The Yorkshire Dales National Park
our national treasure

What are National Parks?

There are 15 National Parks in the UK and each one has been designated as a protected landscape, on behalf of the entire nation, because of their special qualities. They are extensive areas of land with stunning natural beauty, diverse wildlife and fascinating cultural heritage, as well as outstanding opportunities for open-air recreation, making these living and working landscapes truly unique.

Each National Park is different and remarkable in its own way, but they all work together in unison for people, landscape and nature. The National Parks in the UK are as follows:

- England – Broads, Dartmoor, Exmoor, Lake District, New Forest, Northumberland, North York Moors, Peak District, South Downs and Yorkshire Dales
- Wales – Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia
- Scotland – Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs



National Parks in England, Wales and Scotland (©YDNPA)

These areas receive special care and protection and they are managed by a National Park Authority. The Environment Act 1995 defines the purposes of National Park Authorities in England and Wales, including the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), as:

- **to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the national parks;**

- **to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the national parks] by the public.**



Ribblehead viaduct and Inglebrough (©YDNPA)

Why were National Parks formed?

The first National Parks were created in the USA over a century ago, to protect wilderness areas. However, the UK did not have its first National Parks until the 1950s (full history can be found here). In 1949, shortly after the end of the Second World War, the British Government passed an Act of Parliament to establish National Parks, to conserve and enhance their natural beauty and provide recreational opportunities for the public. Demand for access to the countryside had increased during in the early twentieth century, following mass migration into the growing industrial towns and cities. At times this pressure created conflict between the public and landowners, such as the famous 'mass trespass' in 1932 on Kinder Scout in the Peak District.

Yorkshire Dales National Park

The Yorkshire Dales National Park is a living, working environment and home to 24,000 people. It covers 2,179 square kilometres (841 square miles) and straddles the central Pennines in North Yorkshire and Cumbria and also includes a small part of Lancashire.

Over 95% of the land is privately owned, so people who farm the land; who own the buildings and run the businesses, are central to looking after it. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) owns less than 0.4 per cent of the land, which includes car parks, woodland and small nature reserves (Find out more).

The hills (known locally as fells) are grazed by sheep and on the heather moors, grouse are reared for shooting. While in the valleys (known locally as dales) meadows are managed for silage and hay and the valley-side pastures are grazed by dairy and beef cattle. Quarrying still provides jobs for local people, producing high-quality stone for industry and to make roads and buildings outside the area. However, changing economic pressures and the threat of climate change are encouraging changes in land use and farm diversification. Tree planting is taking place on the valley sides, and barns are converted for tourist accommodation to create other income strands.

Tourism is by far the largest industry in the National Park with 6.5m visitor days in 2019, with numbers steadily increasing over the last 10 years. The money visitors spend is fundamental to the local economy. The YDNPA manages car parks and toilets, and runs four National Park Visitor Centres. It works with tourism businesses and other organisations to ensure everyone

understands what makes the environment of the National Park special, and how tourism can make a positive contribution to the economy and well-being of those who live and work there.

Further Yorkshire Dales National Park facts can be found here.



Visitors in Grassington (©Paul Harris)

The creation of natural beauty…

Large parts of the National Park's characteristic limestone scenery were formed under shallow tropical seas 350 million years ago, the shells and corals of vast reefs can still be spotted as fossils. The compact cobbles and mudstones forming the rounded Howgill Fells above Sedbergh are older, between 400 and 500 million years old.

These rocks were slowly squeezed and transformed by huge amounts of force and then shaped by the weather, water and ice since they were last lifted above the sea, about 65 million years ago. The dales began as winding river valleys and many were later shaped by glaciers. During the last half million years, there have been at least three Ice Ages, the last ended around 11,500 years ago. Huge glaciers gouged out the dales and created limestone scars (cliffs), some high on the dale sides. Water from melting glaciers helped to shape some of the famous gorges, dry valleys and caves of the limestone areas. Natural cracks in limestone have been dissolved and enlarged by rainfall to make limestone pavement, about half of those in the UK are in the National Park. Gritstones and shales have weathered to create their own very distinctive scenery, such as the iconic, stepped profiles of Inglebrough and Pen-y-ghent.

Find out more about the geology of the Yorkshire Dales at Dales Rocks or about the natural beauty of the National Park here.

Wildlife in the National Park

The wildlife of today is very different to that which lived here in the frozen tundra-like landscape following the Ice Ages. By about 8,000 years ago, 90% of the National Park was probably covered by trees, however semi-natural woodland only covers 1% of the land today. The trees were cleared for fuel and to build houses, but also to create open space for grazing farm animals and to grow crops. A lot of the National Park is now covered by peatlands, heather moorland and grassland. The area is home to many species of plants and animals and many of the natural habitats are nationally and internationally important.

The varied habitats of the National Park support a wide range of rare and threatened species. Red squirrels are still present in some woodlands in the north-west of National Park and otters are now found in all of the river catchments. There are also reintroduced populations of dormice in mid-

Wensleydale and water voles at Malham Tarn. The moorland and moorland fringe areas still support nationally important populations of breeding waders, including curlew and snipe, with lapwing and redshank breeding in pastures and meadows.

The limestone grasslands and hay meadows also support a diverse range of plants including orchids such as burnt-tip and frog. Other rare plants include holly fern, northern hawk's-beard and yellow marsh saxifrage. There are a number of less well-known but equally important species found within the National Park, including a number of rare fungi, liverworts, mosses, lichens and invertebrates such as white-clawed crayfish.

