

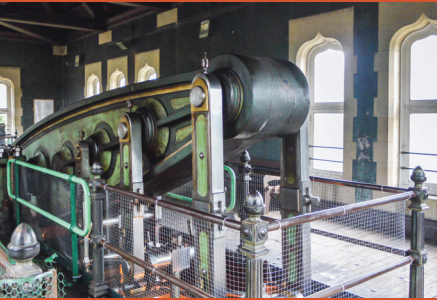
HERITAGE TRAILS GUIDE

Darlington

Explore the natural
and built heritage
of the Tees Valley

River Tees
Rediscovered 

THE TRAILS



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#heritagetrails

WELCOME

Darlington is a large market town in County Durham. With a population of just over 100,000 the town lies on the River Skerne, a tributary of the River Tees. It owes much of its development to the growth of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the world's first steam locomotive powered permanent passenger railway.

During the early 19th Century, powerful Quakers such as the Pease and Backhouse families were prominent employers and philanthropists in the area. Darlington is known for its association with the birth of the modern railway. On 27 September 1825 George Stephenson's engine Locomotion No. 1 ushered in the modern railway age when it travelled between Shildon and Stockton-on-Tees via Darlington, on the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The town later became an important centre for manufacturing. Darlington has also long been a centre for engineering, particularly bridge building. Bridges built in Darlington are found as far away as the River Nile and the River Amazon!

Darlington has over 300km of public rights of way, ten local nature reserves, seven formal parks, three community woodlands and numerous other open spaces to explore.

The trails in this guide take in lesser-known rural communities and natural features in and around Darlington that have contributed to the area's historical and industrial past. From pretty Piercebridge and its Roman significance to the industrial architecture of the Tees Cottage Pumping Station. With Sites of Special Scientific Interest and famous literary connections - Darlington and its environs have them all.

THE NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE TEES VALLEY

The River Tees is barely wider than a jump from one bank to the other at its source. Yet in less than 30 miles it widens, maturing and meandering, through the lowlands between Darlington and the North Sea. The river and its surrounding landscape provide a varied natural habitat for a wide variety of animals and plant life.

Rural farmland and woodland

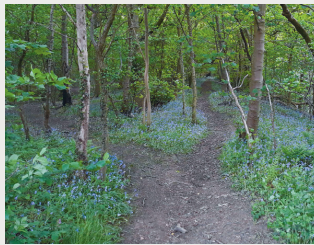
The open countryside around Darlington and to the west of Stockton-on-Tees has rich alluvial soils and so is largely farmed, mainly for crops, but some pastures too. Wildlife benefits from a good network of hedgerows between fields and alongside country lanes. Broad and mixed leaf woodland is found in places on the steep-sided banks of the River Tees.

Hedges, small woodlands and rough pastures are important for a number of bird species which are declining across the UK. These include yellow-hammer, cuckoo, green woodpecker and bullfinch.

Ancient and semi-natural woodland survives along the banks of the River Tees and its tributaries, especially the steep Leven valley. Woodland is generally restricted to the steeper slopes which have no value for agriculture. Ancient woodland is a precious habitat. It is scarce, irreplaceable and supports

a vast diversity of wildlife including many rare and declining species.

To be classified as ancient woodland must have been present since 1600. Before that, planting was uncommon so these woodlands can be assumed to date back to the ice age.



Urban wildlife

The major towns of the Tees Valley are inevitably the sites where most changes have taken place that affect the natural landscape.

Remnant habitats, such as small meadows and woodlands, survived agricultural improvement only to be surrounded by the spread of housing. There are ponds which were created as

a result of human activity; old brick pits, gravel quarries and even fire-ponds for a small airfield support toads, frogs and sometimes the nationally protected great crested newt.

Other abandoned industrial sites support an open mosaic of grassland where wildflowers persist. Elsewhere, dense scrub proliferates with deep thickets of hawthorn, blackthorn and dog rose.

The river

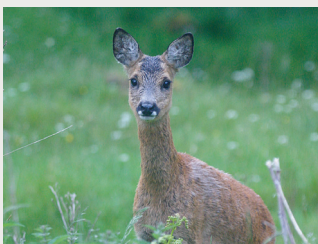
The waters of the Tees are rich in wildlife. Salmon is distributed throughout the river, while the numbers of brown trout have declined, as a result of the degraded and fragmented habitat. Brook lamprey can be found in the Rivers Leven and Tees.





Otters are spotted with remarkable regularity along the Tees throughout Stockton and around the North Tees marshes.

Roe deer are not often thought of as a urban mammals yet are regular visitors to woodlands and pastures on the edge of towns in the Tees Valley.



Bowesfield and Preston Farm

Three large reed-filled pools create a sizeable undisturbed wetland that supports a number of ducks and wading birds such as teal, curlew, gadwall, ruff and golden plover. This is also an excellent place to spot dragonflies and damselflies.

Coatham Marsh

A series of pools and reed swamps, this is the last remaining wildlife habitat to have survived the almost entire urban reclamation of the south Tees. Bordered by Redcar's blast furnace, the site is sanctuary for more than 200 species of wild birds and

wildflowers as well as mammals such as fox and stoats. Smaller mammals must also be present as the site is regularly visited by birds of prey including barn owls.

Maze Park

Visitors can climb one of its landscaped mounds to enjoy panoramic views of the conurbation. Glades and open grassland attract scarce butterfly species such as grayling and speckled wood. The steep banks provide nesting for sand martins and give excellent views of common and grey seals preying on salmon negotiating the Tees Barrage.

Portrack Marsh

This wetland nature reserve attracts hundreds of birds each year and is home to a wide variety of mammals, amphibians and insects.

Winter sees redshank and lapwing, shoveler, pochard, tufted duck and teal frequenting the pools. While kingfisher and grey wagtail are easy to spot.

