INSIDE ...
‘Flying squad’ rescues rare Pennine Way plants — 3
Hay meadows’ future secured — 5
Living North Pennines latest — 6
Sneak preview: Northern Rocks Festival — 10
Green businesses get networking — 12
Your chance to help protect wildlife — 17
A letter from the Chairman

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Spring and Summer 2009 edition of North Pennines News, the magazine of the North Pennines AONB Partnership.

Perhaps the highlight of the last few months has been the much-publicised helicopter ‘rescue’ of the rare flora along the Pennine Way in Teesdale. Through our Living North Pennines project we’ve been able to airlift in materials to improve the footpath by the river, thereby reducing the tendency to step off it in the wet and damage sensitive plants. You can read about this rescue mission on the page opposite.

With summer coming, we can look forward to enjoying our spectacular hay meadows once again. Our Hay Time project has been given a new lease of life with £270,000 of new funding and additional staff to help us conserve and celebrate this most special of our special environmental qualities.

In these pages you’ll read about excellent work on archaeology, new publications, projects with local children and articles about fascinating aspects of the area including the ‘last of the aurochs’ and rare upland flora. There are also continued success stories from Living North Pennines, including the excellent ‘Ales and Tales’ event in Blanchland: find out more about this and other work supported through our HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme on pages 6 to 9.

There’s so much going on amongst our partners and local businesses too. I hope you’ll be as interested as I was in the team’s work to develop and support a ‘green business network’ and also the success of Allendale Brewery (and the pies made with their beer by the excellent Moody Baker in my home town of Alston).

There’s a lot going on, and a lot to look forward to. The birds are back on their breeding grounds as I write, flowers are showing and the spell of winter is broken. I hope you enjoy this edition of North Pennines News and enjoy getting out and about in our beautiful landscape this spring and summer.

Cllr Richard Turner  
Chairman, North Pennines AONB Partnership

© Natural England/Charlie Hedley

60 years of AONBs and National Parks — see page 11

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.
‘Flying doctors’ come to the rescue of rare flowers

Helicopter airlifts took place in February to prevent rare wild flowers and grasses from being destroyed by unwitting walkers along one of the most popular stretches of the Pennine Way.

The 268-mile route which runs from the Peak District in Derbyshire to the Scottish Borders attracts around 33,000 visitors every year to the spectacular High Force and Low Force waterfalls near Middleton-in-Teesdale, and although they’re very welcome, all those stout walking boots were taking their toll on the richly diverse habitats along the way.

People were inevitably walking around the edges of muddy puddles rather than through them, and the path has been gradually widening while the grassy edges – which in spring and summer should be full of rare flowers such as the pretty yellow globeflower and the purple northern marsh orchid – were slowly getting narrower. This is not good news for an area which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve.

Now the North Pennines AONB Partnership, working with Durham County Council, Natural England, local landowners and botany groups has come to the rescue of the wild flowers by repairing several hundred metres of the path to get walkers ‘back on track’ and allow the plants to flourish again.

The work is part of the three-year Living North Pennines project, funded with almost £2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and aiming to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the area. repairing the path is the first phase of a wider package of work to improve access and interpretation in Teesdale over the next few years.

Because the area is such an important habitat for rare plants, the 300 tons of crushed stone needed to carry out the repairs was flown in by helicopter from local quarries. Simon Wilson, one of the AONB Partnership’s Area Coordinators, said the airlifts were really the only option: “There’s no road access to this very sensitive stretch of the path; Wynch Bridge and Holwick Head Bridge at either end of the path are just footbridges, and it’s surrounded by beautiful meadows which could have been damaged if we’d transported stone in by wagon.”

Every care was taken to make sure there was no damage to the local environment; a specialist team of contractors, who have experience of path construction in environmentally sensitive sites, was used to carry out the works. And while the transportation of the stone by helicopter undoubtedly had an environmental impact, Simon has calculated the carbon emissions associated with the work and will be ‘offsetting’ them by planting trees with a local community group.

The path has now re-opened, and walkers can once again enjoy the Pennine Way between Bowlees and High Force – and its beautiful wild flowers.

Turn to pages 6, 7, 8 and 9 for the latest news on the Living North Pennines project.
No-one would deny that the foot-and-mouth epidemic of 2001 had a devastating effect on farming in the North Pennines; most of the sheep that had traditionally grazed in summer on the high Cross Fell range were lost in the culls, and the hills took on an eerie desolation.

Freed from grazing, the response of the upland vegetation was rapid and dramatic; the floral spectacle in the summer of 2002 was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for botanists. Although flocks have been built back up in succeeding years, the somewhat reduced impact of grazing has allowed the vegetation to respond in a way not seen for many years, and botanists have made a number of ‘discoveries’ of plants whose existence had previously been overlooked.

A species of mountain sedge, the sheathed sedge, known from many places in upland Scotland but never before suspected in England, was found in 2002 on Dufton Fell by retired GP and keen amateur botanist Dr Rod Corner. Thereafter it was a classic case of ‘having one’s eyes opened’: we now know this plant from 20 colonies over a range of more than 40 kilometres from Green Fell in the north to Great Shunner Fell in the south – and it will surely be found more widely within, and perhaps beyond, this area in future years.

Another sedge, the water sedge, known from much lower altitude on the River Tees and in a few lake-shore and riverside swamps in the Lake District, emerged in several large patches high on Great Dun Fell; this was as a small form reminiscent of a stunted mountain variety known from high in the eastern Scottish Highlands, but never before seen in England.

The montane Lady’s-mantle *Alchemilla glomerulans* ‘appeared’ in three spots in high-level ‘flushed’ grassland. This plant was known from scattered sites in haymeadows and roadsides in Upper Teesdale and elsewhere, but this was the first time it had been recorded at high altitude in England. Like other Lady’s-mantles, the stunted grazed plants cannot be reliably identified.

Over several summers, new sites have emerged for some species previously thought to be rare, but whose true extent we now know to be much wider. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is the Alpine foxtail, a high-arctic grass, absent from Iceland and Scandinavia, yet re-appearing much further south in Scotland. Its discovery in England was as recent as the 1950s and it was thought to be restricted to a few of the highest springs on Cross Fell and its neighbours. We now know that it is abundant in many springs over almost the same range as the sheathed sedge. It must have existed here from times soon after the last Ice Age, but how the gap developed between its main arctic range and its UK sites is a mystery.

That other famous plant of the North Pennines, marsh saxifrage, is now so much in decline elsewhere in Europe that the UK has a special conservation responsibility for it. It has responded dramatically to the reduced grazing, and in recent years has flowered in far greater profusion than before (it even had a reputation as a ‘shy flowerer’) and – significantly – the flowers now have the chance to set seed.

