



North Pennines National Landscape

Bowlees Visitor Centre Accessibility Guide Version Bowlees Visitor Centre Accessibility Guide

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| Version 1.0 | Updated 19/12/2023 |
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North Pennines National Landscape

Introduction

Bowlees Visitor Centre is run by the North Pennines National Landscape team. The centre is a gateway to the National Landscape and UNESCO Global Geopark. Here you can find information about things to see and do across the North Pennines, take part in our nature and landscape themed events, and explore the site. It is a great place to start exploring the surrounding countryside of Upper Teesdale.

Bowlees Visitor Centre,
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Newbiggin-in-Teesdale
Barnard Castle
Co. Durham DL12 0XE

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<https://www.northpennines.org.uk/bowlees-visitor-centre/>

There is a **visual story** for Bowlees Visitor Centre – to help visitors to know what to expect whilst visiting, especially autistic and other neurodivergent people. Take a look at it here:

<https://www.northpennines.org.uk/bowlees-visitor-centre/visit/visual-story-for-bowlees-visitor-centre/>

North Pennines Outdoor Mobility Network

Bowlees Visitor Centre is a hire point in the North Pennines Outdoor Mobility Network. Here you can hire a Trampler mobility scooter. You can visit the popular Low Force waterfall with the water of the River Tees cascading over the rocks of the Whin Sill. You can follow a farm track up a gentle hillside for amazing views over Teesdale. You can also visit Bowlees Quarry, a special invertebrate site which is home to an abundance of wildflowers. Your booking slot allows you to explore all 3 trails or just complete your favourite.

The Trampler can be booked via our delivery partner – Outdoor Mobility. For more information and to book visit:

- <https://www.outdoormobility.org/north-pennines>
- <https://www.northpennines.org.uk/visit-explore/north-pennines-outdoor-mobility/>





Manual wheelchair

A manual wheelchair is also available to use.

Manual wheelchair – available from Bowlees Visitor Centre



Approach

By public transport

- The nearest bus stop is 150m away from the centre – on the B6277
- Buses on a Wednesday only – Service 73, from Barnard Castle
- Details and printable timetable available from <http://www.hodgsonsbuses.com/service73.html>
- Visit www.traveline.info / 0871 200 22 33 to plan your public transport journey

Nearest bus stop to Bowlees Visitor Centre





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Taxis

- Hodgsons, Barnard Castle - <http://www.hodgsonstaxis.com/> / 01833 630730 / taxis@hodgsonsgroup.com
- Alston Taxis – 07990 593855

Peter's Private Hire, Stanhope – 01388 52781

By car/bike

Approaching Bowlees Visitor Centre on the B6277



From Middleton-in-Teesdale

- The centre is 5.2km from Middleton-in-Teesdale
- Follow the B6277. The turning is 800m beyond the small settlement of Newbiggin – on the right hand side

From Alston, Cumbria

- The centre is 30km from Alston
- Follow the B6277. The turning is 6.7km beyond Langdon Beck – on the left hand side

From St. John's Chapel, Weardale

- The centre is 15.4km from St. John's Chapel in Weardale
- Follow the minor road, up and over Harthope Head, signposted Langdon Beck. After 7.8km turn left onto the B6277 and follow it through Langdon Beck – with the hotel on your right
- The turning for the car park is 6.7km beyond Langdon Beck – on the left hand side



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Final approach:

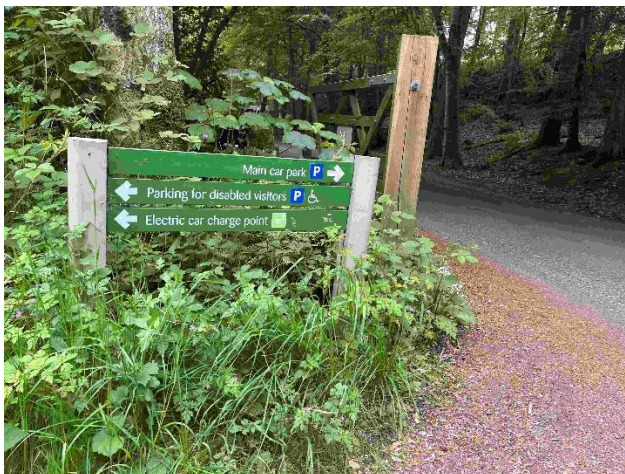
- Turn off the B6277, following the 'Bowlees Visitor Centre P' brown tourist sign
- After 160m on the tarmac road, just as the road bears round to the left to cross a stone bridge over the Bowlee Beck, turn right and enter the main car park

