

# Ovington Trees Arboretum walking guide.

*This guide is best read together with Ovington Trees arboretum map.*

Prudhoe Tyne Riverside 'Transport Hub' has ample parking and public transport by rail and bus. A choice of refreshments is available at Tyne Riverside Café ① (plus take-aways for a picnic at Ovington), the Adam & Eve ② public house or the

White Swan ③ short walk over the river bridge into Ovingham. Note: *The footpaths forming the walking routes do not have waste bins or toilets. Please take all litter back to Tyne Riverside where there are also public toilets.*

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## The Southern Route

Starting at Tyne Riverside, walk over the footbridge and turn left past The Reading Room. Keep close to the wall and look for a gap in the wall signposted to Ovingham Green. Go through a narrow passage, turn right and walk down past a row of cottages to the signpost. Go through the gateway, cross the field and turn right.

Follow the tall hedge on your left to get to ① **Ovingham Community Orchard**. Spend time enjoying the orchard. The interpretation board explains the trees planted. There are a number of seating areas around the site to relax and spot the many species of birds and butterflies that live here.

Exit the orchard and cross the Whittle Burn via the stepping stones. (Alternatively, retrace steps back to the Bridge End Inn and cross using the ancient arched bridge to the main road). At the main road turn left. Keep on the footpath with the wall to your left. Notice the ② **veteran Copper Beech** tree in Wellburn House Care Home on the opposite side of the road. Experts advise the tree is c150 years old and is in good health. Copper Beech trees are believed to be a mutation of the Common Beech potentially from the 15th century. Horticulturalists bred the species for gardens from the 18th century.

Continue along the same road to the schools. Ovingham Middle School has a range of mature trees, including the spectacular ③ **Turkey Oak** (not a true native) with huge leaves.

At the end of the school fence follow the signposted path down to the River Tyne. Look out for trees with thick branches parallel to the ground. This is ④ **evidence of ancient hedge laying**. Hedge laying used to be common, but nowadays tractors with flail cutters trim hedgerows. In this area some of the old hedge trees have died and the surviving trees have not been cut so they are now large trees with some branches very low to the ground. Ovington Tree Project worked with the schools to plant new hedgerows and free standing trees within their grounds. At the bottom of Ovingham Middle School's field is a new copse of 42 newly planted Goat Willow trees.

At the bottom of this path turn right. There is also a ⑤ **newly planted hedgerow** to your right. Species selected have been for maximum wildlife benefit. Hedgerow plants include elder, field maple, hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, goat willow, white willow, and downy birch. Free standing trees planted include alder, crab apple, oak and wild cherry. As well as being a wildlife corridor, the hedge helps to absorb field water run-off and arable fertiliser and pesticides (preventing eutrophication in the river). When mature the hedge will also capture carbon from the atmosphere.

Notice the ⑥ **railway embankment** the other side of the river. This robust structure prevents the River Tyne from its natural meander causing whirlpools and scouring of the north side of the river. Willow rods have been inserted by project volunteers into the river bank. Their roots will stabilise the riverbank and help prevent scouring and flooding.

During spring this footpath is edged in snowdrops, bluebells, daffodils and a host of blossom. Increasing tree species within the new hedge provides blossom and catkins for a number of months then fruit, nuts and seeds later in the year. This helps wildlife and local foragers as well as being of interest all year.

Cross a boardwalk and then a metal tube handled bridge to get to ⑦ **Ferry Landing**. This area on the north bank of the River Tyne was the site of the Eltringham Ferry before the holiday chalets were built. The ferry provided access to Mickley Station and was operated from a Boat House on the south bank of the river. It operated until the 1960's.

At the tall fir trees next to the river bank turn right and follow the track between the chalets. The Ovington area is a popular chalet centre, where chalets have been rented for several family generations. The fields between Ferry Landing and the road are ⑧ **farmed for wildlife**. Sometimes 'bumble bee' mix is sown where plants flower at different times of the year - thus you will not see one uniform colour or form. At the metal field gate turn left along a road going towards Bywell.

At the bottom of a slope down, turn right up ⑨ **Coal Lane**. We are waiting for highways to put a street name here. Coal Lane is very steep so take your time walking up. New trees have been planted to ensure succession of the hedgerow. Look out for Elm, trimmed as a hedge. This prevents creation of a large trunk with deep bark. Dutch Elm disease is spread by beetles who need deep bark to lay their eggs. The emerging larvae damage trees by tunnelling through bark to the core of the tree.

At the top of Coal Lane turn left into Ovington village. ⑤ **Ovington Social Club** is on your right and farther along on the left is ④ **Winships Little Med**. Both serve refreshments.

You can continue exploring Ovington and find ⑩ **Joiners Nature Park** by walking through the village and turning left into Burnside then right at Greenside Road. Enter Joiners Nature Park next to a row of garages. Picnic tables provide a resting place to enjoy fine views of the route you have walked, with Prudhoe Castle in the distance. The park has a small orchard and a willow tunnel.

To return to Tyne Riverside, retrace your steps back to Ovington Social Club. Take ⑪ **St Andrews Lane**, where there has been planting of oak and silver birch trees among the hedgerow. In late spring and summer you may be able to see yellowhammer birds and sparrows along the lane. Lapwing and skylark will be singing over the fields. Early morning and late evening are fantastic times to see and hear huge congregations of starlings.