Allowing plants to seed, and then encouraging that seed to develop where it will, is essential if these intriguing ‘late-glacial relicts’ are to survive in changing circumstances. Many of these plants need open sites to prosper, and may disappear quite quickly if overshadowed by taller plants. Past harsh climates kept the vegetation short and ‘open’, but this can be replicated in warmer climates by grazing. A careful balance is therefore essential.
HOORAY FOR HAY! £270,000 FOR NORTH PENNINES MEADOWS

The beautiful hay meadows of the North Pennines with their myriad colourful wildflowers will be looked after for future generations to admire and enjoy, thanks to funding from three organisations.

The North Pennines AONB Partnership has secured a total of £270,000 to expand and extend the work of its Hay Time project. The award comprises £120,000 from the County Durham Environmental Trust, £100,300 from Natural England’s Countdown 2010 Biodiversity Action Fund and £49,400 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Upland hay meadows are one of the rarest grassland habitats in the country and are home to special plants like wood crane’s-bill and melancholy thistle. In the North Pennines traditional farm management has retained meadows that elsewhere in the country have been lost through the addition of fertiliser or early cutting to make silage rather than hay. With up to 100 different plant species per field, the meadows not only look wonderful but provide an important home for wildlife that is declining at an alarming rate elsewhere. There are also now few better places to look for bumblebees than a traditionally managed hay meadow.

Through its Hay Time project, the AONB Partnership works with farmers to enhance and restore hay meadows across the North Pennines. Staff survey the plants in farmers’ meadows and can then advise on the best approach to improve their wildlife value. In many cases this involves the addition of seed harvested from a nearby species-rich meadow.

As part of the expansion of the Hay Time project, the AONB Partnership has already appointed Neil Diment to the post of Community Officer. A further two project officers will be responsible for surveying the meadows, advising farmers, harvesting and spreading seed and the development of new elements of the project that will focus on invertebrates and birds.

Rebecca Barrett, an Area Coordinator for the North Pennines AONB Partnership said: “This award is a seal of approval for the approach taken in our Hay Time project to conserve an important wildlife habitat in the North Pennines. Our meadows survive thanks to the hard work and care of generations of farmers. Through Hay Time we will not only be working to conserve the meadows themselves but to recognise and celebrate the labours of the farming communities who have managed them over the generations.”

HAY TIME SET TO HIT THE ROAD

As part of the North Pennines AONB Partnership’s Hay Time project, a new two year Community Officer post has been created to bring a ‘Hay Time History Roadshow’ to local communities. The new Hay Time Community Officer, Neil Diment will also be running a series of events with local schools and developing resources such as loan boxes for use by schools and local people. Working with Beamish Museum, much of this work will culminate in an exhibition and an accompanying booklet celebrating the history of hay time.

Neil is keen to recruit new volunteers to help with the many aspects of the project and says: “I’m really hoping to talk to as many people as possible about our wonderful hay meadows that have only survived here in the North Pennines thanks to the work of generations of farmers. People have a vital role to play in their future conservation too and I’ll be working with volunteer botanists to collect seeds and monitor the progress of the restored meadows.”

Neil previously researched the history of hay meadow management in the North Pennines which gave him the opportunity to meet several old ‘Haytimers’ and hear about their work.

Anyone interested in getting involved with the project, or any community groups who would like to find out more about the Hay Time heritage on their doorstep can contact Neil on 01388 528801 or email neil@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

Seeds for Change? Neil (holding a traditional hay rake) with Jean Proud, Bookings Secretary at Ireshopeburn Village Institute, the venue for the first in a series of community meetings and Hay Time events that are planned over the next two years © NPAP
**Ales and Tales Night Had a Happy Ending**

The monks, the lead miners, and even the many ghosts that have populated Blanchland’s fascinating past were the inspiration for an evening of storytelling at the village’s Lord Crewe Arms in February.

Ales and Tales was a free event organised as part of Living North Pennines, a three-year project being run by the North Pennines AONB Partnership with almost £2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to conserve and enhance the qualities which make the area so special.

Held in the atmospheric Hilyard Room of the Lord Crewe Arms, complete with giant stone fireplace, knight’s armour and the hidden medieval ‘priest hole’, the night was packed with thrills, spine-tingling suspense and of course lots of laughter.

Ales and Tales featured North East storyteller Malcolm Green, who wove stories handed down through the ages with history, music and myth to create an exciting fictional tale which had its roots in and around the Blanchland area.

After Malcolm’s story the audience was able to join in and share their own tales of events that took place in and around Blanchland long ago.

Ales and Tales was organised as part of the Living North Pennines project which aims to involve the local community in learning about and interpreting how today’s landscapes have been shaped by the people, activities and industries that went before.

Abi Wylde, the AONB Partnership’s Community Interpretation Officer said: “We’re hoping Malcolm’s tale will get local people thinking about the stories they know from Blanchland’s past, perhaps anecdotes they remember hearing as children, and get them discussing and telling the old stories again.”

Another Ales and Tales storytelling evening will be taking place on 10 November at the Lord Crewe Arms. Call the AONB Partnership on 01388 528801 to book your place.

**Now here’s YOUR chance to get involved…**

There are some great opportunities coming up this spring and summer for people of all ages and interests to get involved in telling the story of their own area.

Through Our North Pennines Stories, one of the six strands of the AONB Partnership’s Living North Pennines project, communities in the Alston, Blanchland and Middleton-in-Teesdale areas can take part in a whole range of innovative activities based on the history and heritage of the landscapes around them.

Community Interpretation Officer Abi Wylde said: “We’d like to help local people collect the stories of the natural and cultural heritage of the area and tell these to people in the AONB, both visitors and locals, in a number of different and interesting ways.”

**… by collecting stories**

Abi has been up hill and down dale over the winter, collecting people’s memories of hard winters in Upper Teesdale. She’s been overwhelmed by offers of stories and has really enjoyed travelling around and recording the memories of people who endured those freezing winters, particularly 1947, 1963 and 1979.

Anyone interested in continuing to collect the stories (as there are many more to record) and photographs, or if you have some spare time and some typing skills and would like to help transcribe the recordings to ensure they are kept safely, we’d really like to hear from you! The invitation also goes out to people living in the Blanchland and Alston areas. Training and support is available for anyone who would like to be involved in this and other future heritage projects.

**… by playing an instrument**

‘New Tunes for Old Brass’ aims to capture what is special about the North Pennines in music. Working with Stanhope Silver Band and internationally renowned medieval instrument group ‘His Majesty’s Sagbutts and Cornets’, and
ON THE TRAIL OF THE HARTSIDE PACKHORSE ROUTES

The routes that the old drovers and their sturdy pack horses followed as they tramped the lonely miles between towns like Alston and Penrith are once again coming into use, thanks to the AONB Partnership.

