



Take a 5.5 km (2 hour) stroll above Hury Reservoir in Baldersdale – alongside some of the most vibrant hay meadows in the North Pennines

**To find out more**  
This is one of a series of hay meadow walks leaflets in the North Pennines AONB. For details and more information about the Hay Time project, contact:  
North Pennines AONB Partnership Staff Unit  
tel: 01388 528801  
info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk www.northpennines.org.uk  
The information in this leaflet is available in large print and other languages on request.

**Around Baldersdale**  
• There is a car park with toilets, including facilities for people with disabilities, at the northern end of the Hury Reservoir dam (see map inside).  
• Cotherstone (5 km) has refreshments and a post office with general store  
• Romaldkirk (5 km) has a brasserie and restaurant, village inn and part-time post office.  
The start of the walk is not served by public transport but the 95 and 96 pass through Cotherstone and Romaldkirk, tel: Traveline on 0870 6082608 for information.



Step into a riot of colour...

**Hay Time** **Walk 3**

**A rich tapestry**

There can be more than 30 different plant species growing in every square metre of upland hay meadow and up to 100 in any one field. They provide an important habitat for birds, insects and mammals – even during the night when bats swoop over them catching insects.

Meadows are great for water voles as they favour stream-sides with a wide range of flowering plants. The North Pennines is one of their last strongholds.



There may be 10 or more species of native grass alone, including sweet vernal grass, which gives hay its lovely smell. In addition to the grasses, there are herbs such as Lady's-mantle and clovers, which are able to fix atmospheric nitrogen in their roots, adding this vital nutrient to the soil for use by other plants.

**Local beauties**

Plants such as melancholy thistle, wood crane's-bill, water avens and globeflower all thrive in the North Pennines and bring the meadows to life with colour in the summer months.



**Lady's-mantle** ▶  
Nine different types of Lady's-mantle grow in the North Pennines and three of these occur nowhere else in the country.

◀ **Red clover**  
Much loved by bumble bees, red clover is an important fodder crop.



**Selfheal** ▶  
Also known as hock heal or sickly wort, selfheal was used by the Greeks to cure sore throats and tonsillitis. It can also help lower blood pressure.

**Every shade**

Betony, common sorrel, red clover, common knapweed and great burnet all add various shades of pink and red to the meadows and verges, while selfheal and tufted vetch bring a splash of blue. The yellows of the meadow buttercup, meadow vetchling, yellow rattle, common bird's-foot trefoil and the dandelion-like rough hawkbit are an uplifting sight throughout the summer, while pignut, cuckoo flower, eyebright, meadowsweet and greater stitchwort come in various shades of cream and white.



**Changing Colour**



Wood anemone, marsh marigold, cuckoo flower



Meadow buttercup, common sorrel, pignut, wood crane's-bill, yellow rattle



Great burnet, melancholy thistle, meadowsweet, rough hawkbit, wood crane's-bill



Common knapweed, Devil's-bit scabious, meadowsweet



Introduction of the semi-parasitic species yellow rattle is often crucial in meadow restoration. By stealing nutrients from the grasses, it weakens them so that patches of bare ground start to appear. These can then be colonised by less competitive flowering plants.

Forty per cent of the UK's remaining 1,100 ha of upland hay meadows are in the North Pennines. The AONB Partnership's Hay Time project is working closely with farmers, both to ensure the survival of flower-rich meadows and revitalise those that have lost their distinctive species. Using specialist machinery, seed from species-rich sites is harvested and spread on meadows to be restored.

**The future**

During spring and summer, the hay meadows of the North Pennines burst with life. An amazing tapestry of wild flowers blooms, filling the landscape with vivid colour – from the white of the early flowering wood anemone in March right up to October, when the blue-purple Devil's-bit scabious is having its final fling. It is not the rarity of the species that make hay meadows an internationally important habitat, rather it is the sheer diversity of plant life that flourishes here.

**Special Species**



## A Hay Meadow Walk in Baldersdale

This 5.5 kilometre walk in Baldersdale visits some of the most spectacular hay meadows in the North Pennines. It also passes close to Hury Reservoir, a popular site for over-wintering wildfowl such as mallard, teal, tufted duck and goosander. The best time to see the flowers is between April and August.

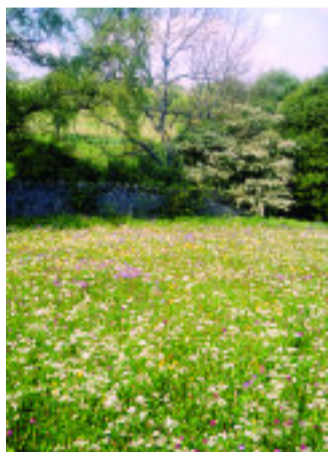
### How difficult is this walk?

Much of the route is along quiet, level country lanes and these sections are suitable for people with limited mobility, including wheelchair users and families with pushchairs. The return route from Willoughby Hall to Fiddler House, crosses rough pastureland and meadows via a series of gates and stiles.



Starting from Fiddler House, head down the lane. In the spring and early summer, you are likely to hear the long, bubbling song of the curlew or the "pee...witt" of the lapwing. These, and other wading birds such as redshank and snipe, nest in large numbers in the pastures and allotments of Baldersdale. Look out for the long, wispy crest of the lapwing and the curlew's long, down-curved beak.

### ▼ The Tatty field



©Barbara Brown

Along Briscoe Lane, you are surrounded by pastures and hay meadows, rich in native grasses and wild flowers. The "Tatty Field" is a particularly striking example, but please don't enter the meadow as there is no public access to it. The flowers are best viewed over the wall or from the gate at the top end of the field.