Right turn into Bowlees Visitor Centre car park



- If you require a disabled car parking bay (or electric car charging) continue to the left, over the bridge, and continue following the tarmac road to the centre itself (another 160m away)

Direction sign at the entrance to Bowlees Visitor Centre car park





Main car park

The main car park is located approximately 100m walk from the centre. Keep left as you drive in – there is a one way system in operation.

Parking

Bowlees Visitor Centre car park



- Park in marked bays only
- Surfacing in the car park is tarmac
- The car park is 'donate and display' i.e. voluntary donations
- Suggested donations are: £2-3 for a half day (up to 3 hours); £3-4 for a full day (3+ hours)
- Donations can be made via a payment machine in the car park (adjacent to small stone built building, next to 'Supporting Bowlees Together' information board). The machine accepts 5p, 10p, 20p, 50p, £1 and £2 coins – no change is given

Car parking donation machine





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- Card donations can be made at the information desk in the centre
- Donations help the North Pennines AONB Partnership to: maintain the centre and its surroundings; run educational initiatives; and develop new trails, routes and activities
- Please – no fires, no camping and no overnight parking

Willow arch picnic area

On the left hand side as you enter the main car park there is a wheelchair accessible picnic area, close to the Bowlee Beck

In the willow tunnel



- From the tarmac there is broadly level access, through the willow arch, via a loose stone path – approximately 1000mm wide
- There is hard standing around wheelchair accessible picnic benches

Wheelchair accessible picnic bench



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- The rest of the area is mud/grass.

The Stargazing Hammock and Molluscarium

Just beyond the stone building in the car park, on the right hand side, is a stargazing hammock/wooden climbing frame feature.

- It is accessed via a short, but fairly steep, incline over muddy/rocky ground

Approach to the Stargazing Hammock



Stargazing Hammock





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At the very top of the car park you will find a spiral drystone wall construction – **the Molluscarium.**

- There is a panel on the wooden fence adjacent to the feature, which explains it
- The circular path to the stone seat in the centre of the spiral is 1150mm wide and the surface is tarmac

The Molluscarium



Toilets (in main car park)

A short distance along the trail (50m) towards Gibson's Cave and Summerhill Force Waterfall there is a stone built toilet block.

Exterior of the toilet block in the mail car park



- There is a one gender neutral toilet cubicle



Interior of the car park toilet



- The door width is 770mm (in front of the door there is an alcove which is 870mm wide)
- There is not enough space to easily bring a wheelchair inside and alongside the toilet. Users will need to walk into the toilet to use it but there are handrails available around the toilet
- The toilet has stainless steel handrails on either side of the bowl
- The toilet bowl is 400mm high
- There is a grab rail to the right of the sink

How to get to Bowlees Visitor Centre from the main car park

The main car park is located approximately 100m walk from the centre.

- Start at the orientation sign near to the car parking payment machine

Orientation sign and the start of the route from the main car park to Bowlees Visitor Centre





- Walk past the sign, on the tarmac path, and cross the wooden bridge (1500mm) over the Bowlee Beck

Wooden bridge over Bowlee Beck



- On the far side of the bridge go down five stone steps (maximum 170mm depth). There is a metal handrail on the left side (1040mm high)

Steps down

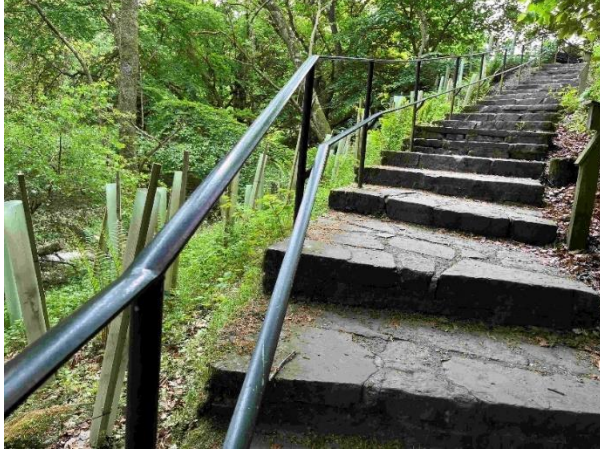


- A short section of concrete and then stone path leads to an upward flight of stone steps
- Climb the steps – there are 26 in total. Step depths vary from 140mm and 230mm. There is a double height (620mm and 1060mm) cast iron handrail on the left side