The Hartside area will form one of five spectacular scenic routes for horse riders and mountain bikers as part of the Partnership’s ‘In the Footsteps of the Pack Horses’ programme – and Community Interpretation Officer Abi Wylde is keen to hear from anyone who has any reminiscences, old photographs or local folklore about the area.

Part of the work on the Hartside route involves carefully repairing and rebuilding the old Haresceugh Fell Footbridge, below what is locally known as Tashy Bill’s Quarry. The bridge is thought to date back as far as Roman times and was heavily used by the 18th and 19th century drovers.

The footbridge over the Ricker Gill has undoubtedly seen better times, centuries of wild moorland weather with the stream in full spate having reduced parts of the bridge to little more than piles of stone.

Abi is hoping to work with local people to collect their stories, so that visitors on the pack horse trail can learn about the history of the North Pennines as they explore the route.

Abi said: “Very little is actually known about the footbridge and the pack horse routes in the Hartside area. If anyone can shed any light on how the footbridge was used – whether it was for long-distance journeys or for local people to get to the nearest town – I’d be delighted to hear from them.”

The Hartside route will take riders in a wonderful 11 km loop along the western escarpment of the North Pennines.

Anyone who has information on the Haresceugh Fell Footbridge or the Hartside area more generally can contact Abi Wylde on 01388 528801 or email abi@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

with funding from the Performing Rights Society Foundation, leading contemporary composer Dr Martyn Harry will create a specially-commissioned piece of music. This piece will be then used as a base for a number of community compositions and concerts, with associated films. We’re hoping to work with local musicians from Middleton and Upper Teesdale, Alston Moor and Blanchland and the Upper Derwent Valley in these workshops.

We’d like to hear from musicians of any level, from silver bands to guitarists and everything else in between!

… or by writing a poem

This spring and summer, the North Pennines AONB Partnership will start ‘Penning the Pennines’!

As Community Interpretation Officer, Abi Wylde supports communities in celebrating the role people have played in shaping the landscape of the AONB.

Penning the Pennines aims to do this through poetry and will work with Vane Women, a writing group based in Darlington, to produce a book in November 2010.

The project begins in late May with poetry readings in and around the Living North Pennines project areas of Middleton, Alston and Blanchland.

Following the readings, a series of workshops will be run by Vane Women, which will help participants to write about the area and the landscape in which they live.

The workshops will take place in July, September and December this year and March of 2010. Dates and venues are to be confirmed, but look out for further information in the coming weeks or call Abi on 01388 528801. The resulting poems will be compiled into a book and published in the closing months of the Living North Pennines project.
Riverbank work creates ‘des-res’ for water voles

Tree clearance work has been taking place on the banks of the River East Allen at Allenheads, in Northumberland, in a bid to boost the numbers of water voles in the area.

The North Pennines AONB Partnership has teamed up with the SITA Trust, Allendale Estates and Northumberland County Council to remove some of the trees which are shading out the bankside vegetation which water voles feed on.

Conservation Officer Andy Lees said: “The water vole population in the East Allen Valley and nearby areas of the North Pennines is one of the most important populations remaining in Northern England.

“Although water voles remain in reasonable numbers in some of the upper Pennine valleys, including the East Allen, they’re now completely absent from the West Allen. By removing some of the trees at Allenheads, we’ll be allowing the plants underneath to grow more luxuriantly and this is one step towards encouraging the water vole to repopulate the whole area.”

The water vole is a protected species, but numbers have declined dramatically in Britain over the last few decades. In the North East, a survey estimates that more than 90 per cent of our water vole colonies have disappeared since 1990. Andy aims to turn that trend around with the help of a grant from the SITA Trust’s Enriching Nature Fund, which will pay for a programme of work to conserve water voles and their habitats in the upper valleys of the North Pennines.

Northumberland County Council has also been working on an adjacent section of the riverbank. Andy explained: “The County Council’s Highways Department is replacing the gabions – that’s the big cages of gravel – which stop the road falling into the river. Because water voles live in these gabions, the Council has had to trap them and temporarily rehome them while the work took place. Our work will complement theirs and will hopefully make the riverbank even more tempting for water voles.”

For more information contact Andy Lees on 01388 528801 or email andy@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

Travel grants are just champion for schools

Lots of ‘North Pennines Champions’ schools have been travelling into the North Pennines for great learning days out. In 2008 the AONB Partnership dished out around £4,500 of grants to 15 schools (some on long-term projects with repeat visits).

All of this year’s travel grants have been allocated for trips to places all over the North Pennines, including Harehope Quarry, Killhope – The North of England Lead Mining Museum and Hamsterley Forest.

The scheme has supported a wide range of age groups and enabled them to enjoy outdoor learning. Aclet Nursery enjoyed a trip to Hamsterley Forest and covered learning objectives across the Early Years curriculum such as gaining independence, making pretend environments outdoors, learning about geographical features and ‘mark-making’ with twigs. They had a great day and then continued their work back in the nursery, creating artwork with leaves they collected.

Another school inspired by the North Pennines was Greenfields Community Arts College. They visited Cow Green Reservoir and explored rocks and landscape as part of a GCSE topic, where they looked at igneous and sedimentary rocks and had to find metamorphic rocks such as Sugar Limestone and give reasons for how they might have occurred.

We’ll be inviting applications after September 2009 for grants in 2010 (the final year of the scheme). All teachers need to do is join up to the North Pennines Champions scheme and supply lesson plans. We will then book bus transport for the visit with grants of up to £300.

Schools which have received a travel grant have been sending their lesson plans and photographs from their day out. All of these will be compiled and added to a website for teachers, packed full of great examples of projects and lessons other teachers and their classes could replicate. It’s the Partnership’s aim to enable more quality visits to The North Pennines!

Schools interested in applying for a travel grant for 2010 should contact Nicola Cullens or Emma Boor on 01388 528801, or email nicola@northpenninesaonb.org.uk or emma@northpenninesaonb.org.uk
Woodlands: Small but Perfectly Formed’ is part of the AONB Partnership’s Living North Pennines project, which aims to add a splash of glorious seasonal colour to the AONB’s hills and valleys.

With additional funding from the Forestry Commission, the SITA Trust and Natural England, around 250 hectares of native upland oak and mixed ash woodlands will be created in the Blanchland, Alston and Middleton-in-Teesdale areas up to the end of 2010.

The end of March marked the completion of the first phase of tree planting, with a total of 43 hectares of new native woodland created. More work is scheduled for next winter.

Lis Airey, the Partnership’s Woodlands Officer, says: “The position of the new woodlands has been carefully chosen to enhance the landscape’s character, and to increase specialist habitat for wildlife.”