Spring is the time for wheatear, whinchat and warblers. And Summer little grebe, moorhen, swans and Canada goose. By late summer, the exposed mud flats are home to waders such as dunlin, black tailed godwit, greenshank and ruff.



Saltholme

A flagship site for the RSPB, Saltholme's wetlands are home to large numbers of wildfowl and wading birds. In the spring and summer many birds breed here including shoveler and gadwall and common terns. The reed beds are home to water rails, reed bunting and reed warblers.



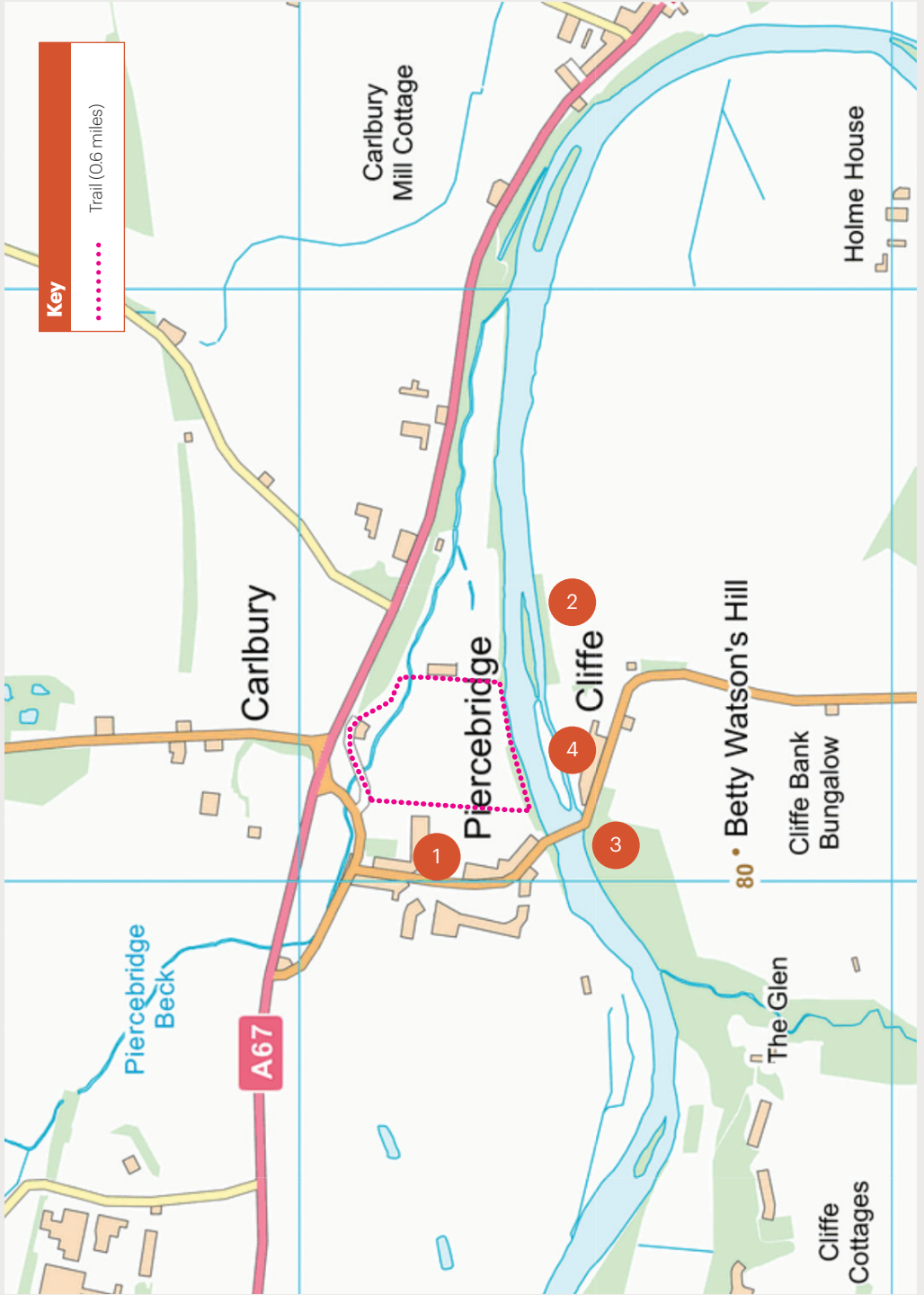
Seaton Common, Seaton Sands and North Gare

Among the relics of a once thriving salt industry lies a network of ditches and wet grassland that attracts vast numbers of over-wintering migrating birds.



South Gare and Coatham Sands

Fresh water marshes, lagoons, dunes and golden sandy beaches are designated as internationally important for wild birds. Species such as bar-tailed godwit, curlew, redshank and grey plover make their winter homes here. While the dune slacks support large stands of northern marsh and fragrant orchids.



PIERCEBRIDGE CIRCULAR

1

Piercebridge is a picture-postcard village of pretty Georgian and Victorian cottages, a village green skirted by ancient trees and a river home to trout and grayling.



▲ The bridge at Piercebridge



▲ Piercebridge Roman Bridge

The current bridge dates back to 1789 – its three handsome spans dressed with Ashlar sandstone. However, its historical significance reaches far back into the mists of time when a foreign power occupied our islands.

Highlights

Piercebridge is perhaps best known for its strategic importance as a river crossing during the Roman occupation. Until the 5th Century, it was sited where the York-Newstead Roman road known as Dere Street crosses the River Tees.

1. Today you'll see the Roman legacy in the form of an **excavated fort** and the site of the original **Roman bridge** – both open to the public (2).

