

FEN BOG  
North Yorkshire

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for the book *Discover Butterflies in Britain*  
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The North Yorkshire Moors Railway passes along the western edge of Fen Bog

Fen Bog is 20 ha (50 acres) of boggy marshland at the head of Newtondale, near Pickering in North Yorkshire. It is 3 miles south of Goathland and lies on the route of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway from Pickering to Grosmont.

This well-known site in Yorkshire is noted for its many different species of butterflies, moths and dragonflies. There is a deep bed of peat where many different bog plants flourish. It lies within a wide valley with heather, hard fern, mat grass and purple moor grass all growing stongly. The reserve is cared for by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

**TARGET SPECIES**

Large Heath (June and early July), Small Pearl-bordered and Dark Green Fritillaries; commoner species.

The North York Moors became one of our first National Parks in 1952. Its moors are one of the largest areas of heather moorland in Britain and cover an area of 550 square miles. It is hard to imagine that they were once permanently covered in ice and snow. When global warming took effect at the end of the Ice Age, the snowfields began to melt and melt water flowed south. It gouged out the deep valley of Newtondale where the

Pickering Beck now flows. Newtondale runs roughly north-south parallel to the A169 Whitby to Pickering road and is a designated SSSI of 940 ha (2,300 acres). Its northern part is a deep bog with peat up to 18 m deep. As well as being part of the SSSI, this is now a Special Area of Conservation under the EC Habitats Directive in recognition of the exceptional importance of the bog mosses and grasses that grow here. Plants include purple moor-grass, cross-leaved heath, tormentil and common cotton-grass. The last is the foodplant for Large Heath caterpillars, and Fen Bog is now one of the last places in Yorkshire where Large Heaths may be found (mid to late June probably being the best time to look for them). Heather and bracken flourish on the moorland edge and valley slopes and I saw lots of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and several Dark Green Fritillaries here one sunny afternoon in late July.

The reserve is easy to find alongside the A169, just south of Goathland, and a great place to visit. However keep to the paths if you want to avoid getting your feet (or more) wet. There are some very deep water channels under the thick grasses, so take especial care that a seemingly firm tussock of grass may have nothing to support you below it. This uncertain foundation was a major engineering problem when the old Whitby and Pickering Railway was first constructed in 1836. Taking the railway over the edge of the bog was unavoidable and required a bed of timber and sheep fleeces to be laid down first so that the track could, in effect, float on the bog. Now the North Yorkshire Moors Railway operates the old British Rail line that was closed here in 1965 as part of the Beeching cuts. It has become a thriving heritage railway, running regular services during the summer months and occasional trains during winter. It has just a few full-time employees but a great number of active volunteers.

The Lyke Wake Walk crosses the northern part of Fen Bog. This is a 40-mile west to east walk from Osmotherly to Ravenscar. Originally it involved walking over the heather but, after over 50 years, there are now clear paths, with various alternative routes. A causeway has been built across Fen Bog, using concrete railway sleepers, to provide a dry route for walkers and prevent damage to bog vegetation. To complete this 40 mile walk in under 24 hours, which is the aim of many of those who attempt it, is a challenging task. The walk takes its name from an old Yorkshire song, the Lyke Wake Dirge, telling of the soul's journey from earth to heaven.

On the east side of the A169, you can see RAF Fylingdales. This is a radar base operated by the RAF which is part of the US missile early warning system. The huge 40 m high pyramid houses radar modules that provide 360° coverage for a distance of 3,000 miles. The station first became operational here in 1964 when it had 3 mechanically-operated radars in separate "golf-ball" shaped structures. In 1990, these were replaced by the one pyramid that you see now, which uses modern solid-state electronic technology and has no moving parts.



Entrance to Fen Bog, looking south



Route of the Lyke Wake Walk which crosses the northern end of the reserve



Fen Bog, looking south



Fen Bog looking north from the ruined Fen House



Fen Bog, looking south



Fen Bog, looking south-west towards the railway



NYMR train heading south behind Fowler 2-8-0 No. 53809, built in 1925



NYMR train heading north behind BR Class 4 2-6-0 No. 76079, built in the 1950s



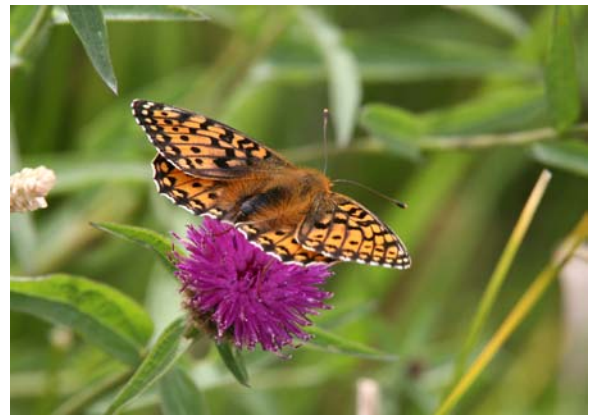
Wheelchair access is only possible to the edge of the boggy area



Fen Bog looking north from Fen House



Dark Green Fritillary (f) near the reserve entrance



Dark Green Fritillary (f)



Common Blue (f)



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (f) at Fen Bog on 19 July



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries shelter on a thistle with a Five-spot Burnet Moth



Small Heaths were plentiful in late July, but no Large Heaths were seen



Ringlets were also common



Small Skipper (m); there were many of this species



Another picture of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.



Enjoying the reserve



Orchids at Fen Bog in July



Yorkshire Wildlife Trust sign



YWT sign



Welcome notice



Information board



The huge radar structure of RAF Fylingdales is visible on the opposite side of the main road.

LOCATION

Explorer Map OL27: North York Moors  
Eastern area  
Landranger (pink) Map 94: Whitby, Esk Dale  
& Robin Hood's Bay  
Grid reference for the entrance: SE858983

The entrance to the reserve is on the A169 Pickering to Whitby road, about 10 miles north of Pickering and 10 miles south of Whitby. Look for a track on the west side of the road. This is just south of the bridge over Eller Beck and 2 miles north of Hole of Horcum. As a marker, if you are coming from Pickering, there is a National Park information point and car park just south of Hole of Horcum.

A few cars can park at the edge of the track leading from the A169 to the reserve's entrance gate. It is possible to take a wheelchair round the locked entrance gate as far as a vantage point overlooking Fen Bog. There are no facilities but these are available at Whitby, Pickering or Goathland.

Public transport is possible by train to Sleights (near Whitby) and then by bus along the A169.

To avoid tramping the rare bog plants and to ensure your own safety because parts of the bog are very deep, do please keep to the pathways at all times.