She added: “Some of the woodland has replaced existing coniferous plantations, but the new woodlands have been planted in a random pattern to mimic the kinds of growth patterns you’d find in older woods. This will help to settle the new woods into the landscape as they mature. The density of the planting also varies throughout the woods, with a dense, dark tangle anticipated right in the heart of the woods, graduating to a lighter, more open planting along the woodland edges.

“Where possible the new woodlands reinforce existing gill woodlands, moving along valley sides with the watercourse as a guide. In other places the woods lap at the edge of moorland known to be frequented by black grouse, in an effort to increase suitable habitat and extend the range of this species.”

The Alston Moor area has seen the greatest area of woodland created, with 27 hectares planted on two sites at Alston Moor Golf Club and Blackcleugh Burn above Barhaugh Park. In addition, a dozen new parkland trees have been planted at Barhaugh Park to help sustain the historic parkland landscape.

Two small planting schemes marked the start of the project in Teesdale: Whistle Crag adjacent to the B6282, and a site on the southern shores of Selset Reservoir. Working in partnership with Northumbrian Water Limited, Wemmergill Estate and Natural England, the AONB Partnership has created 15 hectares of gill woodland in Lunedale.

The Derwent Valley has seen the smallest area of woodland created this season. One hundred and fifty trees have been planted close to the north bank of the Reeding Burn in the first phase of a scheme that will encompass moorland edge, farmland and existing woodland.

and families ‘putt’ trees in too!

Wet and windy weather didn’t bother Alston’s Brownies when they took part in a community tree planting extravaganza at the Alston Moor Golf Club.

Local communities were invited to plant 150 trees at the golf club, take part in games, guess the number of trees to be planted and name the community woodland. The weather was against them, but it didn’t put off the Alston Moor brownies, or their brothers and sisters, and they managed to plant between 30 and 40 trees in one wind-blasted hour!

It is hoped that links between the golf course and Brownies will be maintained; all the trees that were planted on the day are clearly visible from the road so all involved can watch them grow.

Woodlands: Small but Perfectly Formed’ is the part of the AONB Partnership’s Living North Pennines project which aims to add a splash of glorious seasonal colour to the AONB’s hills and valleys.

Local schools ‘tee off’ the tree planting…

Alston and Nenthead Primary Schools sent intrepid teams of tree planters on a mission to help with the woodland planting on Alston Moor Golf Course © NPAP/Emma Boor

For more information on Woodlands – Small but Perfectly Formed, part of the AONB Partnership’s Living North Pennines project, contact Lis Airey on 01388 528801 or email lis@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

Below: Some of the native broadleaf woodland planting at Selset Reservoir which took place over the winter. © NPAP/Lis Airey

www.northpennines.org.uk

North Pennines News: Spring & Summer 2009
Northern Rocks Festival – now we are six!

The sixth annual Northern Rocks Festival of North Pennines Geology and Landscape, organised by the AONB Partnership, is about to start! The two weeks from 23 May to 7 June are packed with almost 40 events and activities to help local people and visitors discover the geology and landscapes of the North Pennines AONB and UNESCO European Geopark.

Supported mainly by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the festival celebrates the unique geological heritage of the North Pennines and its status as a UNESCO European Geopark. It is timed to coincide with European Geoparks Week – a pan-European festival celebrating the special geology of all 35 European Geoparks.

There will be events throughout the North Pennines, across Cumbria, County Durham and Northumberland, run by the North Pennines AONB Partnership and our many partners. Geodiversity Officer Elizabeth Pickett said: “There are lots of fun events and activities – from guided walks and underground mine trips, to dry stone walling and felt making!”

This year there are some exciting new events, which will explore different ways of enjoying the area’s geological and mining heritage. Have a go at watercolour painting in Blanchland, or ride along a pack pony route in Allendale. Learn all about lime in a workshop at Ninebanks, and discover North Pennine landscapes aboard a Cumbria Classic Coach! Also new this year is a week of geologically themed school visits.

Something for everyone... Northern Rocks events include themed walks, mine tours, craft events and children's activities.

New Pocket Guide a ‘must have’ for AONB visitors

This year’s North Pennines Pocket Guide is packed full of places to go, events to enjoy and general information to make sure visitors to the AONB have a thoroughly enjoyable stay. The 2009/10 guide includes a wealth of information about the area, ideal for visitors wanting to find out what is special and for ideas for things to see and do. It includes a list of green places to stay, pointers on being a ‘green’ visitor as well as maps and guides to the individual parts of the North Pennines (Teesdale, Weardale and the Derwent Valley, the South Tyne and Allen Valleys, Alston Moor and the Eastern Fellside).

You’ll also find useful information on the AONB’s nature reserves, moorlands, birds, hay meadows, geology and landscape, and historic environment. Lists of Farmers’ Markets, agricultural shows and fairs, cycle hire, horse riding stables and fishing opportunities are also included.

All in all, if you are visiting the North Pennines then this publication is going to be a valuable guide and a mine of information to enhance your stay in this fantastic part of northern England.

Individual copies are available from the AONB Partnership (01388 528801 or info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk). Bulk supplies can be ordered from Northern Print Distribution (Tel: 01830 521005, Fax: 01830 520032, email ann@npdnorth.co.uk).
60 years of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks

Come December, the 1949 National Parks and Access to Countryside Act will have been in existence for 60 years. Its effect has been to ensure that everyone can enjoy great areas of spectacular countryside and consequently benefit by improving their health and sense of wellbeing.

Ted Fellows, retired editor of Farmers Weekly, reflects on the past 60 years and discusses what the next 60 years might hold…

There may just be people still alive who remember the day in 1932 when walkers en masse set foot on Kinder Scout in the Peak District. This day went down in the annals of countryside access history as the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass. Thankfully today, because of subsequent Government legislations, walkers are more welcome in the countryside throughout the UK.

Early in the 1920s, the Open-air Movement had included legislative proposals. These, however, were thwarted by a General Election. Nevertheless, people continued to demand access to clear air, distant views and invigorating exercise offered by the countryside and its high places. The problem was that much of the countryside wasn’t open to the public.

The bad-tempered scuffles on the slopes of Kinder Scout achieved what the mounting pressure for National Parks from ramblers and country lovers had so far failed to do – it got things moving. A UK-wide rethink of access to the countryside was the positive result.

In 1945 he produced the first post-war official report, which set out what National Parks in England and Wales should be.

He also included details of other areas of countryside that, although not suitable as National Parks because they lacked size and wilderness, were nevertheless beautiful enough to deserve protection (of course, with hindsight, the omission of the North Pennines based on these criteria now seems bizarre).

