

Adder



preservation of our natural heritage, by minimising these disturbances or even carrying out active conservation measures to arrest the decline of these important habitats.

The nature reserve itself is an area of beautiful open moorland and includes the Drake Stone, where nearby rocks have been scratched and polished by the ice sheet of the last glaciation. The site is largely covered by upland heather heath and contains outcrops of sandstones and provides an ideal habitat for adders and other wildlife to thrive such as the carnivorous round-leaved sundew and the large heath butterfly and emperor moth.

### A delicate balance...

One of the most memorable sights you may encounter whilst walking up the moorland of Harbottle Crag is that of an adder basking in the sun. These lovely snakes are our only poisonous snake and should be observed and not approached. The adder is present throughout the UK but is found mainly in the south-west and north-east of England, and parts of Central Scotland.

Many of our reptile species in Britain are declining, particularly the more widespread species and they do not respond well to agricultural intensification. Some of the risks to adders include the loss of suitable conditions through the "improvement" of land for farming or development, overgrazing or regular mowing/stripping of vegetation which removes valuable resting and overwintering sites, causes disturbance and can kill them. So the importance of partnerships between conservation bodies such as the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Defra, the Ministry of Defence and Forest Enterprise can assist in the



The Old Lane

### ... from the highs of Harbottle Crag to the heights of upland pastures.

When you walk up the lane from Low Alwinton you eventually emerge onto what appears to have been a lane or track through a wonderful grassy pasture (point 9). This lane has been marked on maps since at least 1866 and you can see that at one time it was lined by two hawthorn hedges. The route was probably used

to transport limestone from the east of Harbottle to the Alwinton Lime Kilns you passed on the way up the hill.

The fields here are owned by Mrs Sheldrick and managed by her son Simon. Mrs Sheldrick has owned these fields for over 12 years now and it was a previous tenant of hers who entered the land into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme with Simon very happy to continue with it.

**"It gives us the chance to manage the land the way we want to" Simon goes on to explain.**

**"We employ a full time worker and without the CSS we would probably have to intensify, although I'm not really interested in that side of things. On the farm I regularly see red squirrels, deer and almost every sort of mammal you would expect to see in the north east. With the Scheme's help we have been able to restore some stone walls and do other bits and pieces."**

This particular field is known as Hob's Knowe and is known as management code P1 - this is "Defra speak" for a field that is grazed all year round. This field could be very productive from a farming point of view if Simon used fertiliser on



Carefully balanced grazing

it. Stewardship means that he can gain a reasonable income from it without using fertilisers - thus allowing grasses and wild flowers to thrive. The Scheme imposes spring grazing restrictions so that the emerging wildflowers are not nibbled and ground nesting birds such as lapwing and oystercatchers not trampled.

As far as the livestock is concerned, Simon has to strike a delicate balance between overgrazing and undergrazing.

**"We have a flock of Scots Blackface ewes which we put next to a Textel ram, crossing a good traditional British breed with the more continental ram thus producing a good solid lamb. We are in the process of putting more cattle in our system to help balance the grazing.**

**"We do keep a couple of fields out of the scheme as a precaution, which allows us to use fertilizer to help us to grow more grass if we have a hard year."**

So creating a balance is very important and is carefully managed through a combination of good husbandry, active partnerships, careful use of available resources and hard work on behalf of the farmers.



Scots blackface and her lamb



### How to get there

Harbottle is situated approximately 8 miles from Otterburn, 8 miles from Rothbury, 20 miles from Morpeth and 35 miles from Newcastle.

### What are the Countryside Gateway series of walks all about?

These walks follow a trail through public rights of way, permissive paths and bridleways, over farmland and countryside throughout the north east of England. They offer an opportunity to experience the wonderful landscapes in our region and to witness, first-hand, the efforts of the people

who live and work in them. In some cases you will be walking through a landscape that has been farmed by the same family for generations and this offers unrivalled opportunities to learn about some of the methods of conservation taking place and how modern farming practices are offering new opportunities for tourism, conservation and commerce.

We hope that these walks will provide you with an insight into how Defra and its partners are working with farmers and landowners to protect the features that are important for the countryside - for its people and its wildlife. Defra have initiated schemes that create a direct link for agriculture and the environment to work in harmony protecting both jobs, countryside heritage and the environment. Other schemes are helping farmers and rural businesses diversify into areas such as providing high quality produce, recreation and tourism.

