

# Wild...

at Copt Hill and the Seven Sisters  
Nature Reserve

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## Where is Copt Hill?

Copt Hill is just off the B1404 Gillas Lane, Houghton-le-Spring (opposite the Copt Hill Inn). Grid reference NZ353492. For information on local bus services please phone Traveline North East on 0870 608 2 608.

## Would you like to know more?

For more information or to report any sightings of wildlife please see our website [www.sunderland.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/countryside) or contact:

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**Copt Hill is steeped in history, a haven for wildlife and treasured by the people who live, work and walk around it.**

This famous local landmark between Hetton-le-Hole and Houghton-le-Spring is characterised by the ancient barrow at its heart and fabulous views of the surrounding landscape.

### The Barrow

The Copt Hill barrow is a prehistoric burial mound, known locally as the Seven Sisters due to the seven



Ancient flints

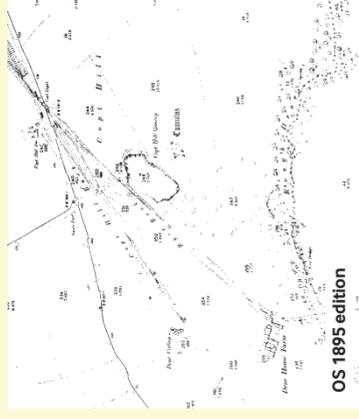
Picture by: Jennifer Morrison

trees that stand atop it. The site is listed by English Heritage as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, reference SM 32055.

### Unveiling Seven Sisters

Unveiling Seven Sisters was a project co-ordinated by the 'Friends of Copt Hill', a local community group formed in 2000. Their aim was to encourage local involvement and awareness of the history and heritage of Copt Hill and to further investigate its origins.

The mound was first excavated in 1877 by Canon William Greenwell and Captain Thomas Robinson. Canon Greenwell was an amateur archaeological enthusiast and librarian of Durham Cathedral library and Captain Robinson the son of a Houghton brewer.



Their work revealed the site to be a burial mound and dated its origins to the neolithic period. There was also evidence of use during the Bronze Age and early medieval period.

With the approval of English Heritage, in 2003 and 2004 the Friends of Copt Hill and Durham University Department of Archaeology carried out further excavations on and around the mound. This unearthed evidence that there was activity on the site

more than 7000 years ago, much earlier than previously thought and placing its origins in the mesolithic period. Many artifacts were found including human remains and flints.

The children of nearby Gillas Lane and Eppleton primary schools have composed alternative stories depicting the origin of Copt Hill and the Seven Sisters. Some of their designs can be seen on the waymarker posts and seats around the site and are featured below.



Chris Revealed @ aerial photography copyright The Geo Information Group @ 2001

# Copt Hill and the Seven Sisters Nature Reserve

## Up to date

The recent history of Copt Hill is one of intensive farming, with crops grown in the field around the Seven Sisters up until the turn of the century. Since 2000 Sunderland City Council has owned Copt Hill. Working with the Friends, the Council has encouraged and improved public access to this 15 hectare site. Plant and bird surveys have shown the value of Copt Hill for wildlife. Meadow areas have been created and maintained by grazing and annual hay cuts.



## On the wild side

Copt Hill is important for grassland birds such as skylark, grey partridge, meadow pipit and kestrel. The hedgerows and woodland around the margins of the site also provide valuable shelter and nesting and feeding habitat for wild birds. Look out for yellowhammer, dunnoek, whitethroat, blackcap and great spotted woodpecker.

In the spring and summer, the best area to see wildflowers is on the barrow, under the canopy of the wind blown beech trees. This area has remained undisturbed through decades of arable farming. Here you will find plants such as cowslip, salad burnet and birdsfoot trefoil, indicators of the limestone soils and rock beneath. As part of the management of the field the Council is trying to encourage the spread of these wildflower meadow species by actively clearing and seeding areas. This is part of the Magical Meadows project run by the Durham Biodiversity Partnership. The grassland and nearby hedges, scrub and woodland also make Copt Hill a place valuable for insects and other invertebrates, and mammals such as field vole, fox and may be even badger.



Pictures by: John Bridges



## Paths, gates and seats

There are three access points to Copt Hill. The main one opposite the Copt Hill Inn, is through a kissing gate to two seats. The surfacing here is compacted stone with gradients varying to steep with some severe crossfall (up to B5 on the Break Free scale). Beyond this end of Copt Hill the paths are uneven to rough earth desire lines, and steep in places (D4).

## Strange Autumn, Copt Hill

By Margaret Cook

I'm caught unawares, gloveless, hatless  
 But this is more like it, late November  
 Mist, parrying with pushy sea-fret  
 Across the Tops, raw:  
 I talk to my young dog, delight in her  
 As always give her space  
 But never too off guard, along the Old Track  
 Briar, Hawthorn and Elder, fresh blossoms  
 Still, vying with lush and wizened berries  
 Through the leaves stunted, sprouting on the branch  
 Silthery mulch underfoot, almost hybrids  
 Weird, certainly unseasonable.  
 The great Beech capped barrow is visible today, just  
 Notebook and pen, often a camera but a dowsing rod  
 Or some such tool would be best  
 For it is still here, in certain places  
 Unaffected by diverse time or season  
 Neolithic, Bronze, Ancient ancestral  
 Roots, mesmerising  
 Leys, just leys! God, such energy!  
 Across the rise I bawl cup-handed  
 Listen, at last hear the approaching  
 Familiar disc jingle jangle  
 Whoa, steady lass, steady!  
 Senses are keener when thinking dog  
 Primal post holocaust  
 This stange Autumn



Red Admiral

## Would you like to know more?

Further information about Copt Hill's Friends, history and heritage can be found in the public libraries in Houghton-le-Spring and Hetton-le-Hole.

## Magical Meadows:

Durham Biodiversity Partnership  
 c/o Rainton Meadows, Chilton Moor  
 Houghton-le-Spring DH4 6PU

Tel: 0191 584 3112 www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk