

Ingleborough National Nature Reserve (NNR) Ingleborough Complex SAC (Natura 2000)

A brief review of the site

- **A Natura 2000 site with over 1014 ha of SAC land. A suite of internationally important habitats, notably limestone pavements (some of the best in the UK), limestone flushes (with bird's-eye primrose), blanket bog and hay meadows.**
- **Favourable condition - >90% of all habitats in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition.**

- **Key Projects:**

1. Access and Interpretation

- Ingleborough NNR is a 'Spotlight Reserve' with over 100,000 visitors passing through it every year.
- English Nature has evaluated the opportunities to promote Ingleborough NNR for public enjoyment and education whilst being sensitive to the wildlife importance of the site.
- We have also been working hard to increase people's experience of the NNR's wildlife and geology by the creation of a number of circular trails.
- Overall the walks seem to be a huge success – over 20,000 walks leaflets have already disappeared from the shelves of the tourist information centres and local B&Bs.

2. Re-wilding

- To recreate the natural mixture of upland plant communities on South House Moor
- To demonstrate the ecological impact of removing farming pressures totally, thus allowing and encouraging, the upland vegetation communities to re-establish and develop to a more natural state

3. Limestone Country LIFE Project

- A partnership project between English Nature, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, National Trust, Grazing Animals Project, Rare Breeds Survival Trust and National Beef Association.
- A £1.27 million (five- year) project with EU LIFE (nature) funding
- To restore Habitats Directive Annex 1 Habitats within the Ingleborough Complex and Craven Limestone Complex cSAC (Natura 2000) to a favourable condition by encouraging a return to mixed farming using upland cattle breeds

- This project will maintain and where necessary enhance the biodiversity value of the internationally recognised ‘limestone country’ of the Yorkshire Dales. At the same time it will provide assistance to farmers to help maintain a sustainable mixed farming system suited to these parts of the English uplands
- As Part of the LIFE Project English Nature has purchased 36 blue grey and beef shorthorn cattle to graze on the Ingleborough National Nature Reserve (NNR).

4. Learning in Limestone Country Project

- A new 3 year education project – ‘Learning in Limestone Country’ has been launched which is a partnership project between the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, English Nature, Field Studies Council, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, Craven College, school and community groups.
- The Project is focussed around the Ingleborough National Nature Reserve (NNR) and aims to increase understanding of the internationally important geology, wildlife and its management.
- Three major programme themes –Schools Out, Community Links and Heritage training
- An exciting challenge will be to involve individuals and groups who currently do not visit the area for financial, physical or cultural reasons

5. Research

- Hay Meadow restoration work with Newcastle University/DERA
- Limestone Country Research (Newcastle University/LIFE) looking at cattle grazing impacts
- Meat Quality Research – Bristol University/DEFRA - The purpose is to identify the role of unimproved biodiverse pastures and traditional breeds in achieving high levels of healthiness and quality in beef.
- Environmental Change Network – first pilot site for new biodiversity network monitoring climate change impacts

Ingleborough National Nature Reserve (NNR) is renowned for the wildlife and geology of its limestone pavement and other limestone features. The area's national and international importance has been recognised by English Nature through the creation of this NNR which covers an area of 1014 hectares. The NNR forms part of the wider Ingleborough Complex SAC (Natura 2000).

Ingleborough Hill is one of the famous Three Peaks in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the others being Pen-y-ghent and Wharfedale. In this area natural processes have created a dramatic landscape of exceptional limestone pavements, gritstone capped peaks, underground caverns and a wealth of wildlife. The range of rock types, soils and altitudes, together with the effects of human management, have produced a fascinating variety of plant communities, insects, birds and other animals.

Some of the best limestone pavements in Britain can be found on the reserve, for example at Scar Close. Specialist plants like the very rare Yorkshire sandwort grow on and around the clints while the grikes contain a wider range of rare plants like baneberry and limestone polypody fern amongst naturally dwarfed forms of ash and hazel. The sheltered conditions in the deep grikes also encourage many wild flowers that normally grow in woods such as wood anemone and bluebell.

Around the pavements are large areas of rich limestone grassland where early purple orchids, salad burnet and rock rose grow. Globeflower and bird's-eye primrose can be found in damper areas.

National Nature Reserve Objectives

- To protect the geological and geomorphological features for which the area is internationally important.
- To maintain and enhance where possible, the flora of limestone pavements, calcareous and acid grassland community mosaics, mesotrophic grasslands, ancient woodland fragments, flushes and upland communities.
- To protect and encourage rare species.
- To expand the reserve to include inadequately represented habitats and rationalise boundaries.
- To demonstrate the conservation value of alternative land use strategies in the uplands.
- To allow the general public and the educational audience, to appreciate the area and promote an understanding of ecological and conservation principles where this does not conflict with maintaining the conservation interest.
- To encourage research and survey work where this will update the biological inventory and monitor natural and induced trends.