3. Piercebridge also played a part in the Civil War; Piercebridge Battle was partly fought on the bridge, when on 1 December 1642 a small Royalist contingent including William Cavendish defended it against Parliamentarians led by Lord Fairfax.

Did you know?

4. A clock in the **George Hotel** inspired Henry Clay Works' 1876 song "My Grandfather's Clock". The clock was said to have been owned by two brothers named Jenkins. When one brother died, the clock began losing time, and it stopped forever upon the death of the other.

Distance

0.6 miles

Estimated walk time

35 minutes

Suggested start/finish

Corner of Tofts Field near Bridge

Route information

A short walk around Tofts Field.

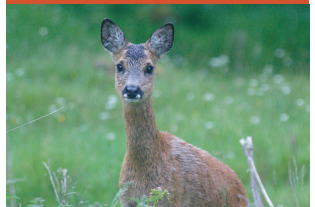
Parking – There is free parking available in the car park of the George Hotel.

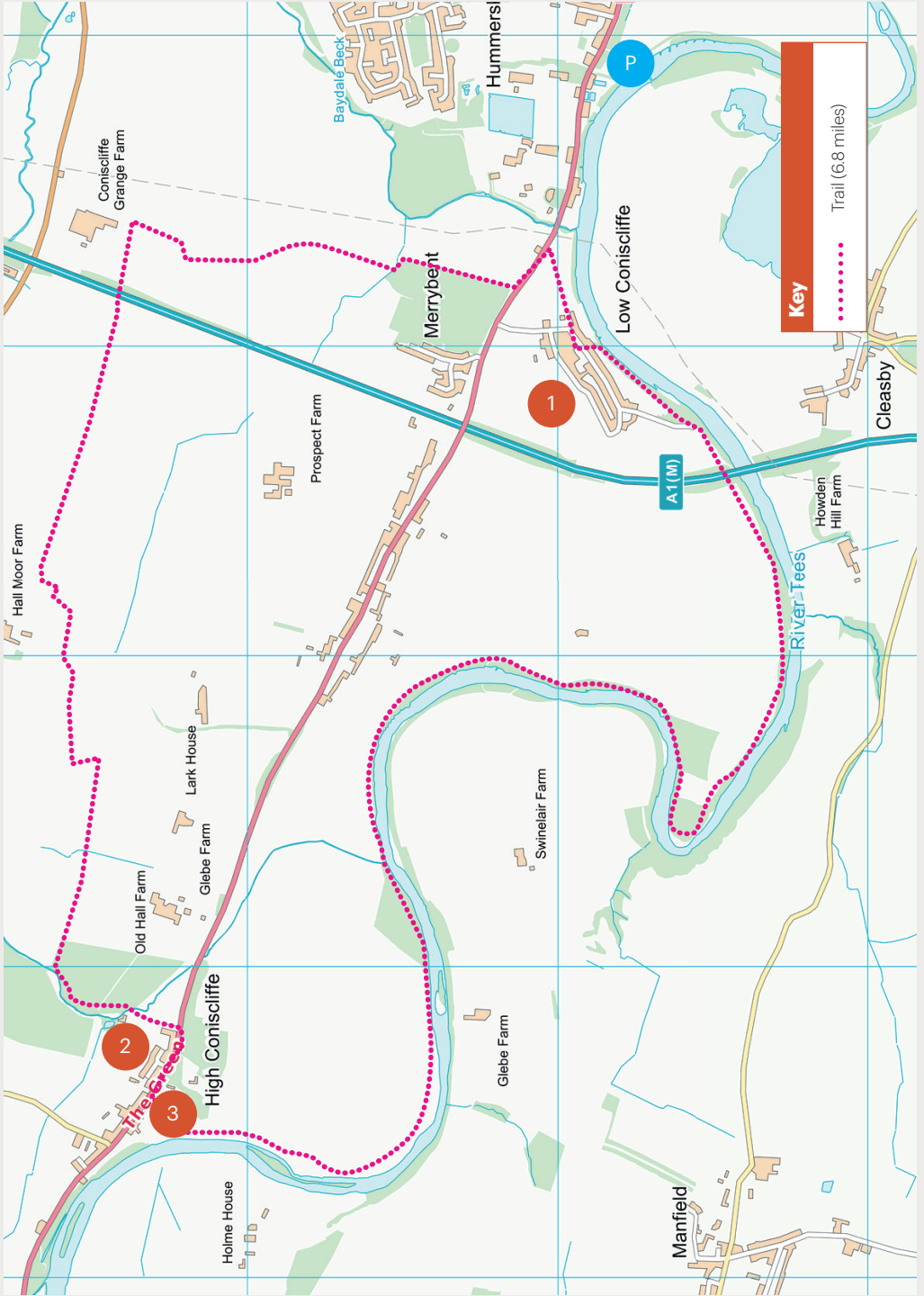
Facilities – There are no public toilets in Piercebridge. The George Hotel and the farm shop and café at Piercebridge Organics both offer food and drink.

Dogs – Dogs on leads are welcome.

Surfaces – A mixture of grass and footpaths. Includes stiles and gates.

WILDLIFE WATCH ROE DEER





Key

..... Trail (6.8 miles)

LOW CONISCLIFFE TO HIGH CONISCLIFFE CIRCULAR

2

Following the route of the River Tees as it meanders through picturesque countryside. Discover historic villages, a Norman church and the site of the execution of the 8th Century King of Northumbria.



▲ High Coniscliffe

Highlights

1. Low Coniscliffe is a village three miles (4.8 km) west of Darlington with a population at the 2011 Census of 716.

The village dates back to Saxon times and the name is thought to come from Old English and Old Norse, meaning 'Kings Cliff'.

This is thought to have been a particularly bloody place in Viking England with the king of Northumbria and several nobles murdered here during the 8th Century.