*"From silent Spring to the march of the seasons, each buzzing with biodiversity. A decade of vision and action that is slowly but surely putting wildflowers and wildlife back into the countryside of England, thanks to a dynamic partnership of farmers, and government and non governmental organisations large and small. Common sense, and information and technology transfer now paves the way ahead for a farmed environment with all the benefits of soils, landscapes and rural communities once again in good heart."*

David Bellamy, Bedburn, March 2002

For more information about this walk and others in the series, please contact:  
**Defra (RDS), Quadrant, Newburn Riverside, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE15 8NZ.**  
Tel 0191 229 5500 Email: [enquiries.northeast@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries.northeast@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

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Design, production and interpretation by: Differentia Ltd, 0191 2332330.  
Illustration by Steve Pardue ([www.wildlifeillustration.com](http://www.wildlifeillustration.com)). Photography by Steve Pardue and Jim Milner.



## Opening doors to a forever changing countryside

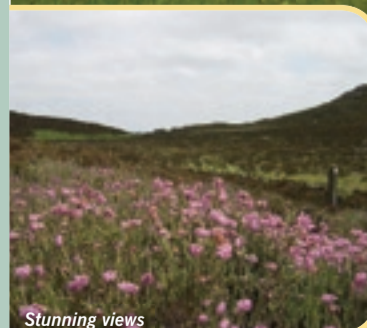
# A Countryside Gateway walk through the ... Harbottle Crag



Moorland flowers



Woodland walks



Stunning views

An easy walk through heather, woodland and upland pasture of the beautiful Coquet Valley.  
Distance: 4 miles  
Grade: Easy



Harbottle Castle

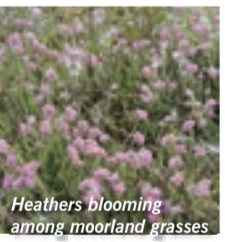
**1. As you go through Harbottle from the south, drive through the main street. As you pass through the village there is a car park on the right for the castle. Park here - good spot for a picnic and a brief visit up to the castle, which is one of English Heritage's properties. Turn right out of the car park and head down the main road on the grass verge. Admire the hills on the left which is in the Northumberland National Park and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as well as being in a Countryside Stewardship Scheme.**



Rich meadow grasses

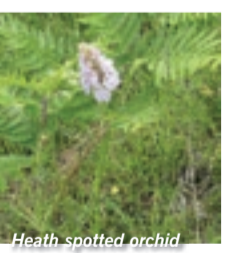
Look out for Adders on the road here. On the verge is bracken, ash honeysuckle and the drooping flowers of water avens.

**2. After a short way turn left into the Forest Enterprise woodland. You can also park here. Carry on up the track in the woodland and turn left up a track which takes you to the signs to Drake Stone. Go through a gate at the top of the track which is Northumberland Wildlife Trust Harbottle Crag Nature Reserve.**



Heathers blooming among moorland grasses

**3. Go through the gate and note the signs about breeding moorland birds. Once through the gate turn right up the hill through the SSSI moorland up to the Drake Stone.**



Heath spotted orchid

The forest on the right is now mainly Scots pine - look out for red squirrels at this point. As you walk through the moorland note the heather which is made of three types - heather (ling) which grows on the dry tussocks, cross-leaved heather and

bell heather which grows in the damp hollows between the tussocks. Look out for adders - make plenty of noise as you walk through heather which is enough to ensure that they are not surprised by human presence, also watch out for the little yellow flowers of tormentil, bedstraw, wolf spider and tiger beetles running and hopping over the track.



The fluffy blooms of cotton grass

Carry on the path up the hill and note that the track splits allowing you to take a detour up to the Drake Stone. Carry on straight to the top of the hill to the right of the Drake Stone. As you reach the top of the track note the cotton grass blooming with furry blossom. Look out for ring ouzel and sweet woodruff. Ahead is Harbottle Lake - which may have waterbirds such as teal, gooseander, common sandpiper and dipper. The moorland supports many birds such as wheatear, black grouse, meadow pipit, merlin, peregrine falcon and whinchat.

NOTE: The peat bog at the eastern end of the lough was formed from a layer of Sphagnum moss growing over deep water. Please keep to the footpaths as the bog is extremely dangerous and could result in drowning!



