Scorpidium turgiscens***.



Runnel



Narrow-mouthed whorl snail

Sadly, because of quarrying activity for rockery stone in the 1960s, much of the original limestone pavement has been damaged or lost. This has left large exposed areas of broken limestone, some of which have taken on a strange and abstract quality.



Broken limestone



Lady's-slipper orchid

## Flora and Fauna

The limestone pavements of Gait Barrows are an ancient landscape, and have retained a rich and specialist wildlife community through the past centuries. Very scarce plants include specialities such as **angular Solomon's seal** and **dark red helleborine** which emerge from the grikes, while the shallow solution pans allow plants like **blue moor grass**, **wild thyme** and **common spotted orchid** to grow. The harsh dry conditions of the pavements have allowed a very special



Angular Solomon's seal



Crazing cattle

dwarf woodland to develop, where ancient **ash** trees grow only to a height of 3 metres over several hundreds of years.

Perhaps the most exciting plant to be found at Gait Barrows is the **lady's-slipper orchid** which is one of the rarest of all British wildflowers. Once thought to be extinct in the UK, this orchid is now being re-established through Natural England's national Species Recovery Program, and Gait Barrows is now home to a thriving population of plants, which are enjoyed by large numbers of visitors each spring.

Gait Barrows is very important for its wide variety of invertebrates, and is especially well known for its rich diversity of butterflies including the increasingly rare **Duke of Burgundy** and **high brown fritillary**. These species thrive in the coppiced woodland and small glades, where careful management maintains the conditions they require.

The woodlands and wetlands of Gait Barrows provide a home for many species of birds. **Green woodpecker** may often be seen raiding the nests of the **red wood ant**, while **blackcap** and **woodcock** nest safely in the dense thicket of branches and bramble in the coppiced woodlands. The restored reed beds of Hawes Water Moss are home to **marsh harrier**, **water rail** and **reed bunting**. The rare **bittern** regularly visits Hawes Water to feed in the shallow reed-fringed edge of the lake.





## Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve way-marked walks

### The Limestone Trail

This is a moderate circular walk over limestone pavement, across flower-rich pastures and back through coppiced woodland.

**Start point:** Permit holder's car park

**Distance:** 2 km / 1.2 miles (1 hour 15 minutes)

**Grade:** Moderate; suitable for trampers but not wheelchairs. Take care when walking on the limestone pavement.

**Facilities at start point:** Car parking for permit holders and bike rack

**Trail markers:** White markers along trail (red numbers on map)

From the car park walk down the track to the large information panel. From here, follow the **white markers** around the trail.

1. Walking along this path from early spring to late autumn, you will notice the many hundreds of **red wood ants**



Red wood ants

Limestone pavement



Dark red helleborine



Bird's-foot trefoil

bustling along their trails to and from their large nest mounds. These clever insects scavenge the surrounding woodland for food and even 'farm' aphids in the tree canopy! Their nests attract **green woodpeckers** which eat the ants and their larvae. You may find their distinctive white cased droppings by the ant nests, and if you look carefully you will see these are full of skeletal remains of the ants!

2. As you emerge from the yew woodland onto the open pavement, look in the sheltered conditions of the grikes for special plants like **rigid buckler fern** and **dark-red helleborine** which thrive here. Here the woodlands are characteristically dwarfed by the harsh rocky conditions, and many of these small trees will be several hundreds of years old. On sunny days, the carpets of yellow **bird's-foot trefoil** and purple **wild thyme** will attract many types of insect.



Northern marsh orchid



*Anania funebris* moth

3. Continuing along the track you will come to an area of damaged limestone pavement, which was quarried for rockery stone in the 1960s. Very slowly, Nature is healing these scars, which are gradually being colonised by **lichens** and **mosses** and **grasses**. You may see the tiny **white-spotted sable** *Anania funebris* moth flying low amongst the flowers in bright sunshine in May and June.
4. Follow the white markers down the slope through denser **yew** woodland and out onto the Little Hawes Water pastures. These fields are managed by cattle grazing in late summer and autumn to maintain their herb-rich swards, and are probably best enjoyed from May to July when hundreds of **northern marsh orchids** and the delicate **ragged robin** come into flower. Such a rich flower mix attracts many



Mother Shipton moth

insects including **orange tip** butterflies, **Mother Shipton** and **small yellow underwing** moths, and **migrant hawker** dragonflies.