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Flight of 26 steps



- At the top of the steps there is a bench (with back rest)
- Follow the wide, stony, path ahead to the centre

Route to the centre from the top of the big flight of steps



- Just before the building go down a short flight of stone steps – seven in total (170 to 210mm deep). There are cast iron handrails on both sides of the steps (920mm high)



Steps down to Bowlees Visitor Centre



- At the foot of the steps you will find the centre toilets on your right. Straight ahead there is a variety of outdoor seating – some of which is wheelchair accessible. The rear entrance door to the centre is just ahead to the right

Step-free route to centre from main car park

- Note that from the main car park there is an alternative (step-free) route to the centre
- Setting off from the orientation sign (near to the car parking payment machine) this route is approximately 300m
- Walk back to the car park entrance and turn right onto the tarmac road
- Cross the stone bridge and follow the road round, past some cottages on the left, to the centre

Route from the main car park to Gibson's Cave and Summerhill Force

There is a short (600m) walk from the car park to Gibson's Cave and Summerhill Force. This is a popular excursion for people coming to Bowlees Visitor Centre. The route is step free as far as Bowlees Quarry (disused) – 200m from the car park.

- Start the walk from the orientation sign near to the car parking payment machine



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Orientation sign in Bowlees Visitor Centre car park start here to follow the walk to Gibson's Cave



- Turn right (as you face the sign) initially on the tarmac road. After 25m bear left, leaving the tarmac, to follow a crushed stone/mud path just to the right of a metal barrier – the gap is 1130mm

Pass to the right of the metal barrier



- Continue past the toilet block, on your left
- Just beyond the toilet block there is a moderately steep incline – with rocky/stony trip hazards



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- At the top of the incline continue ahead on the wide, level mud/stony path. After approximately 35m the path forks. The left fork goes to a footbridge (1100mm wide, surface is non-slip, there is a 70mm lip up to the bridge) over the Bowlee Beck – but is a dead end beyond the bridge
- The main route follows the right fork – mostly level but on an uneven stony/mud path

Take the right fork and follow the mud path through the trees



- Pass through the disused limestone quarry, passing to the left of the wooded mound. Continue to follow the stony/uneven path
- To the right of the wooded mound there are narrow, uneven, grassy paths exploring the wider quarry – watch out for wet boggy sections
- There is a wheelchair accessible picnic bench in the quarry – just beyond the wooded mound
- Be aware, as you walk through Bowlees Quarry, that the route runs alongside the Bowlee Beck. There is a vertical drop down to the stream (3m to the left of the path) – care needed
- At the far end of the quarry the route, to the waterfall and Gibson's Cave, climbs a flight of 40 steps. There isn't a handrail but there is a stonewall (960mm high) on the left hand side. The first step is 270mm high but after that they are not as deep – between 100 and 220mm
- At the top of the steps there are two wooden benches (no backs). Also at the top of the steps there is a flight of nine steps (from 140 to 240mm in depth) down to the left, leading to a viewpoint above a waterfall and pool on the Bowlee Beck



At the bottom of the steps



- Continue on the stone path through the wooden gate (1140mm wide) and follow the now wider, flat stone path (1400mm) for approximately 100m. Watch out for protruding stones in the path – which present a potential trip hazard
- After about 100m the route surface changes to a stone-flagged path. Take care as it is uneven with lips which constitute a trip hazard. The stone flags can be very slippery when wet. Note that the path, in places, is next to a 2 to 4m drop down to stream level
- The rocky path undulates and climbs up short rocky steps (70 to 140mm in height)
- It is inadvisable to enter the stream way as the underwater rocks are extremely slippery

Rough stone steps along the stony path





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- After about 150m you will reach the waterfall (Summerhill Force) at Gibson's Cave. Please do not climb over the low stonewall