His report, and a subsequent one by Sir Arthur Hobhouse in 1947, laid the foundations for the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 which created both the National Park system and areas that became officially known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

Thanks to the 1949 Act, England and Wales’ Protected Landscapes (AONBs and National Parks) now make up some 25 per cent of the countryside. These areas are better protected than the rest of our countryside as important oases of natural beauty for all to appreciate.

However, challenges to conserve and enhance our Protected Landscapes still exist. Millions of people visit the UK’s Protected Landscapes each year, inspired by their grandeur and beauty and a concentration of heritage that is unique. The job of managing the differing needs of local people and visitors, the environment, modern food production and biodiversity, is no light undertaking.

Experienced and dedicated AONB and National Park teams, volunteers and Local Authorities work in partnership with landowners, estates, farms, businesses and communities who steward the land. This close partnership working ensures that potential conflicts of land usage can be minimised.

To protect our AONBs and National Parks – our Diamonds in the Landscape – for our children and our children’s children, it is essential that we all work to strengthen the aims of their founding fathers. After all, “Diamonds are Forever”, if looked after properly.

For further details of 60th Anniversary Celebrations see www.diamondsinthelandscape.org.uk
TOURISM NETWORKERS GO GREEN

Green businesses from across the AONB came together at the end of February for the first ever North Pennines Green Tourism Network event, held at Lovelady Shield Country House Hotel and Restaurant, Alston and organised by the AONB Partnership.

“Around 30 people came along to hear Vanessa Scott, Director, Head Chef and Green Manager of Strattons Hotel in Swaffham, Norfolk, speak about how to make the most of your green accreditation in marketing,” said Shane Harris, Sustainable Tourism Officer for the AONB Partnership. “Vanessa was really inspirational and everyone went away buzzing with new ideas and enthusiasm.”

Vanessa Scott said: “We were really captivated by your beautiful landscape and warm friendly people and are already making plans to return.”

All the businesses in the Network have gained green distinction through awards from the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) and the Bellamy Award. Being a member of these green accreditation schemes demonstrates commitment to minimising their impact on the environment, communicating green credentials to customers, and having a positive impact on the surroundings.

There are more than 40 tourism businesses in and around the North Pennines which have gone the ‘extra mile’ to demonstrate to their visitors that they care enough about the environment to gain green accreditation.

“Three years ago there wasn’t a single GTBS member in the North Pennines,” added Shane. “Now we have a really excellent network of more than 40 fantastic businesses with a strong green ethic which reflect the area’s outstanding countryside, wildlife and geology.”

Visit www.northpennines.org.uk (Click on Exploring/Green Tourism) for more information on green tourism businesses in the North Pennines.

RIGHT ON TRACK

Bishop Auckland has almost been reached by the first Weardale train in 12 years! The Wickham Trolley ran the full length of the line from Weardale to within sight of Bishop Auckland station on Tuesday 27th January. On board were: Graham Lord, Driver; Steve Race, Secondman; Ed Ellis (Iowa Pacific President); Steve Raine, Duty Manager; Mark Westerfield; Todd Cecil; Mike Fairburn and Dave Payne. Volunteers monitored the line crossings and several observers watched the progress of the train from vantage points along the route.

This significant journey follows a huge amount of effort from the organisation and its volunteers over the past few years.

The link is another step in the plan to see commuter, tourist and freight traffic back on the Weardale Railway.

The Weardale Railway, now part of the Iowa Pacific family of railways is seen as a key future route for people to come and visit and stay in the North Pennines AONB using public transport.

The railway runs regular services through the year. For further information telephone 01388 526203 or email info@weardale-railway.org.uk or visit www.weardale-railway.org.uk.
The AONB is 21 years old this summer, and to mark this ‘coming of age’ the AONB Partnership has teamed up with Allendale Brewery to produce ‘North Pennines Beauty’, the perfect light, summery ale to enjoy after a long day’s walking over the moors.

‘Beauty’ will be sold both in bottles and on draft at pubs in the AONB, country shows, farmers’ markets and selected retail outlets. And for every bottle sold, Allendale Brewery will donate 10p to the AONB Partnership’s work of conserving and enhancing the qualities that make the North Pennines special.

Allendale Brewery’s Tom Hick – who won top prize at this year’s Newcastle Beer Festival with his new Adder Lager - said: “Beauty is a golden ale with flavours reminiscent of summer hay meadows, perfect for drinking with picnic sandwiches or while having a pub lunch outside on a warm day.”

Chris Woodley-Stewart, North Pennines AONB Officer and Geopark Manager said: “We were hoping that Tom could come up with a drink that would put people in mind of the amazing landscapes we have in the AONB, the wild moorland expanses and the dazzling colours of the hay meadows; North Pennines Beauty really fits the bill.”

To find out more about North Pennines Beauty ale, contact Tom Hick on 01434 618686 or email info@allendalebrewco.co.uk

The Crown at Catton near Allendale – owned and operated by Tom’s parents - is the latest North Pennines inn to serve Allendale Brewery beers. The local beers with distinctive names and flavours are already served at various locations within and beyond the North Pennines, including The Golden Lion at Allendale, the Elk’s Head at Whitsfield, the Allenheads Inn, the Bluebell at St John’s Chapel, the High Force Hotel, Teesdale, the Cross Keys at Eastgate, the Black Bull at Frosterley and the Bowes Working Men’s Club – to name but a few!

The Wolf has returned to the North Pennines! However, there is no need to start locking up your pets in fear. This wolf takes the form of an excellent steak and ale pie from the Moody Baker, the artisan bakery in Alston.

The Moody Baker has a reputation for producing a wide range of produce using fine ingredients - and the Wolf Pie is no exception.

Why is it named Wolf Pie? Wolf Ale from the Allendale Brewery is a key part of the pie and gives it a unique flavour, say its creators.

Established in 2002 as a workers’ cooperative, the Moody Baker aims to produce handmade, quality and healthy food, using local organic and Fairtrade ingredients wherever possible.

For more information, contact the Moody Baker, telephone 01434 382003 visit www.themoodybaker.co.uk or email info@themoodybaker.co.uk
Voyages and Volunteers at Killhope Museum

Killhope - The North of England Lead Mining Museum will play host to two exciting community projects this year.

‘Routes & Riches’ is a vibrant exhibition exploring the topic of emigration from the dales, and ‘Museums Live!’ is a ground-breaking project giving young people opportunities to get involved in a wide range of activities.

‘Routes & Riches’ is the culmination of Semi Precious: Weardale’s Industrial Migration Stories, which began in 2008 with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project is a partnership between Weardale Community Partnership, Harehope Quarry Project, Killhope Museum, Weardale Museum, Durham Records Office and Twisted Digits UK. The aim of Semi Precious has been to raise awareness of the industrial heritage of Weardale focusing on migration stories.

