

Otterhead Lakes Local Nature Reserve

Approximate length 2km (1.3miles)

Directions to the Reserve

The reserve is located approximately seven miles to the south of Taunton, immediately south of Otterford. A small lane signposted for Otterford Church just on the western side of the B3170 leads to the car park. (After the hill beyond Corfe and a double bend with an advisory 40mph speed limit, take the first right).

Otterhead Lakes Local Nature Reserve Nature Trail

The Reserve occupies part of the former Otterhead Estate including the site of Otterhead House. The site is now owned by Wessex Water but from January 2008 was leased to the Otterhead Estate Trust Co Ltd.

It was designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in March 2008 by Taunton Deane Borough Council working in partnership with the Trust to manage the site. The main feature of this Local Nature Reserve is the valley of the River Otter, in which the former Otterhead Estate had created a flight of five lakes and a complicated system of leats, weirs and pumps. Only two lakes survive.

A range of semi natural habitats make up the site including alder/willow carr, deciduous woodland, unimproved neutral grassland, freshwater streams and ditches.

Marshy areas of the Local Nature Reserve can be treacherous and visitors are advised to keep to the marked trail for their own safety. Stout boots are advised, as paths may be uneven or slippery.

Please remember that the lakes provide drinking water for Taunton and that nesting birds will be present in the woodland during summer months so **please keep dogs on a lead at all times.**



Follow the Nature Trail...

- 1 Start at the Reserve car park (Grid reference ST224 141). The Trail leaves the car park via some steps by the notice board and joins the main drive, which is a public footpath. (Alternatively to avoid the steep steps, walk on to the public road to the lodge and access the public footpath by a gap adjacent to a metal gate). Turn to your left and walk down to the bridge next to the House Lake. Much of the woodland to your right has a rich ground flora with Snowdrops, Bluebells, Dog's Mercury and Twayblade.

Unfortunately large areas of woodland on the reserve are dominated by invasive species such as Laurel, Rhododendron and Sycamore.

- 2 Pass the remains of the walled garden on your left. At the bridge pause to admire the lake and swans. Here the bridge and weir were breached in 1968 and the lake drained. Wessex Water Authority restored the lake and stocked it with trout. Coot and Mallard are always to be seen, with occasional Teal, Great-Crested Grebe, Dabchick and Kingfisher.

Dragonflies hawk over the water, patrolling their territories, and 'dip' the water or plants to lay their eggs. Male and female often fly 'in tandem'. On the far side of the lake the picnic area occupies the site of the old House and terraced gardens, which were demolished during 1951-1952. The House dated from the 1840s and occupied the site of an earlier farmhouse. Look out for adders, which sometimes bask on the sunny terraces.



Greater Spotted
Woodpecker

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3 The Trail crosses the bridge and follows the track round to the left. At a kissing gate, opposite the restored Coach House, the Trail becomes a permissive footpath, leaving the track and crossing 'Lower Cleeve', a former 'watered meadow' much changed by lake dredgings dumped there in 1975. Bats roosting in the Coach House nearby come out at dusk and feed on small moths and gnats over this rough land.

4 At the end of the field go through another kissing gate and enter a Forestry Commission plantation of larch, Sitka Spruce and Douglas fir.



5 Continue ahead. The Trail's permissive path ends at a sunken way, formerly a lane and now a section of public footpath. The steep banks are topped with old hazel, oak, ash and field maple. The stools, or bases, of the hazels are at least 250 years old and have been cut or 'coppiced' every 20 years or so. The damp shaded banks are good for ferns and mosses like *Minium hornum* and *Thuidium tamarascinum*.

