

THE NATURE TRAIL: EASY ACCESS & WALKING, APPROX. 1 MILE



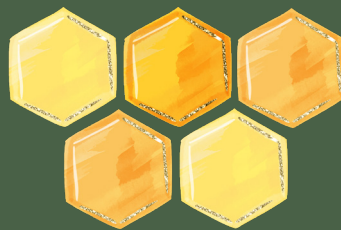
START:

Go to the small patio by the side of The Lodge overlooking the land. Turn left down the grass ramp and proceed into the fields. In the distance on a clear day you can see Pen-y-Ghent up above Settle.

POST 1: WILDFLOWER STRIP

This small strip of wildflowers (notably daisies) was prepared several years ago with a variety of indigenous wildflowers and natural grasses

re-creating original meadows that existed in ancient Bowland areas.



These are pretty to look at, but more importantly, vital as feeding places for many pollinating insects – especially Honeybees which are in serious decline due to overuse of insecticides, so flowery meadows are of great importance.

Whilst a variety of species of wildflowers were planted, it is the daisies which have thrived and continue to be of great interest to pollinating insects, and they add a natural beauty to the planted area.

POST 2: PLANTED SHRUB BORDER

Under the shade of the Lodge there is a planted border consisting of shrubs and some herbaceous perennials which provide breeding locations for a whole host of insects and smaller animals such as rabbits who live within the shrub roots.

THE NATURE TRAIL



POST 3: THE ORCHARD

Comprising of many forgotten northern fruit varieties of apples such as "Red Devil" and "John Downie", and Mayweather Damsons plus other varieties of apples such as Spartan and Russet. As yet, we do not have any Pear varieties, but they will be planted in times to come.

Pollination in spring is taken care of by the insects using the various gardens and borders around the hotel.

POST 4: THE BUDDLEIA GARDEN

Buddleia bushes are one of the best ways of attracting some of our most spectacular butterflies such as the Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Little Blues, Mid Blues, Field Fritallaria and Painted Lady which cannot resist the highly scented flowers of the various colours of Buddleias.

Our original Buddleia trees were planted back in 2012 and whilst a couple remain in position, several have suffered damage from the harsh wet winters so we have added to the garden this spring – we hope they flower this year and add to this delightful area of the grounds.

Whilst the Buddleias are required by the adult butterfly, their caterpillar young feed on nettles and thistles, which is why we have deliberately left areas of these plants in and

around the grounds to help ensure the butterflies flourish.

POST 5: BANKING AREA

This is an area which we would describe as "work in progress"!

This area had become overrun with nettles, thistles, brambles and a whole host of weeds, and whilst this provides benefits to many species of wildlife and insects, we felt this area could be better managed as a steep-sided habitat and we have undertaken the hard work of clearing it and beginning to re-plant it with a variety of plants and flowers which will attract a more diverse range of insects and wildlife.

The dis-used steps have been re-used as planting beds for alpine plants and we will continue to work on this area over the coming weeks and months.

POST 6: THE COMPOST HEAPS!

An important area in any garden! Where our gardening waste undertakes a magical cycle to become nutritious and valuable material to be re-used across the estate.

POST 7: NEW FOREST PLANTATION

This is where the whole project started. We planted over 5000 indigenous species of trees including Ash, Rowan, Holly, Crab Apple and

Oak creating an array of habitats, bird nesting sites, breeding sites for insects, and not to mention breakfast sites for the deer that come and wander through the grounds and eat our precious trees! These trees are also a sustainable fuel source for the long-term future.

POST 8: BIG WOOD

This mature wood to your left does not belong to the Stirk House Hotel but gives us a chance to show you the effects of livestock grazing on wildlife. Look carefully and you will see that regular grazing by sheep and cattle has resulted in a complete absence of an understorey of shrubs, young trees or flowering plants.

As a result, it is useless for small birds which require cover for their nests and a good food supply. Unless livestock is excluded by fencing the wood off, the lack of natural regeneration means that this wood will one day disappear completely when the old trees die.

POST 9: BIRD HIDE

This Hide is free for you to use.