Support from the North Pennines AONB Partnership’s Small Grant Scheme enabled additional workshops and celebrations in local primary schools to take place, sharing industrial migration stories with more than 300 people in the community.

As part of last summer’s Northern Rocks festival, ‘Journeys Around the World’, a promenade performance exploring emigration stories of families in the North Pennines, was performed at Killhope Museum to a family audience. Oral history interviews took place over the winter whilst Harehope Quarry hosted ‘Fire & Bangs’ in November, an explosive celebration of the work that had taken place.

Volunteers’ involvement in the exhibition has come about through Museums Live, a new project led by Killhope Museum and a partnership of organisations in Teesdale and Wear Valley, including Twisted Digits. Through creative challenges and placements with museums and arts organisations, young people not in work or full-time education can develop new skills and gain qualifications whilst benefiting the local community.

For ‘Routes & Riches’, volunteers worked with Rachel Clarke from Twisted Digits to complete the detail of the exhibition, install lights and images, and decorate the entrance with travel posters. Future challenges for 16-25 year olds include installations in the woods at Killhope Museum and digital storymaking at the Bowes Museum. The project is funded by One NorthEast through the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

For more information on Semi Precious, visit www.weardale-history.org.uk.
For more information on Museums Live, visit www.museumslive.co.uk or call Bryony Bell on 01388 537505.

Supermodels Make Their Debut Appearance

Two new additions to the Eco-classroom at Harehope Quarry, Frosterley, will help local children discover the tropical seas and lush rainforests that covered the North Pennines around 320 million years ago, in the Carboniferous Period of Earth history.

These colourful 3D relief models show the creatures and plants that lived in these ancient environments and which are now preserved as fossils in the area’s limestones, sandstones and shales.

Harehope Quarry is one of the best places in the North Pennines to see fossil corals – they show up as striking white shapes in the famous Frosterley Marble which can be seen in the quarry faces.

Now, with the help of the models, you can see how these corals lived and what they looked like when they were alive over 300 million years ago.

The models were made by local model maker Peter Young, and bought by the North Pennines AONB Partnership. Jill Essam from the Harehope Quarry Project said: “These models have really helped the children to think about what the environments of the Carboniferous Period were like, and how geologists know from these fossils they have found.”

The AONB Partnership’s funding for the models came from LEADER+, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Natural England.

To find out more contact Jill Essam at Harehope Quarry, 01388 528633 or 01388 528599 or email jill@harehopequarry.org.uk
Weardale schoolchildren have been finding out about the land use planning process and how the decisions made by local authorities affect the landscapes around them.

Planning Aid North (PAN) — part of the Royal Town Planning Institute which aims to help groups, individuals and children better understand the planning system — has been working with Weardale schools on a project called Minerals under Your Feet. The children looked at the main types of rocks and minerals found in the AONB, and how planners have to balance the economic benefits of mineral working with the need to protect the special character and landscape quality of the North Pennines.

The children also considered and discussed a ‘live’ mineral planning application which the County Council, as the Mineral Planning Authority, approved in 2008. Dressed in appropriate costumes, they played the parts of the various groups involved in the consultation process of the planning application, such as bat and butterfly groups, the Environment Agency, residents, Parish Council and the North East Regional Assembly as well as the roles of the applicant and the planning committee. After listening to all the relevant planning issues and looking at a model of the proposal, the young ‘planning committee’ came to a decision as to whether to approve or refuse the mineral planning application. Three of the schools were in favour of the application, four schools turned it down.

As part of the project the children took part in an educational field trip to Harehope Quarry, Frosterley, and enjoyed learning about the Earth’s geological timeline and the Carboniferous rocks of Weardale, as well as searching for fossils in limestone.

Ray Angelsea, County Durham’s Project Officer for Planning Aid North said: “I was delighted with the children’s local knowledge and debating skills and grasp of important environmental and economic issues that arose from the mineral planning application.”

Last year Planning Aid North worked with more than 1,200 schoolchildren in Weardale to help them understand and enjoy the important historic Conservation Areas found in their towns and villages, as well as enabling them to make valuable and positive contributions to the review of the Conservation Areas now being undertaken by County Councils. Their work went on display at the Hub Community Centre, Stanhope and at County Hall, Durham.

Ray said: “We’re hoping that this project will be taken to other schools later in the year.”

Planning Aid North can be contacted at the RTPI Regional Office, Claremont Tower, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, telephone 0191 2225776 or by visiting www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk
A View to a Sill

The Whin Sill is one of the North Pennines’ most dramatic natural features – and its origins are just as spectacular. A new leaflet from the North Pennines AONB Partnership explains how this special geological feature formed and why it is famous around the world.

To discover its origins we need to go back nearly 300 million years. Molten rock rose up from deep within the Earth and spread out between the layers of limestone, sandstone and shale which make up the North Pennines. It solidified underground to form the Whin Sill, a vast sheet of dolerite (a hard dark rock known locally as whinstone). After millions of years of erosion the Whin Sill is now exposed at the surface where it forms dramatic landscape features.

The Whin Sill took its name from terms used by local quarrymen: ‘whin’ was a hard, dark rock and a ‘sill’ was a flat-lying layer of rock. When Victorian geologists worked out how the Whin Sill formed, the word ‘sill’ was adopted for all similar bodies of rock worldwide. The Whin Sill is therefore famous for being the original sill of geological science and is well known to geologists around the world!

The best places to see the Whin Sill in the North Pennines are in Upper Teesdale and along the North Pennine escarpment. Visit the Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve to see it at the waterfalls of High Force, Low Force and Cauldron Snout, and at the crags of Cronkley Scar and Falcon Clints. It is also very dramatic at Holwick Sears in Upper Teesdale and at High Cup Gill near Dufton. Beyond the North Pennines, the Whin Sill forms the Farne Islands and is a formidable natural rampart for Hadrian’s Wall.

For a copy of the free leaflet contact the AONB Partnership on 01388 528801 or download the pdf from www.northpennines.org.uk. Look out for a forthcoming leaflet on the simplified geological story of the whole North Pennines!

Great new ways to discover Derwent Reservoir

A new self-guided trail leaflet, Derwent Reservoir and Pow Hill Country Park is just one of a number of great ways of discovering the natural and cultural history of the AONB, as part of the three-year Living North Pennines project run by the AONB Partnership and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

You can walk along the new multi-user path at Derwent Reservoir and turn the handle on the digital listening box in a panel at either end of the route. The different channels on the box will give you commentary and oral history recollections on various aspects of the reservoir.

Sound and video files are also available to download from www.northpennines.org.uk. You can take these with you on your MP3 player when you visit the reservoir or enjoy them in the comfort of your own home before or after a visit.

