



## Establishment of the North York Moors National Park

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In medieval times, forests and mountains were seen as dangerous places where wild beasts and demons roamed. Myths and legends reflecting such fears persisted for centuries and appear in place names across the North Yorkshire such as Boggle Hole, near Whitby – believed to be where the ‘little people’, or ‘boggles’, lived – and ‘Fairy Cross Plain’ in Fryupdale, the home of elves and fairies.

By the end of the 18th century such beliefs were disappearing as understanding of the natural world evolved. In the industrialised world people were increasingly concentrated in cities, with a corresponding shift in perceptions of nature: the Romantic movement expressed these by harking back to a supposedly more natural and purer past. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau eulogised the mountains and peasantry of his native Switzerland, and in Britain the poems of William Wordsworth created awareness of the beauty of wild places. Even though the Romantics’ ideal of a medievalist, rural idyll had never actually existed, they influenced the European educated classes to consider nature in a more positive light.

In America, the Romantics seized on the wilderness as a source of inspiration. Artists were employed by the railway companies to paint dramatic

landscapes which would encourage urban-dwellers to visit these areas (travelling, of course, by train). In North Yorkshire, a similar link between the railways, tourism and the scenery was created by the Staithes Group of artists, who worked in villages along the northeast coast in the late 19th century. They sold their works to the emerging middle-classes of the industrial cities, stimulating them to visit and appreciate unpolluted and more natural scenery.

All this helped to win popular support for landscape preservation, bolstered by the Victorians’ enthusiastic study of natural history. There were increasing demands for greater countryside access after World War 1 and finally, after the Second World War, 10 national parks in England and Wales were designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. The North York Moors was one of these, formally coming into existence in 1952.

The National Park measures 143,603 hectares and consists of a high sandstone plateau pierced by valleys of woods, rivers and farmland. From the Vale of Pickering in the south the land gradually rises to the high moorland and then falls away to the north in an escarpment, facing Teesside. The principal valleys such as Bilsdale, Farndale and Rosedale run north-south and drain southwards into the River Rye and thence to the Derwent, the Ouse and

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the Humber, while to the north the valleys drain into the Esk which flows to the sea at Whitby, and in the north-west the Leven drains into the Tees.

The North York Moors boasts the greatest expanse of heather moorland in England and Wales, but 5,000 years ago both uplands and valleys were wooded. These were gradually cleared as human settlements spread uphill during the Bronze Age (from about 2100 BC). Increasing agricultural activity during the Romano-British period saw further clearances, and again during the Anglo-Scandinavian era – but woodland expanded again when William the Conqueror's 'harrying of the north' in AD 1069-70 caused famine and depopulation.

Monasteries such as Rievaulx, Byland and Mount Grace revived the agricultural economy in the 12th-14th centuries and led to the management of moorland for sheep to supply the lucrative trade in wool. Nowadays moorland management balances sheep production with habitats for grouse and other wildlife, contributing both

to conservation and to the local economy. A wide range of tourism, agricultural, craft and other enterprises reliant on the resources of the Moors helps to support a population of around 24,000 people living in over 90 villages and scores of isolated farms, creating the thriving social-ecological system we see today.

For visitors, the Park offers a huge choice of activities, from adventure and activity sports such as mountain-biking, rock-climbing and horse-riding to visits to ruined castles and abbeys, ancient inns and rides on the heritage North York Moors railway, or opportunities just to sit and admire the coastal views at Runswick Bay or Robin Hood's Bay, or inland at Sutton Bank or Hole of Horcum. There are any number of short walks, and longer walks which are completely or partly within the national park include the Coast-to-Coast Walk (192 miles), Cleveland Way (109 miles), Lyke Wake Walk (40 miles) and the Esk Valley Walk (37 miles) – not forgetting the 'special interest' Inn Way, covering 89 miles and 31 pubs!



### Find out more

North York Moors National Park Authority,  
<http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/>

North Yorkshire Moors Association,  
<http://www.north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk/>



*Ralph Cross*



*Boundary marker stone above Rosedale*



*National Park boundary sign*



*Red Grouse, synonymous with the Moors*