Open a hatch, sit quietly, and keep your eyes on the feeders. Try not to talk and do not stick your hands or arms out of the viewing hatches. If you do, this will scare everything off for some time.

We regularly see Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Nuthatches and Great Spotted

Woodpeckers, Robins, Chaffinches and Blackbirds.

Sit a while and see what you can spot! The posters inside the hide may help you identify the birds, flowers and trees you may see on your walk around the grounds.

POST 10: THE DEAD TREE

When standing at the post, look away from the hide into the OLD WOOD and you will see a dead tree trunk with a flat top sawn off in days gone by.



Can you notice the woodpecker feeding signs and their many perfectly round nest holes on the trunk? These are the work of our Great Spotted Woodpeckers which can sometimes be seen or heard in the wooded areas of our estate.

POST 11: SMALL BIRD BOXES

Along the hedge behind the Hide we have erected some 'small hole' bird boxes. These are ideal for many of the birds which visit our bird feeders and will be the perfect place for nesting and raising their chicks.

POST 12: TAWNY OWL BOX

When you leave the Hide turn right and continue along the cut path, following the hedge on your left. Soon, just inside the Big Wood, you will see an odd-looking large nest box lying along a tree branch like a wooden chimney on its side. This is a Tawny Owl box, but if you look at the base nearest the tree trunk, you will see that it has been forced open by a mass of twigs – it has been taken over by a Grey Squirrel!

POST 13: KESTREL BOX

At the end of Big Wood turn left and walk into the Meadow ahead of you. In another dead tree on your left – at the edge of Big Wood, you will see an open-fronted Kestrel nest box we have erected in the hope of enticing our regular visiting male Kestrel to find a mate and nest there. No luck yet, possibly down to that pesky Squirrel taking a shine to the box too!

POST 14: SIKA DEER

Walk a little way down the left-hand cut track and look ahead to the field across the valley. You may be lucky and see some dark brown animals amongst the sheep and cows in the grazed fields.

These are Sika Deer, native to Asia but introduced into Britain in 1874. The ancestors of those you are hopefully looking at, were released

near here in 1904 and quickly made themselves at home in Gisburn Forest next to Stocks Reservoir and they are regularly seen in our grounds.



Whilst we love to catch glimpses of the deer in the land (they pass through so peacefully and elegantly), they do create problems by damaging the young trees and you may notice some damage marks as you explore the grounds (the bark appears chewed and damaged, and they lean on the trees pushing them over).

POST 15: BOTTOM MEADOW / RAPTOR PERCHES / HARE FIELDS

The grass and ground coverings in this meadow have been left long so as to encourage many types of wildlife, most notable the Field Voles which are the main sources of food for Barn Owls.

You may notice some small round holes in the ground as you walk on the paths, and these holes are made by the voles!

The perches you can see in this area in the shape of a 'T' are called "Raptor



THE NATURE TRAIL



Perches” and they are designed to allow predator birds such as Owls, Buzzards and Kestrels to hunt from a resting position high above the grasses.



As you emerge out of the wood, follow the path near the fence line.

Buzzards can often be seen circling high overhead in groups of 2 or 3, sometimes calling to each other and sometimes silently gliding on the thermals. Continue along the cut path in a clockwise direction and as you approach a grazed field, keep your eyes open for Brown Hares and Rabbits which both like this field. In springtime you can sometimes see the famous ‘Mad March Hare’ behaviour.

POST 16: SMALL WOOD

Walk back clockwise to the point where you entered the meadow field and turn sharply left into the small wood corridor on your left. Follow the path through the middle and look out for signs of Badger scrapes where they have rooted for Bluebell bulbs and grubs.

POST 17: LOG PILES

Near the end of the wood you will see various old log piles which have been left in position for several years and will now be the ideal habitat for many different types of insects and invertebrates – have a careful look and see what you can spot (although try not to disturb them too much!).

There is the start of a den being built too – can you add a bit too it?!