5. Follow the white markers to the gate back into the coppiced woodland. Coppicing was traditionally carried out to produce woodland materials such as hurdles and charcoal. The practice continues today solely for the benefit of wildlife. As you walk up along the track through the recently coppiced woodland, you may see **high brown fritillary** butterflies feeding on the flowers of **marsh thistle** and **hemp agrimony**. As the coppiced woodland re-grows, its dense thickets provide safe nesting places for **willow warbler**, **garden warbler** and **blackcap**, and these areas ring with bird song in spring and early summer. Follow the track back to your start point, where the trail ends.

## The Yew Trail

This is an extended circular walk taking in the limestone pavement and Thrang Wood, with panoramic views from the Silver Jubilee cairn.

**Start point:** Permit holder's car park

**Distance:** 2.5 km / 1.5 miles (1 hour 30 minutes)

**Grade:** Moderate; but unsuitable for wheelchairs and trampers. Take care when walking on the limestone pavement.

**Facilities at start point:** Car parking for permit holders and bike rack

**Trail markers:** Purple markers along trail (purple numbers on map)

From the car park walk down the track to the large information panel. From here, follow the **purple markers** around the trail.

1. Walking along this path from early spring to late autumn, you will notice the many hundreds of **red wood ants**



Red wood ant nest mound



Common rock-rose



Dingy Skipper butterfly

bustling along their trails to and from their large nest mounds. These clever insects scavenge the surrounding woodland for food and even 'farm' aphids in the tree canopy! Their nests attract **green woodpeckers** which eat the ants and their larvae. You may find their distinctive white cased droppings by the ant nests, and if you look carefully you will see these are full of skeletal remains of the ants!

2. This area has been quarried for limestone in the past, but is slowly recovering as limestone grassland. Look out for plants like **common rock-rose** and **bird's-foot trefoil** in spring and summer and the butterflies that thrive on them, including the brown speckled **dingy skipper** in spring and the tiny **northern brown argus** in summer. This is also the main area for viewing the **lady's-slipper orchid**.

3. Following the trail, you now pass into the rich woodlands that are dominated by **yew** and **ash** trees. Amongst the trees you will find sunny glades that are the 'stately home' of the **Duke of Burgundy**! This lovely little spring butterfly thrives in these sheltered conditions where its caterpillars feed on **primrose** and **cowslip**. You may also see **pearl bordered fritillary** and **high brown fritillary** butterflies enjoying the sunshine and flowers in the Duke's gardens!
4. Follow the track on a short loop through the wild Thrang Wood. This is a magical remnant of ancient **yew forest**, which has an aura of rare wilderness and stillness. In places these ancient **yew** trees seem to flow out of the solid limestone! Many species of fungi can be found in this



Glistening ink-cap

old woodland, so look for the delicate troops of **glistening ink-cap**. Leaving Thrang Wood, follow the purple markers through an open area of limestone pavement to the Gait Barrows Jubilee cairn which marks the declaration of the NNR in 1977 on the Queen's Silver Jubilee. From here you can enjoy a magnificent view of the whole nature reserve and the landscape or Silverdale and Arnside in the distance.

Follow the purple markers down the slope through denser **yew** woodland and out onto the Little Hawes Water pastures. These fields are managed by cattle grazing in late summer and autumn to maintain their herb-rich swards, and are probably best enjoyed from May to July when hundreds of **northern marsh orchids** and the delicate **ragged robin** come into flower. Such



Duke of Burgundy butterfly

a rich flower mix attracts many insects including **orange tip** butterflies, **Mother Shipton** and **small yellow underwing** moths, and **migrant hawk** dragonflies.

5. Follow the purple markers to the gate back into the coppiced woodland. Coppicing was traditionally carried out to produce woodland materials such as hurdles and charcoal. The practice continues today solely for the benefit of wildlife. As you walk up along the track through the recently coppiced woodland, you may see **high brown fritillary** butterflies feeding on the flowers of **marsh thistle** and **hemp agrimony**. As the coppiced woodland re-grows, its dense thickets provide safe nesting places for **willow warbler**, **garden warbler** and **blackcap**, and these areas ring with bird song in spring and early summer. Follow the track back to your start point, where the trail ends.



Cattle grazing the pastures



Hawes Water in winter

## The Hawes Water Trail

An easy walk to Hawes Water and back.