2. High Coniscliffe is a village approximately four miles (6.4 km) west of Darlington. At the 2011 Census the population of this civil parish was 242.

It is now a linear village, with most houses along the north side of the A67, also has a



▲ St. Edwin's Church

village green and church on the south side of the road.

3. St. Edwin's Church is Norman and dates from 1170 and is dedicated to Edwin, King of Northumbria who later declared himself king of all England and converted to Christianity in 627. The Church and the vicarage are on the edge of a limestone ridge that is said to contain secret passages.

Did you know?

The 'Spotted Dog' pub in the village is named after a foxhound, called Blue Cap, who won a race at Newmarket with a wager of 500 guineas in 1792.

Distance

6.8 miles

Estimated walk time

2 hours 50 minutes

Suggested start/finish

Lay-by at Baydale Beck pub

Route information

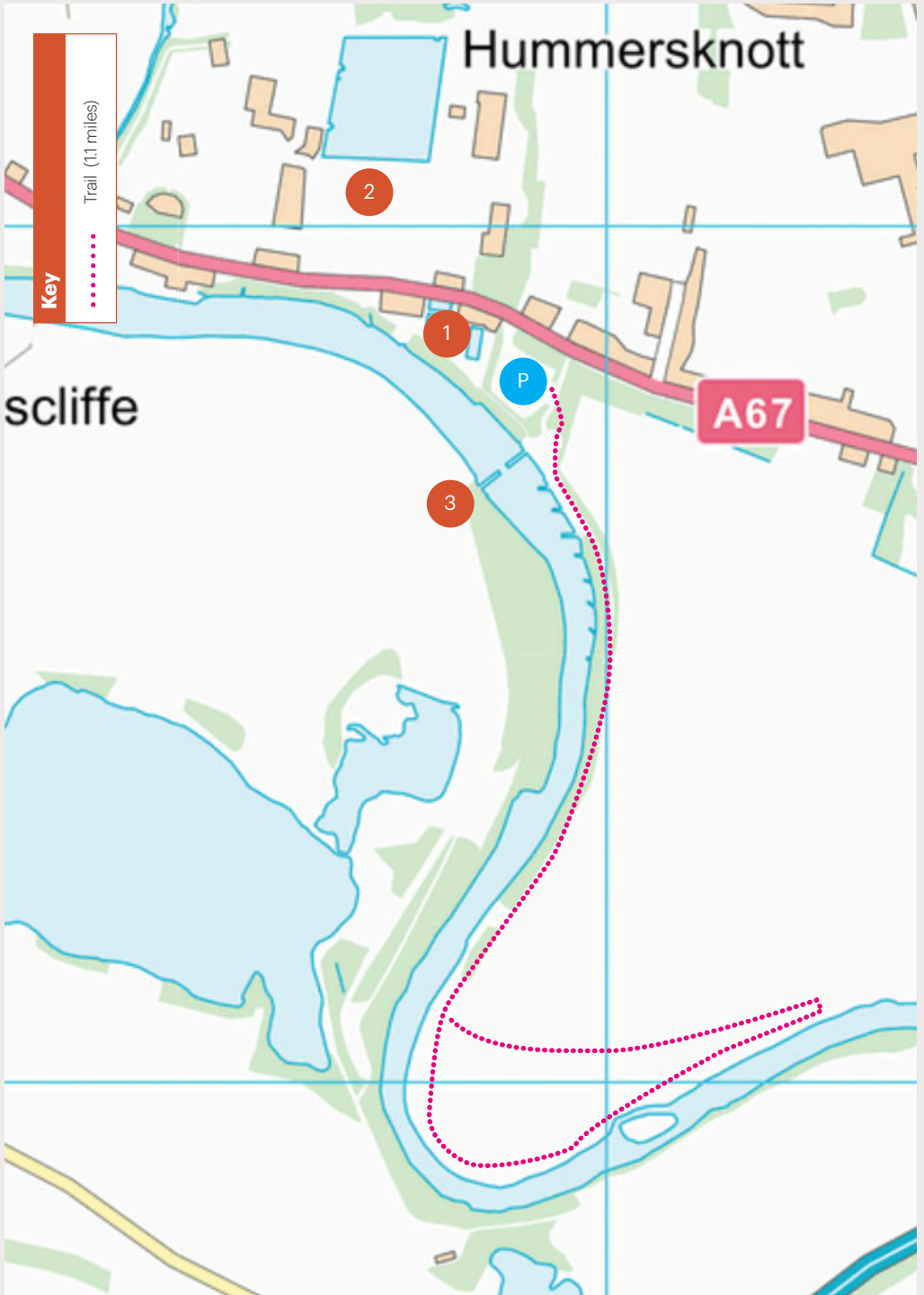
Parking – There is free parking available at the nearby Broken Scar Picnic Area.

Facilities – There are no public toilets in Low Coniscliffe or High Coniscliffe. The Spotted Dog Pub in High Coniscliffe offers food and drink. The Baydale Beck pub on the A67 near Low Coniscliffe offers food and drink.

Surfaces – A mixture of grass and footpaths. Includes stiles and gates.

▼ Baydale Beck, Low Coniscliffe





BROKEN SCAR CIRCULAR

3

Taking in manmade legacies of the Darlington area: Broken Scar Weir and Tees Cottage Pumping Station. Explore this scenic and historically important area.



▲ Tees Cottage Pumping Station



▲ Broken Scar Weir

Highlights

1. Built in 1849, **Tees Cottage Pumping Station** is a Victorian waterworks, originally owned by Darlington Gas and Water Company. It began supplying water to Darlington and the surrounding areas from 1850. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument with two completely original pumping engines in full working order.

The engines are housed in their own purpose-built buildings, dating from 1847 to 1901, that are superb examples of Victorian architecture. The engines and buildings are carefully maintained, preserved and run by volunteers, supported by the site owner, Northumbrian Water.

2. **Broken Scar** is one of Northumbrian Water's principal water treatment works, serving the population of Teesside and East Cleveland. The works has a nominal capacity of 180 million litres per day and abstracts water from the River Tees.

3. **Broken Scar Weir** is an important piece of local infrastructure. Built to control the flow of the river and to ensure a constant level upstream where water is extracted. The area is now a much-loved picnic spot.

Distance

1.1 miles

Estimated walk time

25 minutes

Suggested start/finish

Broken Scar Picnic Area

Route Information

The Pumping Station is open to the public on five week-ends a year. For more information, visit www.teescottage.co.uk

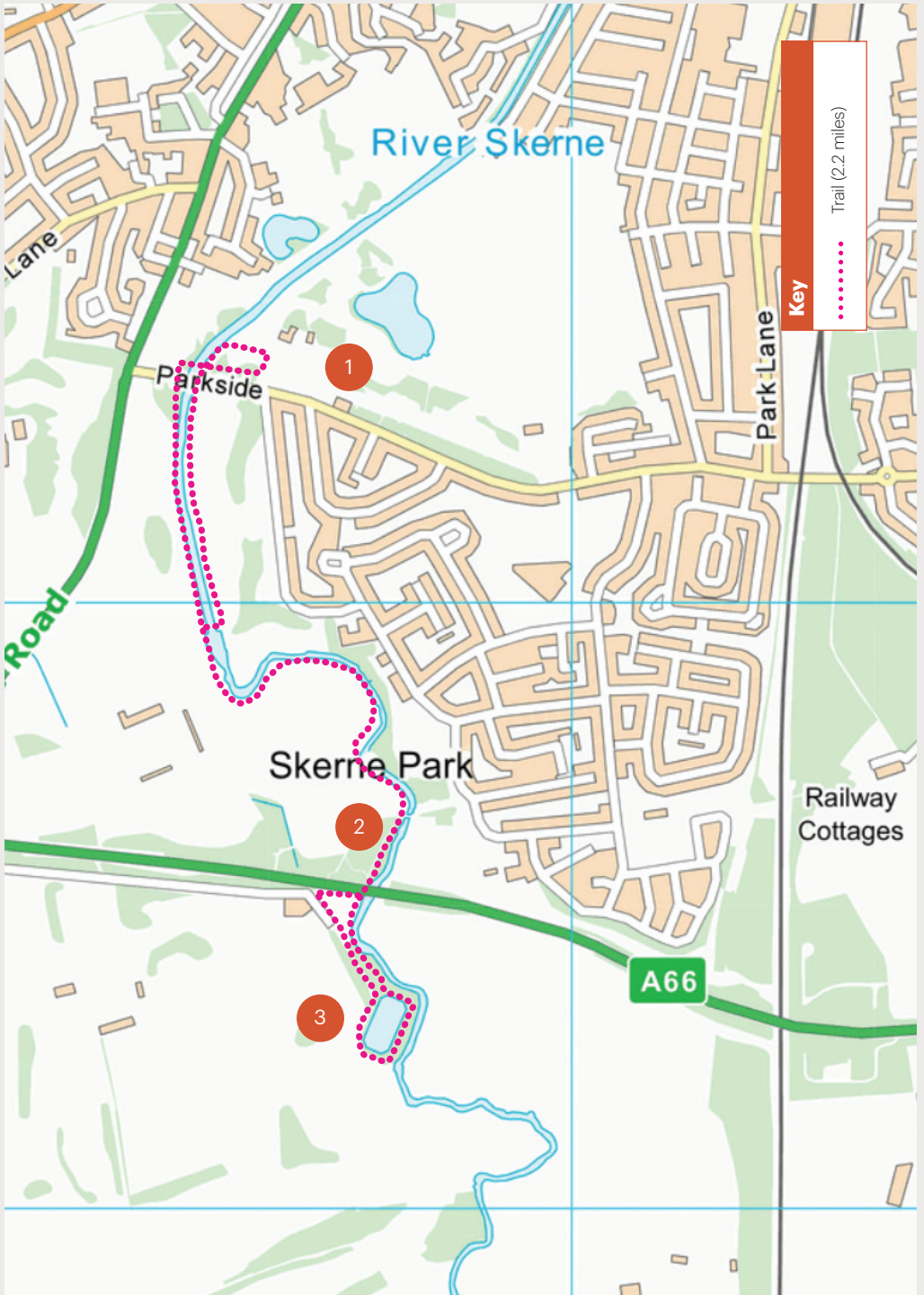
Parking – There is free parking available at the Broken Scar Picnic Area.

Surfaces – A mixture of grass and footpaths. Includes stile and gate.

Facilities – There is a children's playground at Broken Scar Picnic Area.

WILDLIFE WATCH DIPPER





SOUTH PARK, SNIPE POND CIRCULAR

4

On the urban fringe separating town and country explore South Park – a magnificent Victorian municipal park and Snipe Pond. A locally important fishing site and a good place to spot kingfishers and moorhens.



▲ South Park



▲ Bridge over the Skerne

Highlights

1. **South Park.** In his will, dated 1636, Sir James Bellasses left a 10-hectare copyhold farm, Poor Howden's Farm, to the town for charitable purposes. In March 1850, the trustees of the charity recommended that the greater part of the farm 'be used as a park or promenade and a recreation ground for the public at large'. The park, named Bellasses Park was opened two years later. It subsequently became known as People's Park and then finally, South Park and was the first recreational park in the north of England.

At 26 hectares (891 acres), today this Grade II listed park is more attractive than ever – hosting regular events and is home to a lake, bandstand, skateboard park, games area,

education centre, café, sensory gardens and a famous aviary – once the home of Max the foul-mouthed parrot!

2. The riverside path along the Skerne to Snipe Pond is a good place to spot kingfishers and moorhens.

3. In a previous life, **Snipe Pond** was part of a Victorian sewage treatment works, acting as a settlement pond. Today it is a locally important fishing site and thanks to the unflinching efforts of the Friends of Snipe Pond community group, you can enjoy wildflower meadows, a pocket park and improved paths.

Distance

2.2 miles

Estimated walk time

50 minutes

Suggested start/finish

South Park

Route Information

Parking – There is on-street car parking around South Park.

Bus – Bus times can be obtained by calling Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting www.traveline.info

Train – A short walk from the Darlington station, down Victoria Road towards the town centre and along Victoria Embankment towards South Park.

Toilets – in the park

Facilities – The South Park Café offers hot and cold drinks, snacks and ice cream.

Surfaces – A mixture of grass and footpaths.

▼ Snipe Pond



HURWORTH, ROCKLIFFE CIRCULAR

5

Through farmland, along the banks of the River and past a golf course. This trail passes a 12th Century church, a grand stately home and the birthplace of a renowned mathematician!



▲ Rockliffe Hall



▲ All Saints Church

Highlights

1. **Hurworth Green** is the location of a major plague burial site from the Great Plague of 1665. The majority of the village population was wiped out by the disease and are buried here. Bodies were brought for burial from nearby villages along Knelgate, the narrow path leading from the river to the Green.

2. Dating back to 1774, by 1851 **Rockliffe Hall** was owned by Robert Backhouse who began major developments, including landscaping of the gardens. In the intervening years it changed hands a number of times and currently accommodates Middlesbrough Football Club training ground. The hall is a 5-star hotel with an international standard golf course.

Born in the village in 1701 William Emerson became a mathematician of some repute and wrote a number of influential books on mathematics, geometry, navigation and optics. His tomb is in the churchyard.

3. There has been a church on the site of **All Saints Church** since the 12th Century. The present church was built in 1832 and incorporates the tower base and two pillars from the original building.

In the 19th Century, the village was a major centre for linen weaving employing up to 120 weavers. The waters of the River Tees and Skerne were noted for the excellence of their bleaching properties.

Distance

4.5 miles

Estimated walk time

1 hour 30 minutes

Suggested start/finish

Hurworth-on-Tees

Route Information

Parking – There is limited on-street car parking in Hurworth and nearby Croft-on-Tees.

Facilities – Hurworth has various cafés, restaurant and pubs offering food and drink.

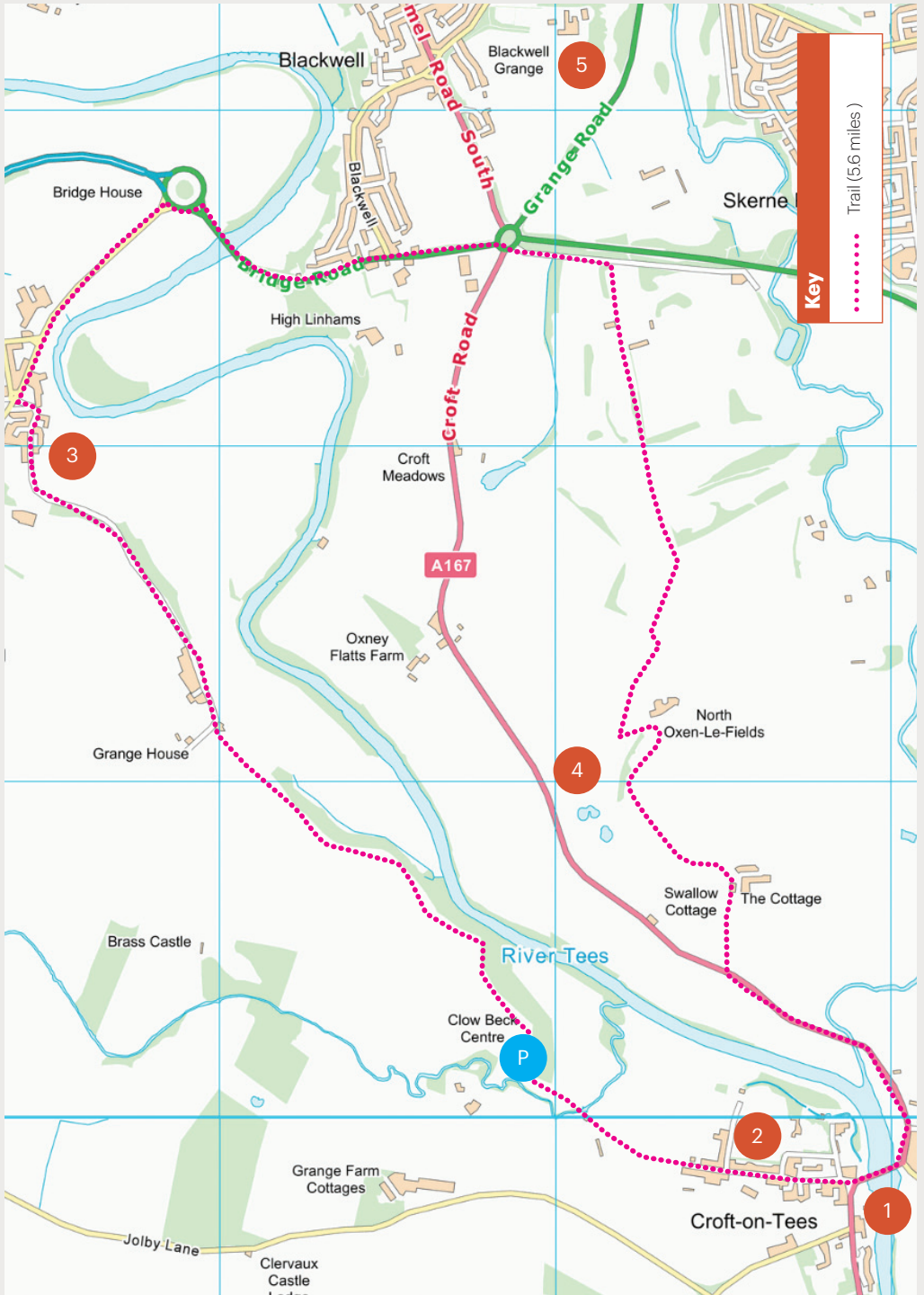
Surfaces – a mix of footpaths and grass. Includes stiles and gates.

▼ Hurworth Green



WILDLIFE WATCH OTTER





HURWORTH, CROFT AND STAPLETON CIRCULAR

6

A trail that takes in Hurworth as well as literary connections with 'Alice in Wonderland', a bridge with a story and an attractive Grade II listed house and estate.



▲ Croft Bridge



▲ Hell Kettles

Highlights

1. **Croft Bridge** was built in the 15th Century to replace a previous timber bridge washed away by floods in 1356. It is the first point a new Bishop of Durham crosses into his diocese and is the scene of an entrance ceremony for the Bishop.

2. Author of 'Alice in Wonderland', Lewis Carroll's (née Charles Dodgson) father was rector of **Croft Church** and both his mother and father are buried in the churchyard.

3. **Stapleton** village and surrounding area were granted by William the Conqueror to a knight known as Benedict de Stapleton. During the medieval period, a bridge linked the village to the northern bank of the river. It was lost after a flood

and was not replaced, meaning that the nearest crossing was at Croft-on-Tees until 1833 when the Blackwell bridge was built.

4. A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) **Hell Kettles** is the only place in Durham where there is a body of water fed by springs. There are various legends associated with Hell Kettles, including the possibility of it being the inspiration of the scene in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' where she falls down a rabbit hole.

5. **Blackwell Grange** is an early 18th Century country house built in about 1710 for George Allan, a wealthy industrialist. After passing through the care of various family members, today this Grade II listed building is a hotel.

Distance

5.6 miles

Estimated walk time

2 hours 35 minutes

Suggested start/finish

Croft, Stapleton or Blackwell

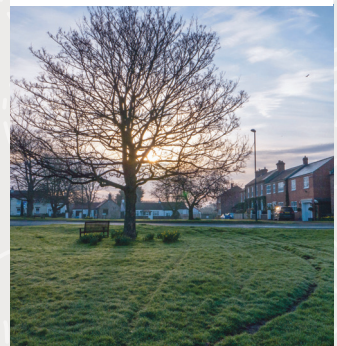
Route Information

Parking – There is limited on-street car parking in and around Blackwell and Croft-on-Tees, as well as a car park at Clow Beck.

Facilities – Blackwell Village and Croft-on-Tees have a range of cafés, restaurants, hotels and pubs offering food and drink as does the The Bridge Inn in Stapleton.

Surfaces – a mix of footpaths and grass. Includes gates.

▼ Stapleton



LOW DINSDALE, GIRSBY, SOCKBURN CIRCULAR

7

A scenic rural and woodland circular trail starting from attractive and notable rural community.



▲ Girsby Bridge



▲ St. John The Baptist Church

Highlights

1. Low Dinsdale – The site of St. John the Baptist Church is possibly 12/13th Century, although the present building is 19th Century.

Low Dinsdale Manor is partially medieval and is within a complex of earthworks. The manor was originally a fortified settlement owned by the Siward family, who later changed their name to Surtees (sur tees – ‘on the Tees’). The current house was built in 1536 and has been added to at various dates. The bridge over the dried out moat has the carved crest of the Surtees family on it. Later members of the family include Bessie Surtees who eloped with a future Lord Chancellor and Robert Surtees, the famous county historian, who also lived at Rockliffe Hall.

2. Low Dinsdale Bridge is the third one, replacing a previous bridge first built by Rev. WS Temple to allow workers from the Surtees Estate to cross the Tees to the church.

3. Girsby Bridge was provided in 1870 by Theophania Blackett, widow of Sir William, of Sockburn Hall to give access to St. John the Baptist Church.

Sockburn Hall, located south of Girsby Green Farm was built in 1834 by Sir William Collingwood Blackett, replacing the previous ruined Conyers Hall. An ancestor of the Conyers family is supposed to have rid the district of the Sockburn Worm, a “dragon or fiery flying serpent” that was terrorising the local area. The Conyers Falchion is used in the ceremony to welcome the new Bishop of Durham.