### ▼ Great Burnet



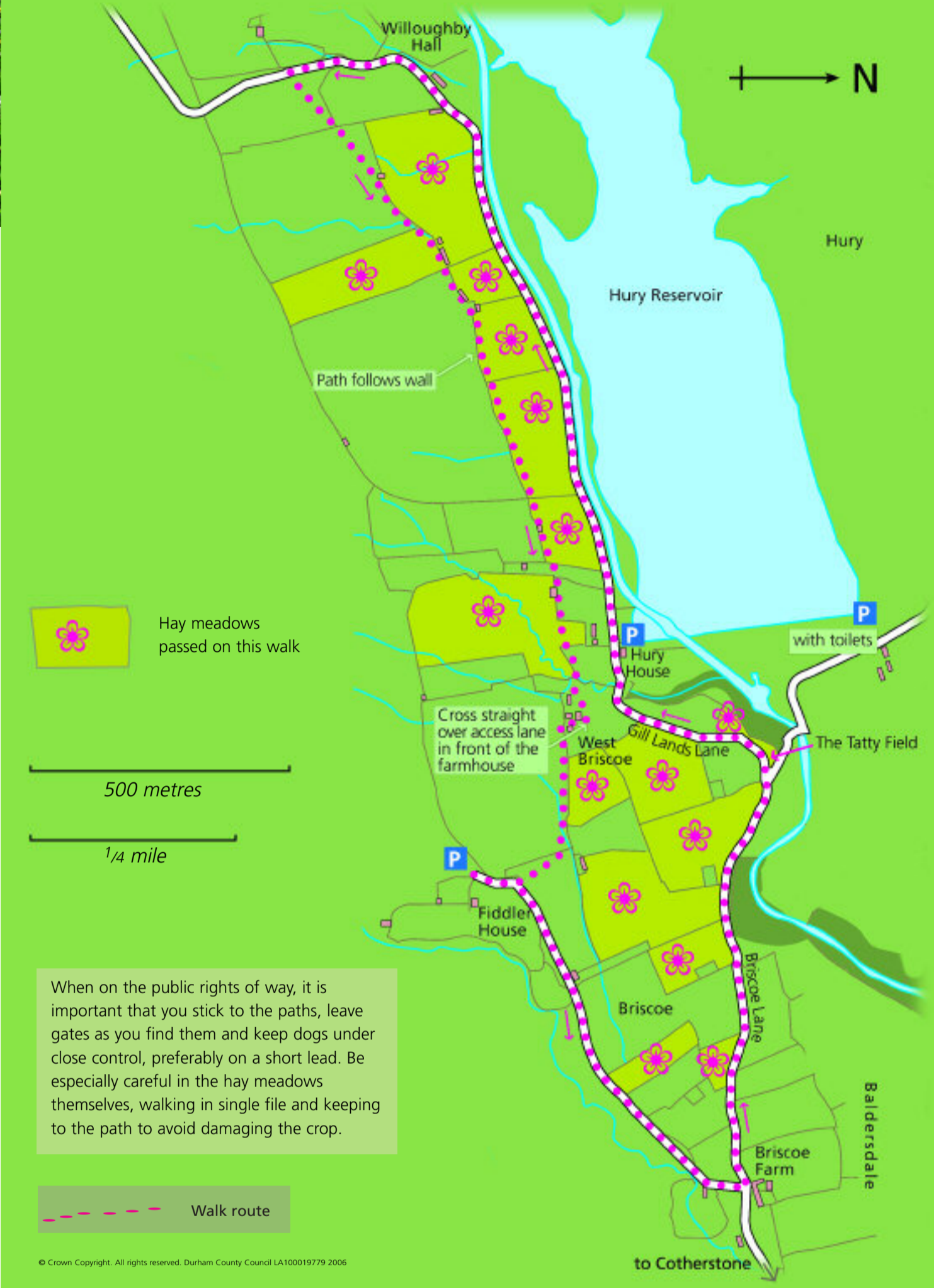
Highways authorities are now encouraged to take account of the needs of flower-rich verges. For instance, they

are asked not to leave clippings on the verges after cutting because this would increase soil fertility. Higher nutrient levels lead to the loss of many meadow species and the establishment of vegetation dominated by nettles, thistles and other more competitive species.



▲ Snipe

Along Briscoe Lane, you are surrounded by pastures and hay meadows, rich in native grasses and wild flowers. The "Tatty Field" is a particularly striking example, but please don't enter the meadow as there is no public access to it. The flowers are best viewed over the wall or from the gate at the top end of the field.



▼ Pignut

The root tuber of pignut has a parsnip-like flavour. It was once so sought-after that pigs would be trained to seek it out - in truffle-like fashion - for human consumption. By contrast, these days it is illegal to dig up wild plants, a measure brought in to protect increasingly vulnerable species.



Great burnet, meadowsweet, knapweed and Lady's-mantles fill the roadsides above Hury Reservoir. Road verges are often important havens for plants that are no longer able to survive within the neighbouring fields following intensification of farm management. In the North Pennines road verges are now the best places to see the striking 'shaving brush' heads of melancholy thistle.

▼ Melancholy thistle



Many hay meadow plants have legendary healing properties. The Romans claimed that betony, for example, could cure 47 diseases. It was also said to be so powerful that wounded animals would seek it out. In more recent times, research has been conducted into the potential cancer-treating properties of common bird's-foot trefoil.

The walk returns to Fiddler House via pastures and across meadows where sheep and cattle graze in the spring and autumn. Trampling by cattle helps break up the soil surface, creating sites for seeds to germinate. Come the early summer the animals are removed to give the hay crop a chance to grow and for the plants to flower and set seed.