Key Projects:

1. Limestone Country Project

The Limestone Country Project is a partnership project between English Nature, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, National Trust, Grazing Animals Project, Rare Breeds Survival Trust and National Beef Association. It is a £1.27 million (five-year) project with the EU LIFE (nature) fund providing c. £500K and the remainder of the funding from the Project partners.

The Ingleborough Complex Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and the Craven Limestone Complex SAC are recognised as being of international importance through their designation under the EC Habitats Directive. The overall objective of the Project is “To restore Habitats Directive Annex 1 Habitats within the Ingleborough Complex and Craven Limestone Complex cSAC to a favourable condition by encouraging a return to mixed farming using upland cattle breeds”. This will entail enhancing the diversity of over 1500 ha of habitat by converting 15 farming enterprises to more appropriate mixed systems involving upland hardy cattle breeds. Farm enterprise change will be assisted by a combination of transitional annual payments alongside grant aid towards purchase of appropriate cattle and the associated farm infrastructure.

The Project also aims to increase awareness and understanding of economically sustainable conservation management, disseminate information regarding the relationship between upland management and nature conservation and increase knowledge of the relative nature conservation benefits of different cattle systems.

The LIFE Project on Ingleborough

As Part of the LIFE Project English Nature has purchased 36 blue grey and beef shorthorn cattle to graze on the Ingleborough National Nature Reserve (NNR). They have been brought onto the NNR in an attempt to address management issues arising from a long history of sheep only grazing (notably increased dominance of blue moor-grass and grazing of limestone pavements). The cattle will be used as part of a wider Local Grazing Scheme linking with other NNR, SSSI and LNR in south Cumbria and north Lancashire. The Ingleborough NNR land will also be subject to organic conversion.

Conclusions

This project will maintain and where necessary enhance the biodiversity value of the internationally recognised ‘limestone country’ of the Yorkshire Dales. At the same time it will provide assistance to farmers to help maintain a sustainable mixed farming system suited to these parts of the English uplands. The project will hopefully provide new options for hard-pressed farmers in the uplands, linked to the production of good quality, environmentally friendly animals, which should provide a premium price at the market place. The Project partners are currently working with the farmers, other organisations and marketing consultants to develop a local marketing initiative through which to sell this quality product. The project will lead to better focussing of nature conservation resources and greater co-operation between conservation agencies and farmers in this area.

2. Access on Ingleborough

Ingleborough NNR is a 'Spotlight Reserve' with over 100,000 visitors passing through it every year. Much of the Reserve has been designated as Open Access Land under CROW and English Nature is preparing in advance for possible changes in visitor movements. English Nature has evaluated the opportunities to promote Ingleborough NNR for public enjoyment and education whilst being sensitive to the wildlife importance of the site. A review of the site, its present use, its potential future use, requirement of the Habitats Regulations and the local context in which the NNR sites was a fundamental part of the approach.

English Nature aims to accommodate access with minimum restrictions, intervention and administrative complexity, while seeking to ensure that the conservation resource is not compromised in any way.

Over the last two years we have been busy on the NNR to make our land a more enjoyable but safe place to visit. Anyone visiting the area will find information boards at all major access points to the reserve and maps and safety information are provided to allow for safe navigation around the land

Many people may not wish to use their new found freedom to explore the wilder areas of the Ingleborough NNR, however those who wish to leave the footpaths are asked to respect the countryside and show consideration for, and cause minimal disturbance to both the wildlife and the land management operations which support it. In particular we are asking people to avoid disturbance to ground nesting birds, such as lapwing and skylark, by keeping dogs on leads throughout the bird nesting period.

We have also been working hard to increase people's experience of the NNR's internationally important wildlife and geology by the creation of a number of circular trails. Wherever possible we would like people to visit by train – and what could be a better way to arrive than a trip on the famous Settle-Carlisle railway.

The wild feel of the area is something we all enjoy so we have tried not to turn the area into a country park, but we have used limited waymarking along with free walks leaflets to help people learn about the local environment. Parts of these trails take people to previously unexplored areas such as the wild South House Moor, with its ungrazed moorland habitats, and the beautiful limestone grasslands of High Brae, a haze of colour for most of the spring and summer months.