These leaflets help you to use the other forms of interpretation and can be found in many local shops and tourist information centres. Alternatively you can download a copy from the above website or order a copy by contacting the AONB Partnership on 01388 528801.

Plants of the peatlands

Walkers in the North Pennines this summer should pick up a copy of the recently published Identification Guide for plants found on the AONB’s moorlands.

Selected Flowers, Grasses, Shrubs, Mosses and Lichens of the Moorlands is a companion guide to the Flowers and Grasses of Upland Hay Meadows which was published in 2006.

The moors of the North Pennines contain around 27 per cent of England’s peat-forming blanket bog, and this very special boggy habitat supports all kinds of unusual plants.

With beautiful illustrations by local artist Sarah Ingwersen, and printed on rain-resistant 75% recycled paper, the leaflet describes 30 of the most common plants walkers on the moors are likely to come across, detailing their height, appearance and the times they are in flower.

To get your copy of the guide, phone 01388 528801 or email info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk
You might think that those of us working in the field of nature conservation would have a pretty good idea of where our most interesting wildlife is, writes AONB Partnership Conservation Officer Andy Lees. After all we need to know where things are in order to help conserve them. But despite large amounts of wildlife data recorded by projects such as the North Pennines AONB Partnership’s Hay Time, Peatscapes and Water Vole projects, there are still big gaps in our knowledge of many animals and plants.

There are a number of reasons for these gaps: sometimes a great deal of experience is needed to correctly identify a species. Sometimes species are simply very scarce and rarely seen. But more often than not, species identified by people every day are simply not reported to the right people. So even for widespread and easily identified species we are often lacking in the most basic distribution data.

Often the people closest to wildlife take it for granted, and assume the ‘experts’ will know about plants and animals they see every day. This clearly isn’t the case! You might be interested to know that until wildlife organisations started collecting data on water voles in the 1990s, after a massive decline in UK populations, that there were no records from the North Pennines at all. It’s not that no-one noticed them, just not the people who record wildlife — and that’s where you could come in.

We hope that over the next few years you will start to help us build a much better picture of our wildlife in the North Pennines. We hope to make it easier for you to record the wildlife you see, and we will help make sure the information gets to the right place. We will also guide you as to which plants and animals we are particularly interested in, because the potential list is almost endless.

There are a large number of quite widespread but important species which are under-recorded, and there are also a large number of organisations out there asking for records. For example did you know about the national ‘HogWatch’ hedgehog survey, the national ‘Make the Adder Count’ adder survey, the RSPB’s ‘Big Garden Birdwatch’, the Durham Biodiversity Partnership’s ‘A Search for Starlings’ roost count, or our own North Pennines Water Vole Survey, to name but a handful?

In future editions of North Pennines News we will highlight one species or group of species about which we would like more information and explain how you can record the information. More often than not we will be encouraging you to use the services of one of the County Wildlife Records Centres with whom we have an agreement. This way we get the information, and it is also shared with those that need it locally, regionally and nationally.

There will be supporting information on our website, www.northpennines.org.uk, and we will update links to other national and regional surveys which you can get involved in. We look forward to hearing from you soon!
SECOND SUCCESSFUL YEAR FOR PEATLAND RESTORATION

The AONB Partnership’s Peatscapes project has just completed its second year of restoring the North Pennines’ peatbogs so that they can play a vital role in the global battle against climate change.

Despite the heavy snow earlier in the year the work to block more than 270 kilometres of drainage ditches was completed on time and on budget. The Partnership’s Peatscapes Project Manager Paul Leadbitter said: “This year’s restoration season took place on six sites with 1260 hectares of blanket bog being hydrologically restored. At a cost of approximately £300,000 it is money well spent as there are benefits for biodiversity, carbon storage, water quality and flooding reduction.”

Over 9,000 kilometres of grips (drainage ditches) were cut in the North Pennines peat over the past 50 years with the intention of draining it and making the soil more productive. Unfortunately, this left a legacy of drying and eroding peat which impacts on flooding, water quality, biodiversity, the historic environment, carbon storage and climate change.

The United Nations Environment Programme recently reported that 10 per cent of global CO₂ emissions come from degrading peatlands and that restoring the planet’s peatlands is a quick and cost effective measure of reducing global carbon emissions. Paul Leadbitter said: “The UK is beginning to emerge as a leader in peatland restoration techniques and carbon conservation science. Climate change experts are telling us that we may have only 100 months to act on climate change and peatland restoration is an easy win for many reasons. Keeping the billions of tonnes of CO₂ locked in the peat is a long-lasting simple solution, reduces national carbon emissions and provides jobs for local people.”

For more information on the AONB Partnership’s Peatscapes project, contact Paul Leadbitter on 01388 528801 or email paulpeatscapes@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

ECOSYSTEMS AT YOUR SERVICE

What are ‘ecosystems services’ — and what on earth do they have to do with us? The North Pennines AONB Partnership’s Peatscapes Project Manager, Paul Leadbitter, explains…

The concept of ecosystem services is not a new one. In fact the idea seems to have first been established by Plato in about 400 BC but it was not until the late 1950s that the idea gained attention through attempts to use ecosystems to process human produced wastes. So why is all the recent talk about ecosystem services so relevant to organisations like Defra, Natural England, the Environment Agency and us in the family of AONBs and Geoparks?

You probably already know what ecosystem services are; you have just been calling them something else or perhaps haven’t ever given them a name. In a nutshell, they are the goods and services that the natural environment provides to humans. These range from the simple, such as food provision, to more complex services including climate regulation and nutrient cycling. In most cases their importance to the human species is crucial and in the face of climate change and fiscal uncertainty there is a need to articulate their role, evaluate their benefits – and protect them.

In 2000, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan announced the Millennium Assessment project (2001-2005) which was to assess the consequences of ecosystem change on human well-being. Essentially this project looked at the state of the planet’s ecosystems and their ability to provide services to its inhabitants. The Millennium Assessment found that nearly two thirds of the services provided to humankind were found to be in decline worldwide and that this situation would probably get worse over the next 50 years unless appropriate polices and practices were put in place immediately to reverse the decline. While the results of this study are perhaps not surprising, it does mark the first time that a global assessment has been undertaken that links the state of an ecosystem to the wellbeing and development needs of humans.

The Millennium Assessment project is having a ‘trickle down’ effect, with agencies in the UK now speaking the language of ecosystem services, and we are starting to see developing policies and funding mechanisms to support restoration work to conserve and enhance these services. Protected Areas in the UK including the family of AONBs and National Parks are continuing – and in some cases expanding – their restoration plans for key ecosystems and their services. The North Pennines AONB Partnership is working with international partners to develop a methodology for attaching a value to the ecosystem services provided by the North Pennines AONB and its partners’ protected landscapes.

