The Nature Reserve also includes a number of meadows. Surprisingly the thin, poor and rare butterflies such as the dingy skipper. wildflowers including common spotted orchid, meadow ideal for a number of interesting fresh water shrimps. In turn, these creatures support birds such as dipper and grey wagtail.

As part of the Blaydon Burn Project, the ponds have been restored and improved to control the level of water and encourage wildlife. The wetlands are proving particularly attractive for a range of animals including palmate newts, emperor dragonflies, azure damselflies, water shrews, willow tits, grasshopper warblers and kingfisher.

The Blaydon Burn Project also sought to reduce problems associated with anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping and illegal motorbike riding, and to make the Burn a pleasant and attractive place to visit.

The Project also worked with the local community and especially the Friends of Blaydon Burn, a dedicated group of local people who have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of and improve Blaydon Burn for everyone.

History

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The Burn itself flows underground through much of the site, emerging for only short stretches. Despite Blaydon Burn's industrial past, the water itself is very clean, containing a variety of invertebrates such as mayfly and freshwater shrimps. In turn, these creatures support birds such as dippers and grey wagtail.

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Blaydon Burn Trail

This leaflet details a circular two and a quarter mile moderate walk, taking in the best of Blaydon Burn’s rich archaeological heritage and abundant wildlife. Along the way you will encounter some stiles and moderate slopes. The path may also be muddy in places so please wear footware suitable for walking in the countryside.

Alternatively follow the gently sloping path along the bottom of the valley along the old Blaydon Burn Waggonway and back again.

1. Cowen’s Lower Yard Firebrick Manufactory
The factory, which opened in 1838, made 6 million firebricks a year. At that time a good hand moulder could make 2,400 bricks per day. The workers seen in the foreground of the picture are eating lunch or ‘ba’it’ on top of the ovens. The cooling brick ovens made a warm seat on a cold day. The factory closed in 1975 and the walls you can still see near the bridge are part of a kiln back. Today this area is a wildflower meadow supporting dingy skipper butterflies.

2. Blaydon Burn Waggonway
From here the path up the valley follows the line of the Blaydon Burn Waggonway. This was built in 1840 to link Cowen’s High Yard, pits and mills with the Lower Yard and the Newcastle-Carlisle railway which transported goods away.

3. Macey’s Forge
Built in the 18th century this water-powered corn mill was converted to a forge in the 19th century. The waterfall provided power for the ‘overshot’ water wheel. The site was subject to a major archaeological excavation in 1982 and two community digs in 2007 and 2009. Along the burn look out for dipper bobbing among the remains of the Newcastle-Carlisle railway to the Tyne below.

4. Mature Oak Trees
These support rare purple hairstreak butterflies and the shy green woodpecker.

5. Stands of Elm Trees
These trees support white letter hairstreak butterflies. These butterflies are particularly rare as they only lay their eggs in flowering elm trees and therefore suffered serious declines following the introduction of Dutch elm disease.

6. Hobby’s Mill
Hobby’s Mill began operating in 1767 as a corn mill and some of the walls still survive. This site was part of a community archaeological dig in 2006.

7. Hobby’s Mill Pond and Dam
Named after an 18th century miller, this pond was created after 1713 to power Hobby’s Mill. By 1914 the pond was a reservoir used by Priestman Collieries to supply water to the worker’s houses at Ottovale Terrace. As part of the Blaydon Burn Project, the pond was re-excavated and now provides a home for wildlife such as the tiny water shrew.

8. Edward Pit and Tar Tunnel.
A brick archway marks the entrance to the Edward Pit, where coal was mined from the 1890s to 1996. The site was re-used around 1900 by Priestman Collieries as the entrance to a tunnel connecting the tar works at Ottovale above the valley with the railway to the Tyne below.

9. Blaydon Burn Meadows
These have been re-seeded with a wild flower seed mix and at certain times of the year are grazed with cattle or horses. Large flocks of curlew spend the winter here, feeding on abundant earthworms in the sandy soil.

10. Reservoir
Now redundant, this early 20th century reservoir supplied water for quenching coke, burned in ovens in the valley below or as a general supply for Blaydon Burn Colliery. Birds such as nightjar and treecreeper can often be seen clinging to the bark of surrounding trees, searching for insects and spiders.

11. Besseie Drift Mine
This pit was part of Cowen’s Blaydon Burn Colliery. Most of the mines in Blaydon Burn were worked for fireclay for Cowen’s Firebrick Manufactory.

12. Coal Drop at Besseie Pit
Along this southern section of the route are a long series of retaining walls. These were related to spoil heaps, coal screens, railways, waggonways, pit heads and other buildings. The four openings here were coal drops. Coal was carried from the Besseie Drift Mine to the drops on an elevated platform and transferred to waggonways below.

13. Wintrip’s Mill
Wintrip’s Mill was a water-powered flint mill. Flint milling was a significant industry along Blaydon Burn. Ground flint was usually used in the production of porcelain but in Blaydon Burn was used to make firebricks. By 1914 Wintrip’s Mill had been demolished and replaced with coke ovens.

14. Coke Cutting Platform
From 1900 Priestman Collieries operated a 230m long battery of coke ovens. This brick laid ‘path’ was used as a coke cutting platform in the early 20th century bricks from the demolished coke ovens were laid flat forming a platform on which to grade and cut the coke into ‘nests’.

15. Priestman ‘Ottovale’ Coke Works and Newcastle Tar Works
The Priestman coke ovens became known as the ‘Ottovale’ or ‘Ottovale’ after their German manufacturer, Otto Hilgenstock. The ovens produced coke, while the nearby Newcastle Tar Works refined crude tar, a by-product of coke production. The Newcastle Benzol Works was the first place in the world where petrol known as Blaydon Benzol was produced from coal. An Electricity Power Supply Station also ran on the heat and gas produced by the Coke Ovens. Reclamation of the site began in the 1970s and the area has now been returned to grassland.

16. Blaydon Burn Site of Nature Conservation Importance
These fields were fenced to enable grazing by native breed ponies. This ‘conservation grazing’ creates the perfect conditions for rare flowers to flourish. During spring and summer, vivid pinks and purples splash the meadows, as common spotted orchid and self heal bloom.

17. Map Key
Blaydon Burn Waggonway
Blaydon Burn Wildlife and History Trail
Parking

100m