**Start point:** From entrance north of Challan Hall on Brackenthwaite Road at SD 474766

**Distance:** 1.5km / 1mile (1 hour)

**Grade:** Easy and accessible; suitable for wheelchairs and trampers.

**Facilities at start point:** Limited road-side parking can be found on Brackenthwaite Road. Alternatively, there is disabled parking with RADAR access at the head of Moss Lane at SD 478765. From here the walk can be taken in reverse.

**Trail markers:** Orange markers along trail (orange numbers on map)

Leave the road at Challan Hall and walk down the track, following the **orange markers**.

1. A short way down the track, stop to enjoy the wonderful view of Hawes

Water and the fens and reed beds of Hawes Water Moss, with Trowbarrow Quarry in the distance. The path passes through an area of young **secondary woodland** which has developed since the cessation of grazing here in the 19th century, before which it was open pasture with ancient yew trees! Evidence of this very different past is that the grassland snail *Pomatia elegans* can still be found living here.

2. Continuing along the track, you will reach an old pasture on your right. This was formerly grazed by ponies until the 1950s when it is reputed to have been a picture of beauty with carpets of **marsh orchids** and other wild flowers. Natural England has now established annual mowing here to encourage these wild flowers to return. **Hemp agrimony** grows abundantly here, and attracts many species of hoverfly like the striking *Volucella pelluscens*, with its translucent side panels.

*Volucella pelluscens* hoverfly



3. At the fork in the track, follow the path to your right which takes you past the low limestone crag called **White Scar**. This was once much more exposed and could be seen at some distance as a glowing white landform. Natural England is now working to restore open conditions at several places along the Scar, to encourage plants like the **rare spring sedge**.
4. Continue along the track, passing over a small brook, before passing through the gate onto the boardwalk along the edge of the lake. Benches along the boardwalk offer you the opportunity to rest and enjoy the serenity and tranquillity of Hawes Water. This peaceful place attracts many birds, like **great crested grebe** and **little grebe** which nest here every year. **Water rail** squeal and wail from the deepest sedge beds, while in the summer **reed bunting**, **reed warbler** and **sedge**

*Pomatia elegans*





Bird's-eye primrose

**warbler** chatter incessantly from the reeds. Look for the delicate **bird's-eye primrose** in early summer but be careful not to touch the large sedge-like plants that grow on the fringe of the lake – it is not called **saw-sedge** for nothing!

5. The boardwalk leads you back to the public footpath towards Moss Lane, which passes by the extensive area of fen and reed bed which grows in the waterlogged marl and peat soils. These are home to rare marsh birds like **bittern** and **marsh harrier**. Follow the track to the RADAR car park, where the trail ends. To reach the start point, re-trace your steps back along the trail.



Common rock-rose

## How to get there



Gait Barrows NNR is near Morecambe Bay in north Lancashire, 2.5km north of Silverdale and 3 km south east of Arnside at SD 481772.

By car, access is via minor roads from the A6 at Beetham to Brackenthwaite Road. A small permit-holder's car park can be found on the reserve. Additional parking is available on road-side lay-bys.

The nearest train stations are in Silverdale and Arnside. Both stations are served by Transpennine Express and Northern Rail. Local bus services to the area from Carnforth and Lancaster are provided by Stagecoach.

**Call Traveline on 0871 200 22 33 to plan your public transport.**

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## Take Care

- The nature trails and public footpaths are open to the public at all times. Because of certain natural hazards and the sensitivity of some of the habitats within the site, access to other parts of Gait Barrows is by permit only. Applications should be sent to:-