It is generally agreed that there are four categories of ecosystem services:
- Provisioning Services, such as food, fibre, fuel and water.
- Regulation Services, such as carbon storage, water filtration and flood protection.
- Supporting Services, such as nutrient cycling, oxygen production and soil formation.
- Cultural Services, such as education, recreation and tranquillity.
Work will take place over the summer to conserve a nationally important piece of industrial heritage in the North Pennines, writes Tom Gledhill, Historic Environmental Adviser for Natural England in the North East.

Readers may be familiar with the site of Low Slitt Mine, as it is located on one of the most popular walks in the AONB, up the Middlehope Burn from Westgate. The walk takes you up through the ancient woodland of Slitt Wood, formerly a coppice wood in a medieval deer park belonging to the Bishops of Durham. Emerging from the wood you come upon the remains of Low Slitt — a lead mine last in operation in the 19th century.

The site is designated as a Scheduled Monument, and among the interesting features are the stone base for one of Armstrong’s hydraulic engines (which served as a winding engine for the shaft), a row of bouse teems (one of the finest examples in the North Pennines), and an ore washing and dressing floor where water was used to separate the heavy lead ore from lighter waste minerals.

As well as a nationally important industrial heritage site, the mine is also part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest, designated partly for its botanical interest of the lead tolerant plants that grow on the washing floor.

Unfortunately the remains of Low Slitt Mine are deteriorating; the lime mortar is eroding out from what is left of the buildings, causing them to collapse, and the Middlehope Burn is prone to flash floods and is eroding away the ore washing and dressing area. The natural deterioration of the site is being made worse by unauthorised campers, who have caused damage by dismantling stonework to make barbecues and lighting fires, and well as leaving litter.

Natural England and English Heritage have been working together to find a way of conserving this important and popular site. The first phase saw Natural England commission a team of specialists to assess the condition of the monument and investigate the causes of the decay. This brought together a conservation architect and an archaeologist to record the historic fabric, a hydrologist to investigate the options for protecting the site from the stream, and an ecologist to ensure that the ecological interest of the site is protected. While the preparation for the main conservation phase was underway, English Heritage funded urgent work including repairs to the culvert arch.

The project is now at a stage where work on site to consolidate the buildings and control the damage caused by the burn can begin. Work will be underway during this spring and summer to help safeguard this site of national historic and ecological importance for the future.

For more information on Low Slitt washing floor conservation contact Tom Gledhill on 0191 2293096 or email tom.gledhill@naturalengland.org.uk

SLITT PATHS AND GUIDED WALK

New Permissive Access at Low Slitt

In spite of the damage at Low Slitt Mine, Natural England and the owner of the site don’t see this as a reason to restrict access by responsible visitors. In fact as part of the owner’s Higher Level Stewardship agreement, they have agreed to allow additional permissive access, which will allow walkers to see more of the site and take in some of the superb views. Anyone wanting to find out about other permissive access provided by Natural England can do so by looking on http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk/

Rockwalk reminder

Don’t forget the Slitt Wood Walk taking place on Sunday 14th June, led by local geologist Brian Young. It’s a three-mile, mainly easy walk starting from Westgate and taking in the Middlehope Valley’s rocks, plants and mining heritage. For further details or to book a place phone the North Pennines AONB Partnership on 01388 528801.
When aurochs roamed the hills

Preserved in the peat bogs of the North Pennines are some remarkable glimpses into our prehistoric past, writes Elizabeth Pickett from the AONB Partnership Staff Unit. Bleached tree stumps are relics of the ancient forests that grew here after the last Ice Age, and flint arrowheads tell of hunting expeditions thousands of years ago. One of the animals our ancestors would have hunted was the mighty aurochs. These prehistoric wild cattle were formidable animals standing two metres high at the shoulder and with fearsome horns.

The aurochs would have stood about two metres high at the shoulder, and would have towered above one of our modern breeds of cattle © NPAP/Elizabeth Pickett.

We know aurochs once lived here because their horns have been found buried below the peat, in the Moor House–Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, and on Treshope and Burnhope Moors in Upper Weardale. The horns, made of tough keratin (the same material as fingernails), have survived well in the wet, oxygen-poor peat.

A horn was conserved last year by archaeologists at Durham University and dated by radiocarbon techniques, as part of the North Pennines AONB Partnership’s Peatscapes project. The results show that this aurochs died about 4000 years ago, in the early Bronze Age. This is only shortly before the supposed extinction of the aurochs in Britain – so maybe this was one of the last aurochs ever to roam the North Pennines! Elsewhere in Europe the aurochs survived much longer; the last one died in 1627 in the forests of Poland. The horn was displayed last summer in an exhibition ‘Out of this Earth’ at Killhope, the North of England Lead Mining Museum.

For more information on the AONB Partnership’s Peatscapes project and for a copy of the leaflet ‘Living History: how peat is revealing the past’, contact the AONB Partnership on 01388 528801 or email info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk.

News in Brief

Community archaeologists will delve into AONB’s past

North Pennines AONB Historic Environment Officer Paul Frodsham is currently working with English Heritage, the North Pennines Heritage Trust and numerous other partners to develop a community archaeology project that it is hoped will start in April 2010.

This will provide professional expertise and funding for local groups to undertake a range of archaeological research, conservation and interpretation projects, as well as enabling a series of events with an historical theme.

The intention is for the project to focus on a large number of small-scale initiatives at locations spread throughout the North Pennines over an initial three-year period.

Training will be available in archaeological techniques including geophysics, excavation, air photo interpretation and documentary research. People from different parts of the North Pennines will have the opportunity to participate in projects elsewhere in the region, thus creating a dynamic network of inter-related projects all of which will contribute to our understanding of the North Pennines over the centuries.

If you have any ideas for projects that you would like to see included within this initiative, or if you would like to register to receive regular updates as the project develops, then please contact Paul at pfrodsham@northpenninesaonb.org.uk or on 01388 528801.

Bastle rescued from decay

Work will take place this summer to protect the ruins of a Northumbrian bastle house, once a farmer’s fortress against the Border Reivers of the 17th century. Rowantree Stob on the west side of Knockshield Burn in Allendale has many of the features of a bastle house, the thick-walled defensive farm houses with living spaces above a byre. Although it has a typical bastle doorway with a drawbar tunnel which would have housed a stout oak timber to bar the door in times of attack, the experts say Rowantree Stob is unusual in that its walls are thinner than most bastles, and its position against the slope next to the burn would have been hard to defend. The letters ‘TR’ are carved into the doorway and these are probably the initials of a relation of Margaret Rowle who is recorded as a tenant at ‘Rowndetreestob’ in 1608. Natural England has reached an agreement with the farmer that will protect the ruins and has already funded a project to record the building, assess its condition and produce recommendations for its consolidation.