Distance

4.7 miles

Estimated walk time

1 hour 40 minutes

Suggested start/finish

Low Dinsdale

Route Information

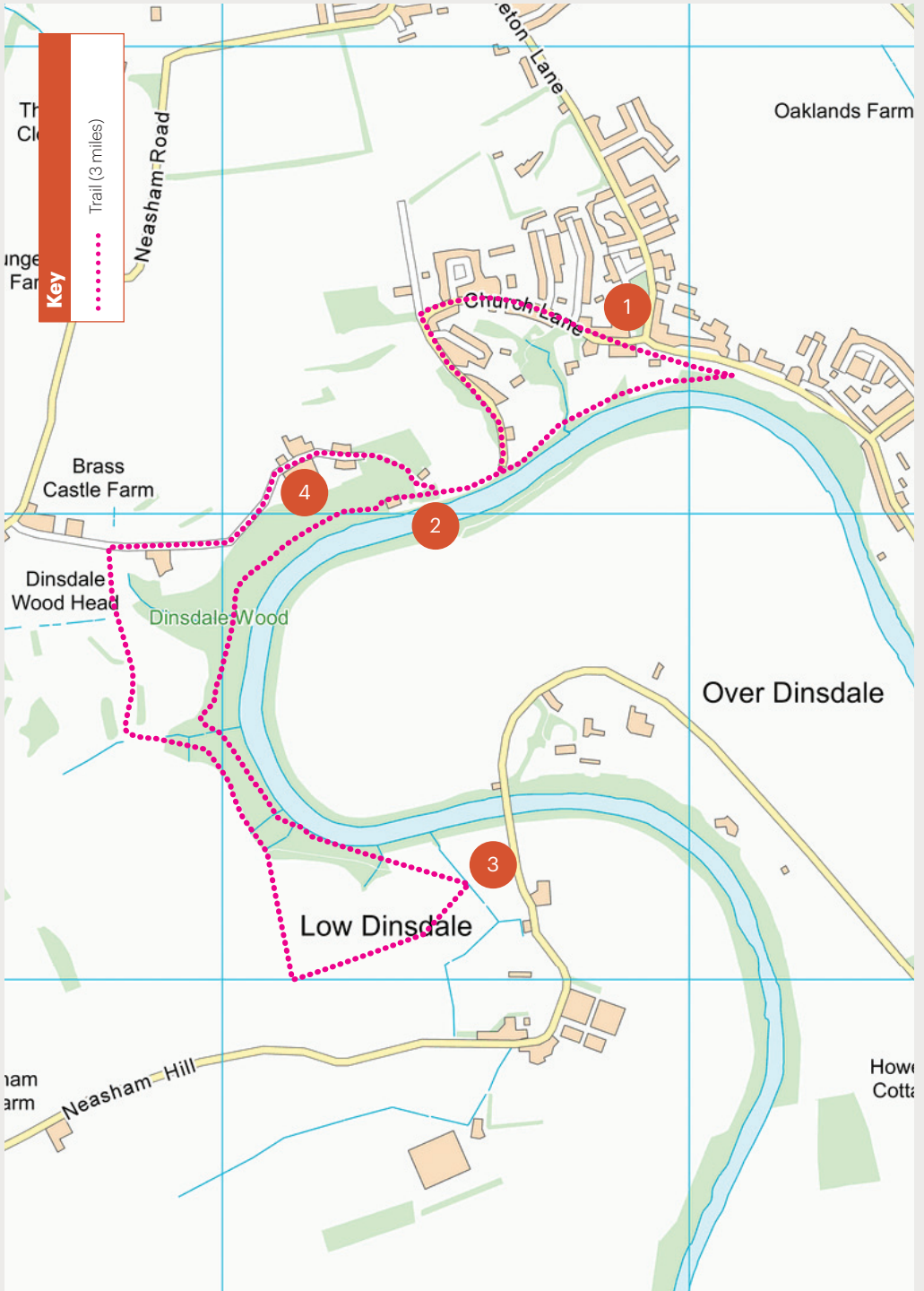
Parking – There is limited on-street car parking in Low Dinsdale.

Surfaces – a mix of footpaths, road, dirt roads and grass. Includes stiles and gates.

Dogs – Dogs on leads are welcome.

▼ River walk to Low Dinsdale





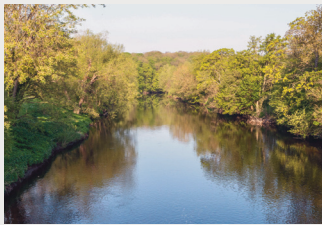
MIDDLETON ONE ROW, LOW DINSDALE CIRCULAR

8

A scenic riverside walk that takes in two historic listed buildings, the remains of a Norman castle and a Victorian spa.



▲ Middleton One Row



▲ Low Dinsdale

Highlights

1. The route from St Laurence Church passes **Castle Hill** (reportedly the oldest house in Middleton One Row and the 17th Century manor house of the Royalist Ayscough family) and opposite is the Friary, said to have been bought by George Stephenson for his two sisters to live in. The road continues down passing Tower Hill Motte and Bailey castle before arriving near the site of 'Pont Teys' (or Bridge on the Tees), the crossing point on the Roman supply road north from York.

2. Following the route up river brings you to **Dinsdale Spa**. In 1789 labourers employed by Sir John Lambton discovered a spa spring whilst drilling for coal. The spring was said to have 'burst forth accompanied with a tremendous smoke and sulphurous stench!' The

supposed curative powers of the waters prompted visitors from a wide area.

3. The riverside walk through the woods and then across fields to Low Dinsdale arrives at the 12th Century church of **St. John the Baptist** before turning back past the old manor house which is surrounded by much older moat earthworks and entrenchments.

4. The walk along the edge of the wood cuts across the golf course and meets the imposing gates and building which was the 70 room Dinsdale Spa Hotel (now Dinsdale Park). Built in 1829 to serve the increasing number of visitors delivered by the new railway to Fighting Cocks Station in Middleton St. George and a daily stage coach from Newcastle.

Distance

3 miles

Estimated walk time

1 hour

Suggested start/finish

Middleton One Row or
Low Dinsdale

Route Information

Parking – There is limited on-street car parking in Middleton One Row and Low Dinsdale.

Surfaces – a mix of footpaths, road, dirt roads and grass. Includes stiles and gates.

Dogs – Dogs on leads are welcome.

WILDLIFE WATCH WATER VOLE



River Tees Rediscovered

Bus times can be obtained by calling
Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visiting
www.traveline.info

This guide has been supported by the
River Tees Rediscovered Landscape
Partnership, thanks to money raised
by National Lottery players and
awarded through The National
Lottery Heritage Fund.



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