

Glorious Grasslands: Case Study 1

High Ash Farm

Barrowmoor



One of the species-rich hay meadows at High Ash Farm

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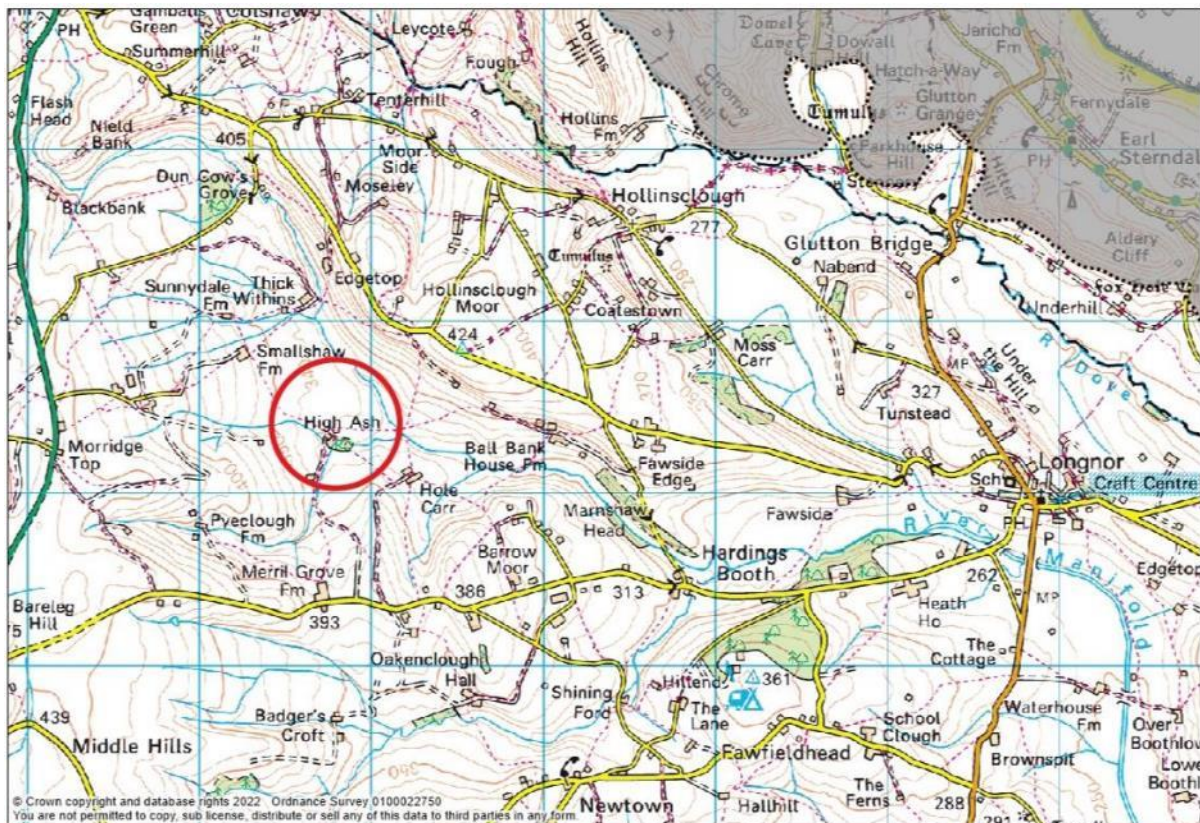
South West Peak Landscape Partnership Grassland Officer

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The farm

High Ash Farm is located in Barrowmoor and is situated in the Brand Top grassland target area, not far from Longnor, an area which has a high concentration of semi-natural habitats.

The farm comprises approximately 20 hectares of grassland, rush pasture and small areas of woodland, which is rented out to a neighbouring farm. There are two hay meadows and grazing is carried out with native cattle (White Parks) and a handful of miniature donkeys.



The landowner

Denis Moors has owned and managed High Ash Farm for the last 30 years, previously having worked as a teacher in London and Stoke-on-Trent. He moved to the farm to set up an outdoor education centre, which he has been running now for many years, welcoming groups of young people, families and others.



Denis Moors from High Ash Farm

Glorious Grasslands: influence & interventions

Work at High Ash Farm through Glorious Grasslands has been done alongside other projects including, Slowing the Flow. Overall, the SWPLPS has been able to deliver multiple benefits to the farm.

Glorious Grasslands first surveyed the grasslands at High Ash Farm in August 2018. The hay meadows were clearly species-rich, though there were indications of improvements in parts of the fields.

The rush pasture and grassland near to the brook were being heavily grazed and there were few positive indicator species present or evident in the sward. The rush pasture had uniform rushes of similar height and structure, with the grassland in between tightly grazed. The most evident species in the grassland close to the brook were crested dog's-tail, perennial rye-grass, white clover and autumn hawkbit.



Hard grazed grassland near to the brook, leading to the species-poor rush pasture, August 2018

The project has been able to influence the management of the grasslands and help to diversify the rush pasture.

