

## Get involved!

There are a number of ways you can get more involved in the countryside around you. You can:

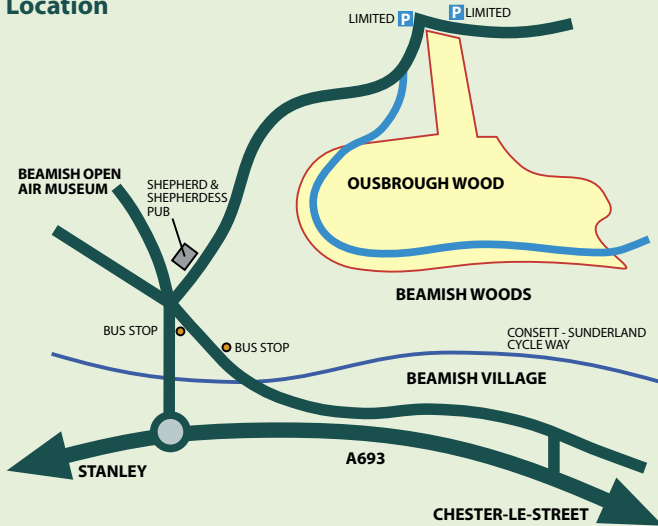
- Come along to our organised events
- Become a countryside volunteer (the bird boxes in this wood were all made by volunteers)
- Arrange a visit/activities for your school or community group.

### Interested?

For more information on countryside events or to get an educational factsheet about Ousbrough Wood, please phone the Countryside Team.

**0191 433 3443**

### Location



This area is covered by Ordnance Survey 'Explorer' map 308, 'Durham and Sunderland'.

**For public transport information contact Traveline North East  
0870 608 2 608.**

When walking in the countryside please wear appropriate footwear and outdoor clothing and tell someone where you are going.

**Enjoy your visit to Ousbrough Wood!**

# OUSBROUGH WOOD



# Welcome to Ousbrough Wood

**As you stand in this ancient and magical woodland it's hard to believe that for hundreds of years scores of people lived and worked here in what was then a busy, noisy industrial valley. As these industries closed and people moved away, nature re-claimed the valley. Today Gateshead Council cares for this natural wood for the benefit of people and for wildlife.**

## Present and Future

### Woodland

Ousbrough Wood is a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). One half is ancient woodland. Here an Oak and Silver Birch woodland grows. In the more fertile areas at the bottom of slopes, Ash, Elm, Beech and Sycamore grows, giving a wonderful autumnal display. The other half of the wood is a conifer plantation of Scots Pine, Douglas Fir, Western Hemlock and Larch.



Beneath much of the woodland there are heathland plants such as Ling (Heather), Bilberry and Heath Bedstraw. This reflects a time hundreds of years ago when this area was a heathland. Today areas of heathland are so rare that they are protected from encroaching trees!

Today we manage the wood to conserve and enhance its wildlife. This involves removing some of the 'non-native' trees like Western Hemlock. In the future the conifer plantation will be thinned to allow areas of heathland and Oak/Silver Birch woodland to re-grow naturally.

### Wild flowers

In the spring much of Ousbrough Wood is carpeted with Bluebells, Ramsons (Wild Garlic), Primrose, Dog's Mercury and Wood Anemone. These plants are normally only found growing in ancient woodlands.

The meadow is managed as a traditional hay meadow to encourage wildflowers to grow. Here flowers like Devil's Bit Scabious, Betony, Sweet Cicely, Wood Crane's-Bill and Pignut grow.



Primrose



### Animals

The meadow is something of a sun-trap and is a good place to see butterflies. Look out for the Common Blue, Small and Large Skippers, the Meadow Brown, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock.

Roe deer and Foxes can be seen in the quieter parts of the wood. Red Squirrels have probably now been displaced by the North American Grey Squirrel, but if you are lucky enough to see one please let the Countryside Team know, on 0191 433 3443.

In spring and early summer the woods come alive to the music of the Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Blackcap. Listen to the sound of the Great Spotted Woodpecker 'drumming' its bill against a tree and look out for Dippers in the Burn. Stay in the woods until dusk and you may hear Tawny Owls calling.



Grey Squirrel



## Past

This wonderful ancient woodland was once the heart of a thriving industrial community. Industrial activity started in medieval times rising to a peak between 1800 and 1850. In 1841 seventy six people lived and worked in the woods here.

The woods were an important part of the industrial economy providing hazel for the collieries, oak bark for the tannery, ash as handles for forge products and larger timber for the colliery and for other heavy industrial uses. The conifer plantation was planted later to create a reserve of timber to be used as pit props.



Thomas Hunter, Beamish Burn Blacksmith.\*

The Burn industries were so important that in 1803 a plan was drawn up to build a canal to connect the Burn to the Tyne. Fortunately, for the wildlife, this scheme never went ahead.

The industries started to decline when faster-moving, larger steam - run factories started to be introduced. The great flood of 1877, which probably damaged many of the buildings, may have been the last straw for most of these businesses.

As the jobs declined people moved out of the woods into the villages and towns. The last of the cottages was demolished in the 1930s.

Did any of your ancestors live or work in these woods? If so, Gateshead Council's Countryside Team would like to hear from you.

**Phone 0191 433 3443**

### 1 High Forge

First recorded as a corn mill in 1714, it was converted to the first rolling mill in the North of England in 1765. Cannon forged here was highly sought after by Wellington's Commanders during the Napoleonic wars. The derelict building opposite was a file-maker's shop. The forge closed in the 1870s and the shop in 1916. Censuses showed that infant mortality was very high here, probably due to the damp conditions.

### 2 Middle Forge

Recorded as a fulling mill and tannery in 1717, Fulling mills removed grease from woven cloth. Tanneries made leather from hides. A mill race was built to provide a more controllable flow of water. Here, the river was diverted and controlled using sluices. A forge was in place by 1792 but it was probably destroyed by the Beamish Burn flood of 1877. One of the houses here was converted to a sweet shop in about 1900 to serve a growing tourist industry. The last building here was demolished in 1939.



Beamish Colliery Pumping Station\*

### 3 Pumping Station

A water-wheel powered pump was sunk in 1763 to remove mine water from Beamish Colliery. As mining progressed, water power became insufficient to drain the lower seams and in 1860 a steam engine was erected to drain the pit. This was powered by coal from the Money Hill drift mine. During the 1926 coal strike the engines were stopped but the mine didn't flood - all those years the engine had been pumping away needlessly!



Roe Deer †



Great Spotted Woodpecker †



Bluebell



Wild Garlic



Dipper #



### 4 Low Forge

Probably the oldest of the three forges, it was built on the site of a fulling mill. Known as Hussey's Forge in 1764, it closed in 1877 due to the Beamish Burn flood. The Forge buildings were demolished in 1895.

### 5 Money Hill Drift Mine

This was in operation between 1895 and 1920. When more coal was produced than was needed to operate the pumping station, the excess coal was dropped down the pumping station mine and transported to Beamish Colliery. During the winter the tub wagons got covered with snow. Jokes were made at Beamish Colliery when snow-covered wagons surfaced, about the bad weather underground.

### 6 Paper Mill

This was producing high quality paper by 1792. Young girls, who lived in the Paper Mill Cottages, were called 'strippers' because they stripped buttons off old garments used in paper manufacture. The mill was probably destroyed in the Beamish Burn flood of 1877.

\*Old photographs courtesy of Beamish Photographic Archive.

Wildlife photographs: †Darin Smith and # Jim Pattinson.