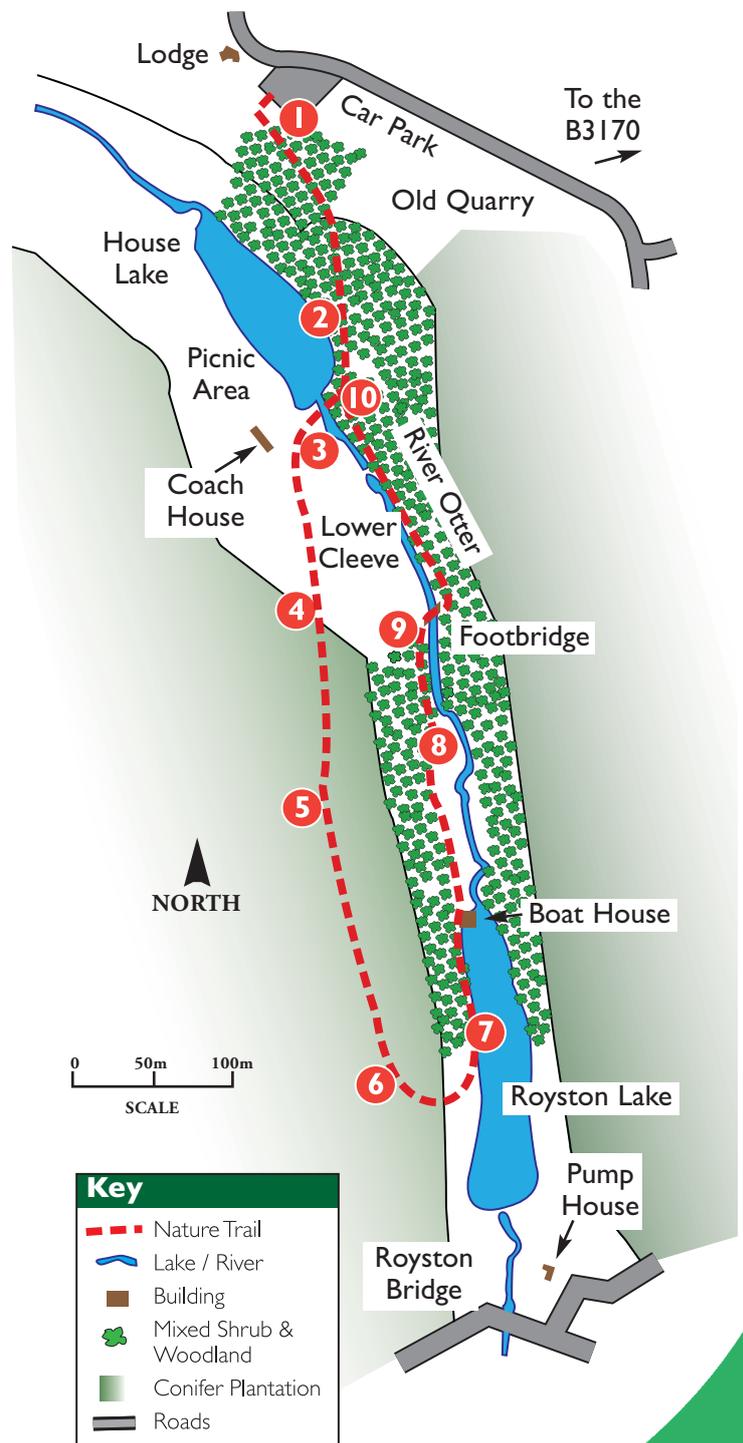


Primroses, Bluebells, Red Campion, Lesser Stitchwort, Bugle, Wall Pennywort and Dog's Mercury can be seen here. The bark on the large ash trees is covered with lichens, indicating unpolluted atmosphere. Look for Greater Spotted Woodpeckers in the old beech trees.

6 On leaving the woodland, the trail now turns left leaving the sunken lane and public footpath and continues as a permissive footpath down a fairly steep slope through the bracken and young larch to the bottom lake, known as Royston Lake. Great care must be taken on this permissive path as fishermen on the bank may be back casting where the path runs down to the water. On the other side of the lake the former pasture of 'Slade

Common' now supports birch and alder scrub with a forestry plantation on the higher slopes.

Water from this lake is pumped over the Blackdown Hills to reservoirs, which provide drinking water for Taunton. Downstream of the Reserve the River Otter continues its course southwards to the Devon coast at Budleigh Salterton.



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7 Now turn to your left along the water's edge. The alders on the left support much wildlife. Siskins and Redpolls enjoy the seeds in the cones, and tits and warblers search the bark for insects. On the right, growing in the water are jointed rush, reed-mace (bulrush) and tussock sedge.



Gatekeeper

Further along the ruins of the boathouse can be seen. The remains, other than a few timber supports, have sunk into the water. This area is rich in dragonflies, fresh water beetles and water plants, including Angelica, Water Starwort and Fool's Watercress.

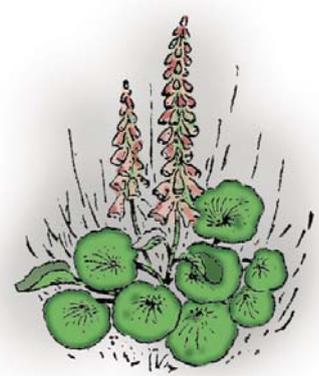
8 A small bridge now takes the path over a ditch. On the right breached dams have resulted in very boggy ground in former lake beds. There are the remains of two lakes. Grass snakes hunt for frogs and toads in these wet areas. The rough grass provides cover for small mammals, which are hunted by buzzards and kestrels, tawny owls and little owls.



Little Owl

9 The path follows the river upstream, crosses another bridge and continues along the other bank. Voles make their homes in the thick tussock sedge, shredding the leaves for nesting material. The fast flowing stream provides a habitat for caddis flies, freshwater shrimps and small brown trout. Dippers and grey wagtails also frequent the river. In the spring look out for Kingcups and Primroses. During the summer clumps of Mimulus at the water's edge produce bright red and yellow flowers.

10 A short incline in the path will bring you back to the bridge where water cascades out of the House Lake. Here the trail reverts to public footpath again. To return to the car park turn right and walk back up the main drive.



Wall Pennywort

For Further Information Contact: Otterhead Estate Trust Co Ltd

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