Summerhill Force and Gibson's Cave



- Retrace your steps to the car park

Bowlees Visitor Centre – the building and immediate surroundings

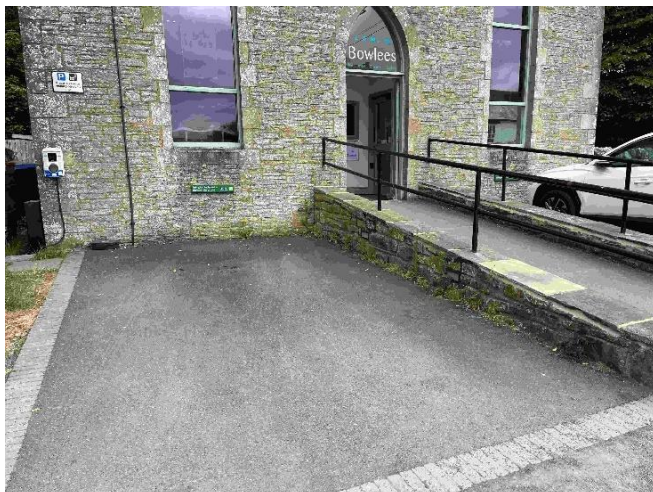
Accessible parking

Directly in front of the centre there are two accessible parking bays:

- As you face the front door the parking bay to the left of the ramp is dual use – both for disabled parking and electric car charging
- The bay on the right hand side of the ramp is disabled parking
- Both bays have a tarmac surface



Accessible parking and car charging bay



- Away to the left of the centre (as you face the front door) there are two further accessible parking bays
- Both bays have a gravel/stony surface

Additional accessible parking bays



Bike parking

- Parking for push bikes/e-bikes is available adjacent to the toilets, near to the rear entrance
- An outside tap is also available for bike washing



Bike parking



Toilets at the centre

There are two gender neutral toilets at the Centre. They are located in a separate building adjacent to the rear entrance.

The toilets at Bowlees Visitor Centre



Larger toilet:

- On the right, as you face them
- Non-powered door width of 870mm
- The floor space of the cubicle is 1900 by 2200mm
- The transfer space is to the right of the toilet (from seated position)



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- There is both a fixed handrail and a handrail which can be lowered on the transfer side
- Grab rails on both sides of the washbasin
- The toilet bowl is 470mm high and the washbasin is 770mm high
- Red emergency cord next to the toilet
- Baby change facility – wall mounted, fold down (930mm high)

The larger (accessible) toilet



Smaller toilet:

The smaller toilet



- On the left, as you face them
- Door width is 690mm. There is a 10mm step/lip
- There are no grab rails
- The toilet bowl is 430mm high and the washbasin is 830mm high

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Helen's Garden

Adjacent to the centre is Helen's Garden.

Entrance to Helen's Garden



- Gate width is 940mm
- Inside the garden there are two benches (with backs and arm rests)
- Path surfaces are stone/gravel

Path surfaces in Helen's Garden





Inside the Centre

Overview

- There is good lighting throughout the centre and café areas – aided by large external windows
- There is ramp access throughout the ground floor of the visitor centre. There are steps in places but these can be avoided
- There is a first-floor mezzanine area – with additional café seating and gallery space. This is accessed via steps, with no lift available
- Downstairs flooring consists of a small carpeted area (in the gift shop) and old jointed floorboards – which can be uneven in places

Front entrance

- If you have parked in the accessible parking bays at the centre you will probably access the centre through this entrance

Bowlees Visitor Centre – Front Entrance



- There is a permanent ramp accessing the front door. Metal handrails on both sides of the ramp – at 1100mm height. The ramp surface is tarmac
- Non-powered door (width 1140mm) into entrance lobby. This is usually propped open when the centre is open
- Once in the lobby there are further (again non-powered) doors to the left and right. The width of these doors is 870mm



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Inside the front door



Rear entrance

- If you approach Bowlees Visitor Centre on foot from the main car park this is the entrance you will encounter first – at the bottom of a flight of seven stone steps, with cast iron handrails on both sides

Bowlees Visitor Centre – Rear Entrance



- Non-powered door
- Door width is 970mm. 40mm lip
- Visitors wanting to use the centre toilets will need to exit through this door