Emperor dragonfly

This whole area is a SSSI and forms an extensive area of dwarf-shrub heath with associated blanket bog.

Part of the land here is farmed by Mr Carruthers, who has reduced the number of sheep he grazes on the moor by entering into a Countryside Stewardship Agreement. This will help the heath regenerate without becoming over grazed.

**4. Head towards the lake and follow the waymarker sign over a stile. Cross the stile and follow the footpath down towards the lake. There are lots of large flat rocks here - ideal for a picnic or simply to just enjoy the peace and quiet.**

**5. At the end of the lake there is a stile over a fence - ignore this and turn right following the path up a hill towards woodland with the fence on the left. Head in to the Forest Enterprise woodland and follow the path in a more or less straight ahead direction. Enjoy the quiet of the pine forest. The path here follows the fence line which has by and large fallen down but is still visible.**

Look out for butterflies and emperor dragonflies. Also woodland birds such as coal tit, long-tailed tit and chaffinch. Also in July look for the red berries of bilberry.



A wonderful farming landscape shaped by generations of farming families

**6. Eventually the path comes out of woodland and to a gate. Go through the gate and turn right onto a track. go through another gate and carry on the track with the forest on the right. At this point there are open fields on the left "Barrow Knocks" which combines a SSSI and a Stewardship Agreement.**

Look out for butterflies such as red admiral, foxglove and tormentil. Also bedstraw, the little blue flower of the heath milkwort. Milkworts were once thought to improve milk production in cattle hence the name! The many little white flowers you may come across could be eyebright. On the verge on the right look out for orchids such as heath spotted orchids and early purple.

**7. Carry on the track to a wooden gate and turn left onto the main road towards Alwinton Bridge.**



The lime kilns of Low Alwinton

As you walk on the verge notice the wealth of meadow flowers such as self heal, cow parsley, grasses, veronica, chickweed, white orchid, heath spotted (or common spotted) orchid and early purple orchid in the field which is rich in meadow flowers and is part of a Stewardship Agreement.

**8. As you reach the bridge look over into the Coquet and watch for dipper, common sandpiper and unusually for upland rivers, kingfisher. Cross the bridge and turn right at Low Alwinton Cottages. Walk down the track and cross a cattle grid past the cottages on the left.**

Continue over another cattle grid up to the Alwinton Lime Kilns which have a panel explaining their history. There is lots of dog rose, foxgloves and buttercups here. Over the fence on the right is a meadow which is rich in grasses and flowers. It is also a SSSI and NNR.

Look for swallows and butterflies here. This large area is known as Castle Haugh and Park House Moor Field and has been in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme since 1994. The farmer, Mr Dixon runs an organic farm and much of the land he manages is upland pasture. This is especially important for breeding upland birds such as lapwing, curlew and golden plover.

**9. At the end of the Tarmac path go through a gate heading towards a small woodland ahead. Follow the grass track to the corner of the woodland through the field. Look to the right and you can see the castle on a mound. This field is largely grazed by sheep and is in a CSS - it is rich in meadow grasses. Ahead you can see the lovely wooded valley of the Coquet. Eventually you come to a wooden fence and a stile - go over this and follow this path down the hill.**



Lapwing

Look for heron flying lazily overhead.

**11. Eventually you will see a track on the right which goes over a bridge over the Coquet. Stop a while and look for kingfisher, dipper and common sandpiper. As you cross the bridge the track meets a Tarmac road - turn right here and at the end of this road turn right onto the main road and through the village back to the car.**



Meadow cranesbill



Grazing among the CSS

Harbottle castle is managed by English Heritage and is well worth a visit. The first castle was constructed by the Norman Lord Redesdale about 900 years ago.



One of the many beautiful plaques in the car park of Harbottle Castle

It was built to a design introduced into Britain by the Norman's and known as a motte and bailey castle. This consists of a large conical mound - the motte - which would have been surmounted by a palisade and a tower. Later the Norman's replaced the palisade on top of the motte with a stone keep. Part of this keep remains, along with fragments of the stone curtain wall and gatehouse. The stone walls of the castle have been and repaired as they were in danger of collapse. The gatehouse was recently excavated by archaeologists from Newcastle University, and the gatehouse uncovered by the archaeologists have been consolidated to provide visitors with a better appreciation of this type of defensive structure.