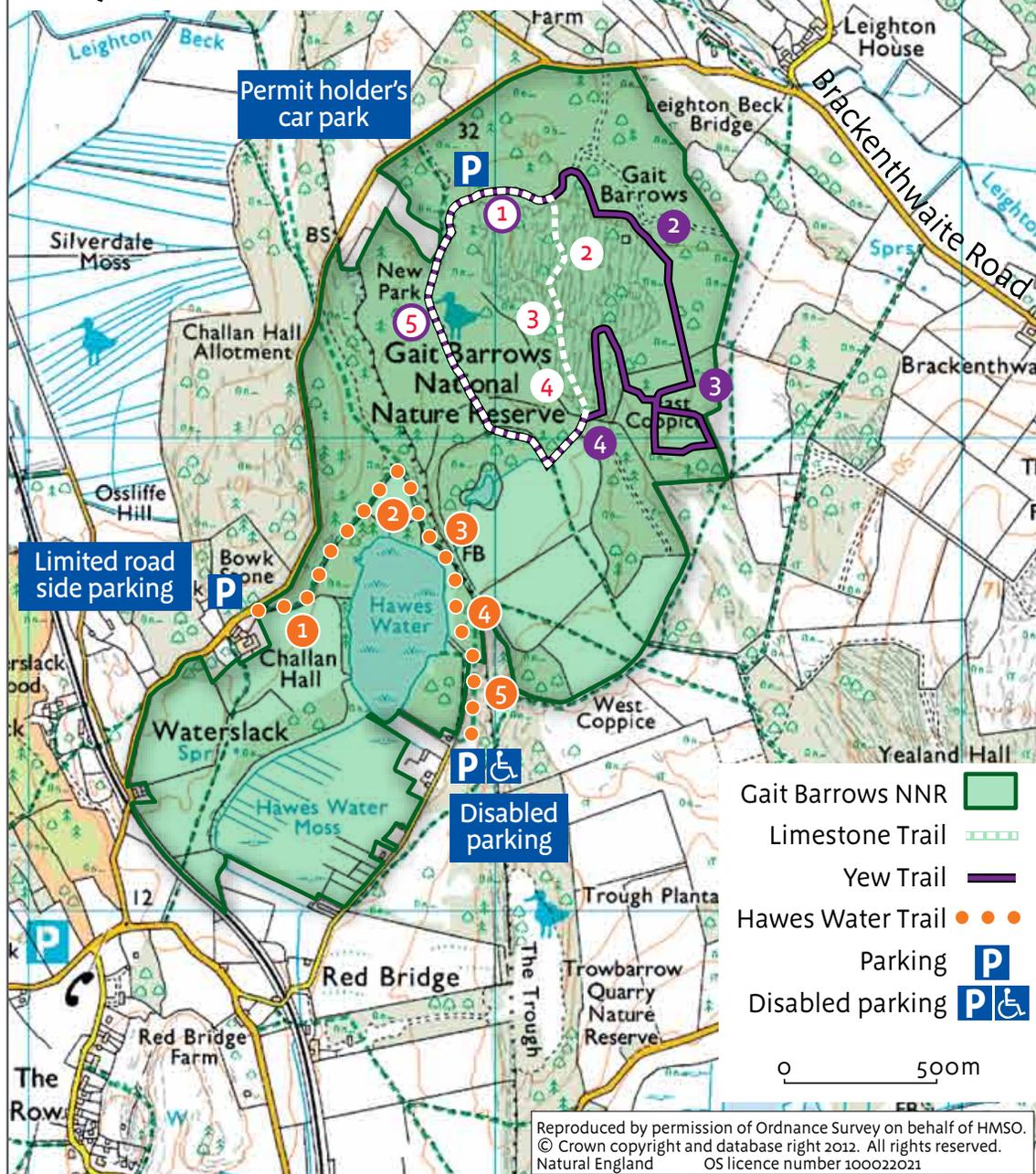
By Post: Natural England, Roudsea Wood Base, Fish House Lane, Haverthwaite, ULVERSTON, Cumbria LA12 8PE

By Phone: 015395 31604

By Email: [rob.petley-jones@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:rob.petley-jones@naturalengland.org.uk)

- Please take care when walking on the limestone pavements as they have uneven surfaces and deep crevasses, and can be very slippery especially when wet.
- Much of the site is hazardous and care should be taken when leaving the paths. There is no access to the wetlands around Little Hawes Water and Hawes Water, or onto Hawes Water Moss, as these areas are extremely hazardous and are very sensitive wildlife areas.
- To avoid disturbance to wildlife, there is no access for dogs away from the public footpaths, where dogs should be kept on a lead at all times. This includes the open pastures on the NNR.
- Ticks are present on this reserve and Lyme Disease occurs in the Morecambe Bay area. Visitors are advised to take adequate precautions against ticks. Information on Lyme Disease can be found at <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Lyme-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- Please follow the Countryside Code.

# Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve waymarked walks



Permit holder's car park

Limited road side parking

Disabled parking

- Gait Barrows NNR
- Limestone Trail
- Yew Trail
- Hawes Water Trail
- Parking P
- Disabled parking P

0 500m

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**Front cover photograph:**

Limestone pavement

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**For further information about the  
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