

Welcome to Baldersdale

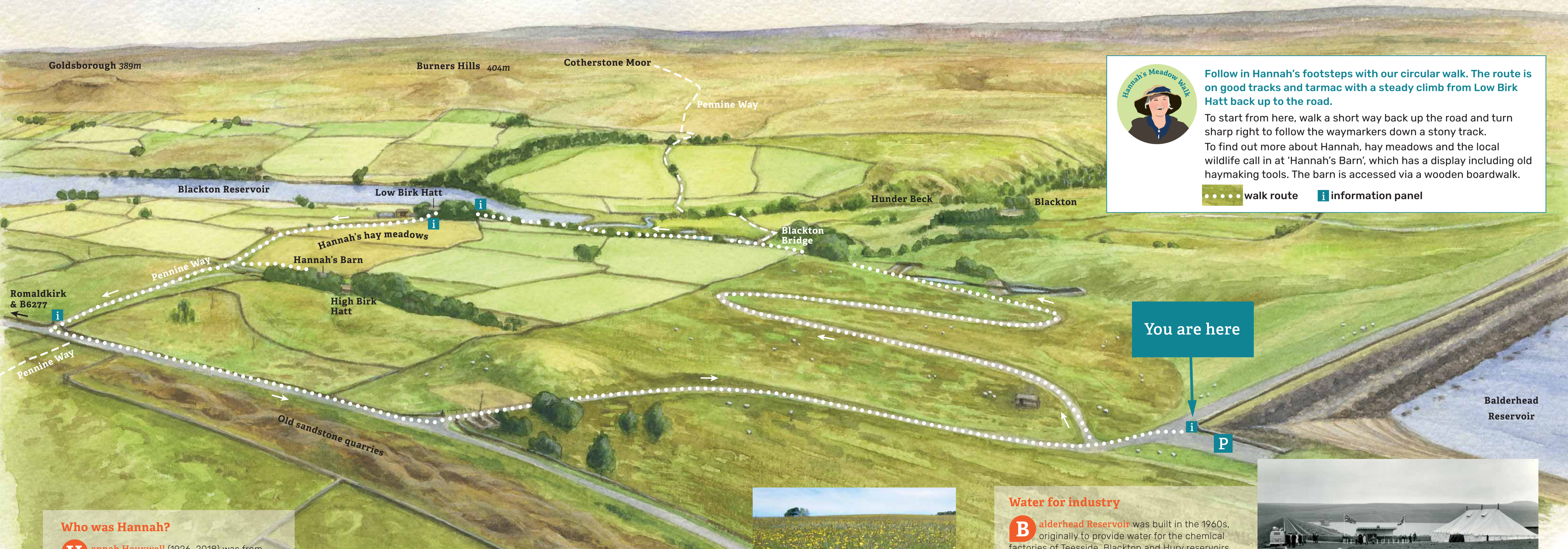
Water, wildlife and upland hay meadows

From here at Balderhead Reservoir in Baldersdale you can enjoy a pleasant 1¾-mile circular walk which takes you through countryside associated with celebrated 'Daughter of the Dales' Hannah Hauxwell. Hannah's old farm is near here and her hay meadows are now a nature reserve managed by Durham Wildlife Trust.

Funding through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

About Durham Wildlife Trust

We are a local nature conservation charity working across Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, County Durham and Darlington. We manage special places for people to enjoy and rely on our members and supporters to fund our work. If you enjoyed this nature reserve, please consider supporting us. Join today or become a volunteer to get involved: www.durhamwt.com



Hannah's Meadow Walk

Follow in Hannah's footsteps with our circular walk. The route is on good tracks and tarmac with a steady climb from Low Birk Hatt back up to the road.

To start from here, walk a short way back up the road and turn sharp right to follow the waymarkers down a stony track.

To find out more about Hannah, hay meadows and the local wildlife call in at 'Hannah's Barn', which has a display including old haymaking tools. The barn is accessed via a wooden boardwalk.

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Who was Hannah?

Hannah Hauxwell (1926–2018) was from an old Baldersdale farming family. After her parents and uncle died, Hannah struggled on alone at the family farm, Low Birk Hatt. From 1961 to 1988 she farmed there with just a few cows, no running water and, for much of that time, no electricity.

Her tough and solitary life may well have remained largely unknown outside the local area if she hadn't come to the notice of Barry Cockcroft, a TV documentary producer for Yorkshire Television. After featuring in his film 'Too Long A Winter' about the hard lives of Dales hill farmers, broadcast in January 1973, she became an unlikely national celebrity.



Hannah at Low Birk Hatt

Hannah's Meadow Nature Reserve

Hannah farmed using traditional methods as her family had done for generations. As a result, her meadows are a wonderful habitat for wild flowers, insects and birds. Species-rich upland hay meadows like these are now one of the rarest grassland habitats in the country. Durham Wildlife Trust looks after Hannah's old meadows for the benefit of wildlife and for all to enjoy.



Photos © Marcus Byron



Main image: The lower meadow in June
Inset: Ringlet butterflies on meadow thistle

Water for industry

Balderhead Reservoir was built in the 1960s, originally to provide water for the chemical factories of Teesside. Blackton and Hury reservoirs further down the dale were built in the 1890s, to provide water for earlier industries. All three reservoirs are now owned and operated by Northumbrian Water to supply drinking water and act as flow regulators for the River Tees to the east. They are also important wildlife habitats.

Top right: Balderhead Reservoir opening ceremony on 8 October 1965

Right: View down Baldersdale on 30 June 1959, before Balderhead Reservoir was built. The water level is now above the farm buildings on the far right of the picture

Images courtesy of Teesside Archives



Hannah was deeply attached to Low Birk Hatt and Baldersdale:

"To me there's nowhere like it and never will be. This is my life – my world."

From 'Daughter of the Dales' by Hannah Hauxwell with Barry Cockcroft, first published by Random Century, 1990