You will pass a rather scruffy border of thistles and nettles. This is the one of the food areas for the caterpillars of the butterflies we mentioned at Post 4 and has been deliberately left rough for them.

POST 18: BUTTERFLY FOOD PATCH AND BEE HOTEL

As you emerge out of the wood, follow the path near the fence line.

You will pass a rather scruffy border of thistles and nettles. This is the one of the food areas for the caterpillars of the butterflies we mentioned at Post 4 and has been deliberately left rough for them.

Mounted on the fence is a “Bee Hotel” – this array of holes is the perfect nesting site for female solitary bees – such as red mason bees and leaf cutter bees. These “hotels” are also used by ladybirds during winter periods.

POST 19: MATURE HEDGEROW

This is a beautiful old hedgerow which had become a bit neglected

and ‘gappy’. It is also a fine example of what hedgerows used to look like.

Hedges such as this not only provide shelter for livestock and larger animals, they also provide nesting places and blossom for insects, which then results in winter food (berries) for many bird species and small mammals. We have therefore plugged the gaps in our hedges with berry-bearing shrubs such as Guelder Rose, Hawthorn, Holly, Rowan and Blackthorn (Sloe).

Our nature trail now continues across the Estate but please feel free to explore this area some more – the area located within the centre of the paths you have followed is a beautiful space so why not stay a while and see what you can see and hear? We have positioned some picnic benches for the perfect spot to sit and relax.

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO EXPLORE SOME MORE, RETURN TO POST 19.

Continue past post 19 into the open field area with the hotel up to your right. Keep to the foot of the hill and continue almost straight across to the next area of trees. Follow the cut path through the hedge.

POST 20: MATURE HEDGEROW

As at post 19, this old hedgerow provides a great habitat for many creatures and has been the site of nesting pheasants in recent years

who hid themselves in the thick undergrowth, protected by nettles and thistles.

As you emerge into the clearing area with the bench seating, take the left-hand pathway along the fence line.

POST 21: OPEN FARMLAND

The Open Farmland (which does not belong to us) does not have many features to encourage wildlife aside from the hedgerows at the edges of the fields but it is a good area to view some of the larger animals as they move into and out of our Estate – they are well hidden on our land with the trees and long grasses but much more visible once in the open farmland. Hares, rabbits, and deer are frequently seen in this area so keep watching!

POST 22: ACCESS TO JOIN THE RIBBLE WAY

This stile links the hotel grounds directly to the Ribble Way and from here you can walk on several public footpaths and bridleways and explore the wider area.

POST 23: WILLOW TREES

The large willow trees which you can see here were planted as part of the original tree planting scheme. They were planted within a boggy

area of a sunken pond and this supply of water has helped them and the trees in this area flourish and they appear much more advanced than other areas in the grounds.

Sadly, the Ash trees in this area however (and the rest of the site) are suffering from Ash Dieback disease and we will in time end up with natural clearings within these areas.

Follow the pathway loop back to the clearing. Cross the clearing to take the narrow path at the opposite side through the ancient hedgerow back towards the hotel.

POST 24: BARN OWL NESTING BOX

Back in 2012 we installed a nesting box specifically for Barn Owls and we were delighted when a breeding pair took up residence and successfully raised a family of 3 chicks.



The winters which have followed were exceptionally wet have created difficult conditions for Barn Owls

and sadly they have not returned to nest, although they are occasionally spotted flying in the area.

The nesting box is still in place in the large sycamore tree behind you in case they ever wish to return.

POST 25: OUR MAGICAL TREE!

This beautiful tree is a different kind of feature from those you have seen so far and it is an important spot for our wedding parties for photographs and videos.

It has an extra secret in that it is draped with thousands of fairy lights to create a stunning back drop for romantic night-time photographs!



TIME FOR A CUP OF TEA AND A PIECE OF CAKE!

Follow the footpath back up to the hotel and come and enjoy a well earned drink and something to eat – we have plenty to tempt you and help rebuild your energy levels!

We hope you have enjoyed our nature trail and the Estate grounds, please come and visit us again soon!



POST 25
Our magical tree on a beautiful frosty December morning!