In 2019 Slowing the Flow work began, with re-meandering sections of the brook, installing a fence to create a wide buffer zone of grassland and creating a series of scrapes in the rush pasture to benefit waders.

The Glorious Grasslands project advised a change in management of the buffer area from the management at that time (continuous grazing with cattle through spring to autumn) to grazing only in late summer/early autumn, to enable the plant species to flower and seed. Plans were being put together to carry out seeding of the area to enhance it. However, follow up visits demonstrated that the release from grazing pressure meant that many wildflowers re-appeared very quickly and sward enhancement interventions were not necessary.

Low growing species such as common bird's-foot-trefoil, the uncommon heath milkwort, heath speedwell, mouse-ear hawkweed, eyebright, autumn hawkbit and harebell have all flourished since the management changes were implemented. Mountain pansy, recorded on the site since at least the late 1980s, has increased its number of flowering stems and managed to set seed in 2020. Taller herbs including ox-eye daisy were also spotted for the first time in 2020.



Fenced out area showing early flowering plants, June 2020



Autumn hawkbit, harebell, tormentil able to flower with the change in the timing of grazing, July 2020



More mountain pansy flowers, following changes to management, July 2020



Mountain pansy seeding, June 2020 and harebell about to set seed, August 2020

The hay meadows have also benefitted as a result of advice from the project as they are now more often being cut later, with cuts typically now taking place in late August or September. This is providing more opportunity for later flowering species such as devil's-bit-scabious, great burnet and harebell to flower and seed. Again, this slight change in management is benefitting a wealth of species, particularly pollinating insects.

In September 2020 and 2021, sward enhancement took place in part of the rush pasture area. An area of approximately 1.5 ha was mown and scarified in September 2020. Seed (20.15 kg of brush harvested and hand collected) with a high content of devil's-bit scabious was sown across the area. Plug plants were also added – 125 devil's-bit-scabious and 65 ragged-robin plants. This was supplemented in September 2021 with a further 105 devil's-bit-scabious, 65 ragged-robin, 19 autumn hawkbit and 62 sneezewort plug plants. All the plants were grown from locally harvested seed and with the help of the volunteers. A small amount of devil's-bit scabious and water avens seed was also sown into bare patches.

The area was temporarily fenced off to protect the plants from livestock, with grazing resuming the following spring. An even larger area in 2021 was similarly fenced to enable the wildflower plugs to establish.

The aim is to encourage greater plant diversity in the pasture areas.



Seed sowing and plug planting, September 2020



Plug planting with the help of volunteers, September 2020



Plug planting, September 2021



Green hay bales from High Ash Farm, September 2019



Seed harvesting & volunteers processing seed, High Ash Farm, August 2020.

Outcomes of working at High Ash Farm

There have been numerous benefits and outcomes as a result of the project's work at High Ash Farm. Wildlife and people are both winners.

Wildlife benefits

We know much more about the wildlife on the farm which supports many common species, but also many species which are rare or of conservation concern. The range of habitats means that the site supports a large variety of species that rely on the grassland habitats to varying degrees for all or parts of their lifecycles, including for feeding and breeding. Species such as frogs, toads and common newt feed in the grasslands and numerous invertebrates spend their time within the pasture land and hay meadows. Widespread butterfly species – skipper, small tortoiseshell, peacock, green veined white and common blue are found in good numbers, alongside many species of bees and flies. Conservation concern species, such as snipe, and rarities or more specialist species such as violet oil beetle, dark green fritillary butterfly and waxcap fungi, have recently been recorded at High Ash too. All these species, and more, will benefit from the combined interventions and management changes to the grasslands.



Rare species identified through Glorious Grasslands at High Ash Farm, violet oil beetle (Meloe violaceus) and intermediate waxcap (Hygrocybe intermedia)

High Ash Farm as a donor site

The hay meadows at High Ash are species-rich and have been used as a source of wildflower propagules over two years, collecting from different areas each time. The site has been used for green hay and brush harvesting/hand collection with the seed going to five different sites, contributing to the restoration of over 21 ha of grassland on 15 fields.

Denis Moors an ambassador for grasslands, wildlife & people

Working with Denis has been one of the most uplifting and successful projects which has brought substantial gains not only for High Ash Farm, but also for other farms in the South West Peak and for many different people.

Denis has supported the partnership and especially the grassland project. He has been generous in allowing his farm to be used for many different activities:

- Volunteer-organised walks starting from his farm.
- A venue for volunteers to carry out seed sowing for growing plug plants.
- A venue for celebrating National Meadows Day, leading two walks himself in 2019 and in 2021.
- Allowing his fields to be used as sources of wildflower seed.
- Welcoming volunteers and others for surveys and restoration work.

He also continues to influence others having been interviewed for an article in ParkLife magazine (published spring 2021 [ParkLife magazine: Peak District National Park](#)), speaking with his neighbours to promote events and participating in a film made about the Glorious Grasslands project, sharing his views and ideas with many people.



Denis leading a guided walk around his farm, July 2019 (National Meadows Day)



Volunteers with plug plants, High Ash Farm, September 2021



Filming with Denis Moors, High Ash Farm, June 2021