We have talked to many of our visitors about whether they have found these walks enjoyable and stimulating and the feedback has generally been good. Overall the walks seem to be a huge success – over 20,000 walks leaflets have already disappeared from the shelves of the tourist information centres and local B&Bs. Most of us seem to like easily accessible information that makes our holidays/day visits more enjoyable and our simple information leaflets seem to be working well.

3. Re-wilding of the uplands

Within living memory the dwarf shrub communities on Ingleborough and the surrounding hills have been devastated by overgrazing linked to the rise in sheep numbers. Areas like South House Moor were once notable grouse moors as the estate bag records confirm but today the heather cover is almost gone and Red and Black Grouse are seldom seen. In many areas extensive moorland gripping has added to the problem and undamaged bog and mire communities are difficult to find. Many of the associated plant and animal species although still present have become extremely rare.

From management already carried out on the NNR there are encouraging indications that restoration of native habitats, by removing or reducing grazing, encouraging the re-establishment of the altitudinal zonation of natural plant communities and attempting to return the drainage pattern to its natural course, is a practical possibility.

Project Rationale

On Ingleborough we have had the chance to demonstrate the ecological impact of removing farming pressures totally, thus allowing and encouraging, the upland vegetation communities to re-establish and develop to a more natural state

The overall objective for the South House Moor Re-wilding project is:

‘To recreate the natural mixture of upland plant communities on South House Moor including scattered native woodland grading into Juniper scrub communities and good quality dwarf shrub moorland, valley mire, deep peat communities, acid grasslands and a small area of limestone pavement’.

The project will deliver a major increase in the wildlife capital of the NNR and SSSI as well as the moor itself. The early work will enhance structural diversity, whilst the longer-term will see the reestablishment of native communities that are currently absent or present as very small remnants.

4. *Habitat Management and ‘Favourable’ Condition*

The introduction of the UK Government target for 95% of SSSIs into favourable condition by 2010 is a key driver of English Nature's work.

With regards to the Ingleborough NNR (1050 ha) over 95% of the Reserve is currently assessed as being in a 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition and hence meets the PSA target. Key issues currently being addressed are the provision of the appropriate stock type (through the Limestone Country LIFE Project), woodland/scrub regeneration and restoration of species-rich hay meadows. Although we are some way to achieving favourable condition of the nature conservation resource it is an imperative that there is a continuation of effort and funding to secure appropriate management into the long-term.

With regards to the wider Ingleborough SSSI/SAC(Natura 2000) (3,500 ha) there are still significant problems with regards to both ecological 'overgrazing' and also the absence of appropriate grazing animals. The former of these two issues is currently being addressed through the implementation of the 'Sheep WES' utilising funding provide through the 'Sheep envelope'. In the wider Yorkshire Dales area the major issues preventing achievement of the PSA Target are moor burning, ecological overgrazing and drainage.

5. Learning in Limestone Project

An outdoor classroom has come to life offering opportunities for young and old alike to discover the special environment on our doorstep

A new 3 year education project – 'Learning in Limestone Country' has been launched which is a partnership project between the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, English Nature, Field Studies Council, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, Craven College, school and community groups.

The Project is focussed around the Ingleborough National Nature Reserve (NNR), the and also the Malham Tarn NNR. This project area encompasses two Natura 2000 sites, notably the Craven Limestone Complex SAC and the Ingleborough Complex SAC. The overall aim of the Project is to make the area more accessible to all.

There are three main project themes:

Schools out

Special access to nature reserves, historic locations and landscape sites will provide quality experiences based on interpretation, investigation and self-discovery. The main educational themes in the project area are:

- *Walking with Wildlife – wildlife habitats and ecology*
- *Landscape Explorers – the geology and physical landscape*
- *Signs of the Times – historic sites, events and human activity*

The Project offers both local schools and schools from West Yorkshire and North Lancashire a range of interpreted day visits to the area. It will provide initial

classroom sessions to prepare school groups for the outdoor visit and add value to the experiences which will be linked to the National Curriculum.

Community Links

The project is also aiming to work with local and regional community groups and help to overcome barriers to visiting the Ingleborough and Malham areas. We will offer a range of activities including events, walks and projects linked to the Schools out themes. An exciting challenge will be to involve individuals and groups who currently do not visit the area for financial, physical or cultural reasons. We aim to overcome barriers to participation and enable all sectors of society to visit and enjoy the area.

Training

A series of training courses and events is being provided to provide opportunities to develop heritage and conservation skills. Groups already benefiting from the project include the Richmond based Social Firm 'Just the Job'. This group recently visited and had a two day Drystone Walling Course provided by Craven College. This will help the team build their skills and gain employment in the Dales area.

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Ingleborough NNR