A significant amount of blanket bog has been degraded or lost due to extensive drainage (known as 'gripping'); peat extraction, over-grazing, and seasonal burning to promote fresh growth for livestock or for grouse on shooting estates. The importance of peat as a store for carbon has now been recognised and so large scale peatland restoration and the conservation of existing blanket bog is now being undertaken (Read more about looking after wildlife in the National Park).



Red Squirrel (©Dave Weedon)

Heritage of the National Park

There is archaeological evidence that people have lived in the area of the National Park for about 11,000 years. A succession of settlers and invaders from Neolithic farmers and Bronze Age Beaker people through to Roman, Anglo-Scandinavians and Norman conquerors have all lived here. They have all left their mark on the landscape - if you know what to look for.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lead mining was an important industry, especially in Swaledale and Wharfedale. Local stone quarries have been worked for building stone and roof slates throughout the National Park. Limestone has been quarried for centuries, especially to make lime, which was used to 'sweeten' acidic soils or to make lime mortar used in building.

Centuries of farming have left their mark on almost every aspect of the National Park: miles of dry stone walls; thousands of field barns; hay meadows and high pastures. Paths first used by stone age hunters became drove roads for cattle going to market, or packhorse routes linking monasteries to their farm estates. Most villages in the area began as farming communities and many local customs and festivals have their origins in the turning of the agricultural year. Traditional stone farmhouses and barns are a striking feature of many villages.

Find out more about heritage in the National Park at: Out of Oblivion



Field barns in Swaledale (©Stephen Garnett)

Recreation and Tourism in the National Park

Staying in overnight accommodation, eating-out, shopping and participating in outdoor activities are the most popular tourist activities in the National Park. Walking is the most common recreational activity; however, cycling, mountain biking, climbing and caving are also popular.

Visitor numbers can have a negative effect on the environment, causing problems such as path erosion, traffic congestion and disturbance to residents, farmers and wildlife. There are also less visible issues, such as many houses are now owned as second homes or holiday lets. This demand has increased house prices, meaning there are fewer affordable homes available for local people and the need for land for further housing developments. Balancing tourism, the needs of the resident population with protecting the beauty of the National Park is a constant challenge.

Visitors to the National Park spent £374m in 2019, which is essential for the local economy, as it creates jobs for local people and provides improved services and facilities for both local people and visitors. The tourism industry employs 5,353 people in full-time or equivalent jobs, such as in in cafes, shops, hotels and tourist attractions. Find out more at Tourism in the Dales and Get outdoors.

Promoting understanding and enjoyment

YDNPA works with a wide range of people and partner organisations to achieve its aims. It helps both local communities and visitors to understand and value the landscape, to show that it can be enjoyed, while also promoting the conservation of its special qualities. The YDNPA communicates this in different ways, for example:

- At the YDNPA website
- Via a number of social media channels: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube
- Working with schools to run educational activities about the National Park
- Organising outreach programmes with groups of people who would otherwise have limited opportunity to experience the National Park
- Organising events for the public (Cheese Festival, celebrating local produce and Dark Skies Festival, Go Wild!, to name a few…
- Providing high quality interpretation about the landscape, activities and attractions via a wide variety of media including interpretation boards, leaflets and digital equivalents
- Sending free newspapers to local residents and The Visitor magazine for visitors
- National Park Visitor Centres
- At the Dales Countryside Museum in Hawes



National Park Visitor Centre at Grassington (©Paul Harris)

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- *Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority homepage*
  http://www.yorshiredales.org.uk/
- *National Parks UK homepage*
  https://www.nationalparks.uk/parks/
- *The 15 National Parks:*
  https://www.nationalparks.uk/parks/
- *Government legislation for UK, Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland::*
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/
- *The Environment Act 1995:*
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/25/section/61
- *History of National Parks:*
  https://www.nationalparks.uk/the-history-of-national-parks/
- *Mass trespass at Kinder Scout 1932*
  http://kindertrespass.org.uk/kinder-mass-trespass-history/
- *Introduction to the Yorkshire Dales National Park: https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/about/about-the-national-park/*
- *Yorkshire Dales National Park Facts:*
  https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/about/about-the-national-park/facts-about-the-national-park/
- *Geology in the National Park:*
  https://dalesrocks.org.uk/
- *Introduction to the natural beauty of National Park:*
  https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/about/landscape/natural-beauty/
- *Looking after wildlife in the National Park:*
  https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/park-authority/looking-after/wildlife/
- *Heritage in the National Park:*
  http://www.outofoblivion.org.uk/
- *Tourism in the National Park:*
  https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/park-authority/living-and-working/tourism-in-the-dales/
- *Getting outdoors; Recreation in the National Park:*
  https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/things-to-do/get-outdoors/
- *YDNPA social media channels:*
  https://www.facebook.com/yorkshiredales
  https://twitter.com/yorkshire_dales
  https://www.instagram.com/yorkshiredales
  https://www.youtube.com/user/TheYorkshiredales
- *Promoting understanding and enjoyment through: a) education with schools:*

https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/about/national-park-management-plan/b-welcoming-place/objective-b5/

- *b) outreach programmes targeting people from under-represented groups: https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/about/national-park-management-plan/e-flourishing-local-economy/objective-e6/*
- *c) organising events to promote the National Park's special qualities and local distinctiveness: https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/about/national-park-management-plan/e-flourishing-local-economy/objective-e6/*