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- If you access the centre using the rear entrance, you will immediately encounter ramp access (1100mm wide) down to the shop area – metal handrails (910mm high) on both sides

Inside the rear entrance



Information desk

- The information desk is 760mm high, with no recess
- Level access available to the information desk

The information desk



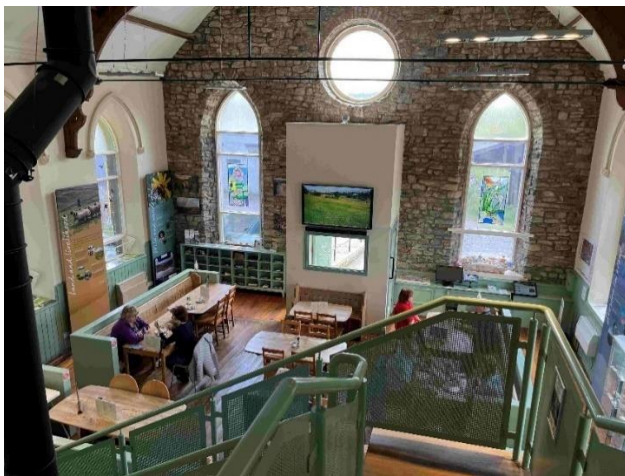


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The Falls Café

- The counter is 1100mm high, with no recess. It is recognised that this is high – staff will give the relevant assistance to anyone who requires it
- The café is situated over two levels – with the central area being accessed via a step (200mm). Step-free, and level, access is available at the front of the Centre. There are also tables on the mezzanine level (accessible via a flight of steps)

Café seating



- The menu includes some vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options
- Non-dairy milk (oat) milk is available
- Ring in advance for advice on any other special dietary requirements – 01833 622145
- Highchairs are available
- There is a menu posted at 'wheelchair user height' on the café counter
- The menu is available in large print – ask at the counter
- There is no background music, although the space is quite echoey and can be quite noisy when busy – on account of the wooden floor, no soft furnishing and the high roof and good acoustics



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Gift shop area

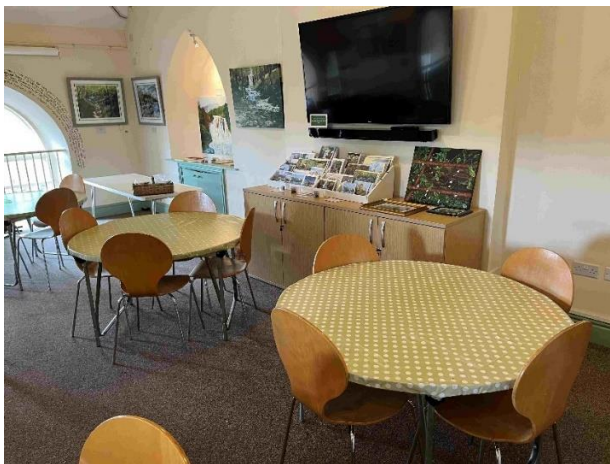
- There is a step up/down (200mm) within the information desk/gift shop – marked with high visibility hazard tape. There is an alternative level access route

Step in the gift shop



- Flooring in the shop area is a mixture of wood and carpet
Mezzanine level

Mezzanine level



- There is stepped access to the upstairs/mezzanine level



Steps up to the mezzanine level



- 17 steps in total – step height is 160mm
- No lift is available
- Metal handrails are available on both sides of the steps – 900mm high
- Part way up the steps there is a chimney (from the wood burning stove) within touching distance of the steps. When the stove is on this will be **very hot – do NOT touch!**

Wood burning stove

- There is a wood burning stove in the café area
- It is enclosed by a metal cage

The woodburning stove is safely contained in a metal surround





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- A chimney comes out of the stove and vents through the roof
- When the stove is on it, and the chimney, will be **very hot – do NOT touch!**

WiFi

- Public WiFi is available
- Bowlees Visitor Centre Guest
- Password: B0wl335!

Weather forecasts

- Daily weather forecasts are posted on a whiteboard behind the information desk

Dogs

- The centre is dog friendly downstairs. Please keep your dog on a short lead
- Dogs are not allowed on the mezzanine level
- Assistance dogs are obviously able to access the whole centre
- Water bowls are provided outside