

Walk 5 MOORLAND MAGIC

WILDLIFE AND ECONOMY

Just after direction 7 notice the low, stone-lined shelter on the right of the path. This is a grouse butt - a powerful clue to the origins of the moorland landscape.

The wide-open expanse of moorland found in the National Park looks and feels like a wild landscape. In fact, although the heather and grasses have not been sown or planted, this is a managed landscape. For over 150 years the moors have been carefully looked after by generations of keepers to nurture red grouse - a game bird and, since the Middle Ages, to create grazing for sheep.



Sheep farming and grouse shooting have made the moors what they are today, without them the chances are that the nation would have lost an internationally important environment. Happily management as a grouse moor goes hand in hand with the needs of other moorland wildlife. So much so that virtually the entire moorland area in the Park has been made a 'Special Protection Area' because of its internationally important numbers of breeding merlin and golden plover.

A BURNING ISSUE

As you cross the moorland you can't fail to notice the patchwork of different sized heather plants. Some areas have quite tall heather, some a short, even carpet, whilst others are charred and black, seemingly devoid of heather or other plants. Why is this? The reasons are linked in to the needs of grouse and are in tandem with the needs of grazing sheep.

Grouse need tall heather to nest in and short heather to feed in. Foraging sheep also enjoy tucking into the succulent new heather shoots! Carefully burning patches

WHY NOT LET NATURE TAKE ITS COURSE ?

Why should we keep the moors in this 'unnatural' state? What would happen if we stopped burning and grazing?

The open expanse of moorland with its wide uninterrupted views is one of the key special qualities of the National Park. Without controlled burning and sheep grazing the moorland scenery

of tall heather every once in a while produces the required mix of heather ages - a winning combination for sheep, red grouse and other wildlife.

Controlled burning is quite different from the occasional accidental fire which can be severely damaging to both the moors and their wildlife. Keepers burn the moor between 1 October and 15 April when the ground is damp. This avoids the possibility of the peaty soil catching fire. Accidental fires can burn for months, killing heather roots. Areas affected in this way may never fully recover - so please be careful.



would radically change. The heather would grow tall and 'leggy' and tree seedlings would be able to grow. In perhaps 100 years most of the moorland would be covered in rowan, hazel and birch woodland - not unlike what the area would have looked like 8,000 years ago in the Middle Stone Age.

The end result would undoubtedly be more 'natural' but we would have lost many important aspects of the North York Moors which make the Park so special today. The sense of freedom would have disappeared, moorland birds would have lost a home and a rich mosaic of habitats would have been lost. Much of the character of this corner of England would have gone forever.

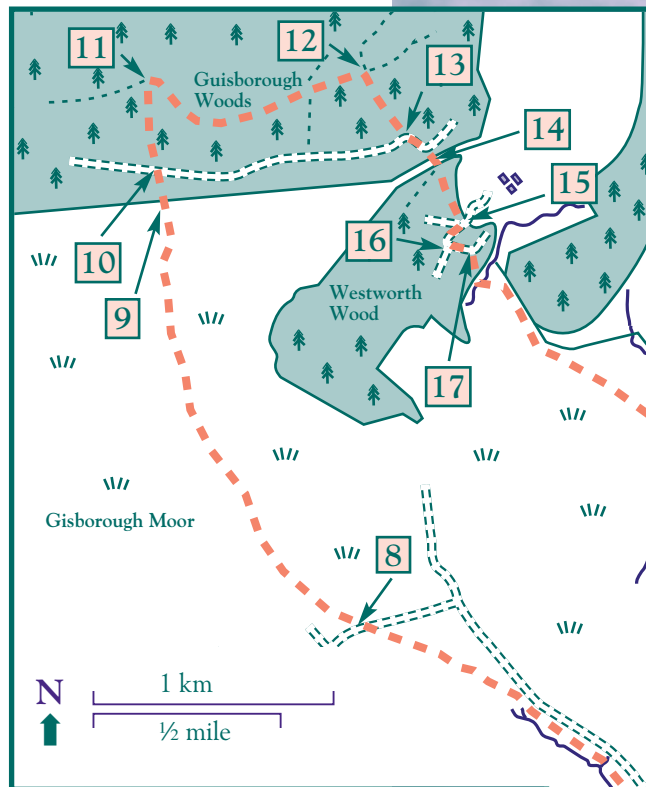
Walk 5

Commondale

A fantastic, circular trek that invites you to get to grips with the stories behind the National Park's moorland.

Time	6 hours
Length	9 miles (14.5km)
Start & Finish	Commondale Station
Terrain	A long but relatively gentle walk over undulating moorland and through fields

1. Leave the station, go through two fieldgates and turn left. At the road turn left, downhill and over the stream.
2. Just before the bridge turn right, on the track.
3. Go through the fieldgate and continue ahead with the stone wall first on your right and then on your left.
4. At the road turn right and almost immediately left to follow the farm track.
5. Turn right at the footpath sign, going downhill. Cross the stream.
6. Turn left. At the wall continue uphill, keeping the wall on your left. At the track turn right.
7. Where the track bears up to the right, follow the waymarked path ahead.



8. At the track continue ahead.
9. Follow the forest path ahead.
10. Continue ahead.
11. Turn right onto the Cleveland Way.
12. Turn right and follow the footpath uphill.
13. Turn left. After 50m turn right.
14. Go through the bridlegate and continue ahead, through the trees.
15. Turn right along the level track.
16. Turn left.

17. Turn right on the downhill path. Cross the stream and continue ahead.
18. Cross the stream and continue ahead with the stone wall on your left.
19. At the stone trod turn right.
20. At the sharp bend in the road follow the footpath straight ahead.
21. Keep to the left of the trees.
22. Turn left. After 300m turn sharp right onto the bridleway.
23. Go through the gate and diagonally cross the field.
24. Continue downhill.
25. Turn right along the track past the farm to the station.