At the end of St Andrews Lane is a junction. A quick route back would be down the bridleway to your right to end up back at Ovingham schools. Alternatively, carry on straight over and down through the ⑫ **ancient wildflower meadow**. A range of native orchids can be seen at the right time of year.

At the bottom of the path is a small footbridge over Whittle Burn. See if you can spot a Dipper, a white fronted bird that likes to bob up and down while looking for food. A deviation left takes you to a small group of cabins in Whittle Dene set in **13 mixed woodland**. A little farther north you will find a ruined corn mill that was water powered. Retrace your steps to continue down the valley. Take care near the boardwalk as there have been regular landslides due to springs emerging in the hillside eroding the area

You will come to the end of the wood and through a small gate enter a large wild flower meadow. This has a wide variety

of butterflies and moths visible in summer. Carry on along the path, through another gate plus a double set of 'kissing gates'. When you see houses on the left you will pass a **14 new hedgerow planted 2024**. This hedge comprises hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, hazel, field maple, elder, crab apple, and rowan. Several oak trees have been planted in the fields behind. Step through a metal gate and follow the path round the dwelling to a stone wall style. You will emerge behind St Mary's Church Ovingham. From here you can walk around the church and back over the river to where you started.

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## The Northern Route

Start from Ovington Social Club Ovington NE42 6DH (small car park at rear) and walk on the footpath northwards.

Local folklore says that an apple tree on the left as you walk up the back lane from Ovington Social Club is unique. **15 The Ovington Apple** is apparently a species bred by a local resident of years gone by. You may be lucky in the autumn to pick up a windfall to try this apple.

This footpath is an ancient **16 drovers path**. Local farmers still drive their sheep down this lane to get to different pastures. There are some mature venerable trees along this path. Some new succession planting has been undertaken. This path becomes very muddy after heavy rain and wellington boots are often essential. A wide range of bird species can be seen and heard. Many of the trees along this path are extremely old and host a wide range of insects and moths that in turn attract bats and many birds. Villagers undertake bat detection and know this drovers path is frequented by Duabenton and Pippistrelle bats. Surveys have been undertaken on local birds spotted. The data is held on Ovington Trees website.

Towards the top end of this path the mature trees stop. A new row of free standing **17 specimen trees** have been planted on the right of the fence. Species selected are to showcase what broad leaf trees can grow in this part of Northumberland. Starting at the bottom of the field the trees planted are Aspen, Crab Apple, Wild Cherry, Hornbeam, Goat Willow, Mountain Ash, Downy Birch, Beech, Field Maple, Small Leaved Lime, Hawthorn, Sweet Chestnut, Silver Birch, and Oak. The development of these trees will continue to be monitored to check on health and to provide educational interest on growth rates of different species of trees.

Go through the gate at the top of the path. Turn right on the bridleway. This bridleway has no official name, but locals have called it "Curry's Lane" due to the family who farmed the land here in the past. You will see chalet cabins on the left, please keep to the bridleway and keep walking along the bridleway. In the fields to the right small new copses have been planted to provide shelter for wildlife. After passing a small holding on your right you will see new **18 plantings of willow** on the left. This is to absorb water as there are a number of freshwater springs so the trees will help absorb excess water. Willow bark contains a chemical called salicin, which is similar to aspirin. It has pain and fever reducing effects in the body. Many insects and consequently birds feed on willow. Historically willow wood was used for tools and cricket bats. Coppiced willow stems are still used by willow weavers to make baskets and woven fences as it is very flexible.

At the end of the bridleway you will see a signpost. This is the top end of **19 Whittle Dene**, please turn right. This path follows the top of Whittle Dene down to Ovingham. Whittle Dene, owned by the Woodland Trust, has been a continuously managed woodland since the 1600's. Volunteers are taking detailed records of the venerable trees to register on a national database.

The Whittle Burn at the bottom of the valley drains from Whittle Reservoir, a source of drinking water for the locality. Woodland management of this valley is being undertaken to help restore the diversity of wildlife in the burn, which in turn will help other wildlife to thrive. Thinning the number of trees will allow daylight to get to the burn to encourage re-growth of freshwater plants beneficial for insect larvae and fish for homes and food. Woodland Trust also plan removal of non native tree and plant species in selected areas to encourage wider native diversity. Planned coppicing allows more light into the gorge to allow succession trees to thrive and improve habitat for wildlife. Along this path you will see **20 bluebell, wood anemone and wild garlic** in spring. Look out for a footpath crossroads. On the left is a timber upright with a Woodland Trust label showing an entry point down a steep path to a bridge over the Whittle Burn. Our route does not go down this path, but you can choose to deviate and explore the bottom of the steep valley. The dense woodland and abundant hedge cover ensures privacy for roe deer, foxes, badgers, rodents and squirrels. Sadly only grey squirrels are seen. Volunteers working with Woodland Trust and Northumberland Wildlife Trust hope to create conditions to encourage the return of red squirrels.

The cereal crops grown in fields to the right are bounded by thick hedgerows. The landowning family have ensured succession planting over many years to maintain dense and wide hedge boundaries and field margins to encourage wildlife. During May you will see an abundance of Hawthorn blossom. This attracts a wide range of pollinating insects and moths. In autumn the bright red Hawthorn berries attract a host of wildlife including redwing, fieldfare, thrushes and many small birds.

At the bottom of this path you arrive at the end of St Andrew's Lane where you can turn right to return to Ovington.

