

# Discover North Berwick Law Important Plant Area

## A botanical walk up East Lothian's iconic hill

North Berwick Law is the result of volcanic activity over 300 million years ago and rises to 187m above sea level. With rocky outcrops, ancient grassland and panoramic views there is much to see on this walk. The mix of alkaline volcanic and acidic rock is scarce in Scotland, and creates conditions for unusual wild flowers, lichens and mosses to grow.

### Where to start

Start at the car park at the base of North Berwick Law. This is just off the B1347 south of North Berwick. Grid reference NT553842.

### Distance

1 mile return.

### Walk grade

A short, but steep and strenuous walk. The route includes some rocky, slippery and uneven sections.

### Refreshments

There are many options for food and drink in North Berwick at its many cafés and restaurants.

### WC

There are public toilets in North Berwick.



## We are Plantlife

Plantlife is the charity that speaks up for Scotland's wild flowers, plants and fungi. From the open spaces of our nature reserves to the corridors of Holyrood, we're here to raise their profile, to celebrate their beauty, and to protect their future.

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# Plantlife

## Wild flower walks

## The wild plants of North Berwick Law

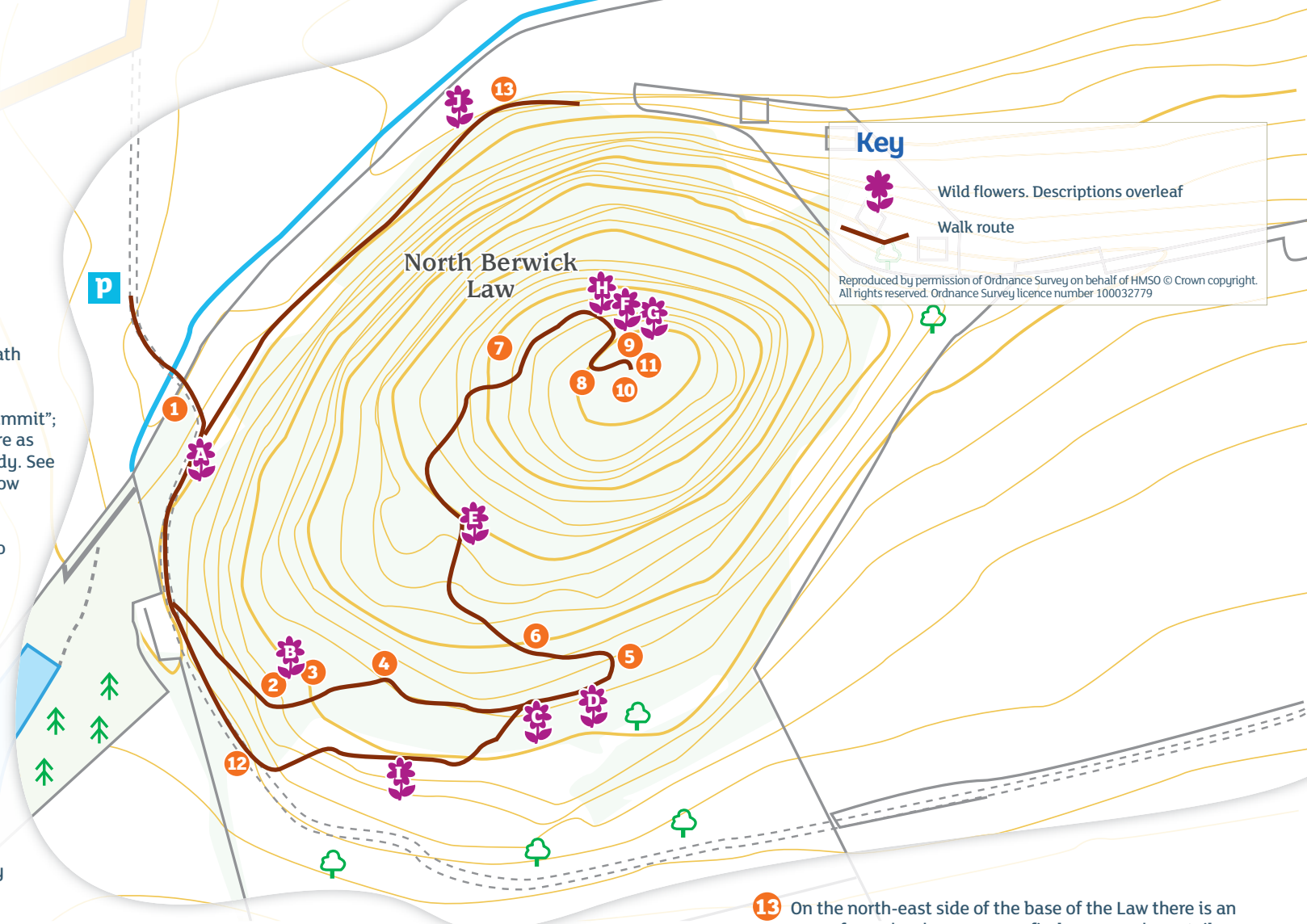
A 1 mile walk up  
East Lothian's iconic hill



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## Directions

- 1 Enter the site from the car park and follow the main path which curves to the right.
- 2 Continue until you see the sign which says "path to summit"; follow this which is the main route up the hill. Take care as the path is steep in places and can be slippery and muddy. See common gorse with its spiky branches and bright yellow flowers which can bloom all year round.
- 3 As you climb you'll see informal paths branching off to the side. Please stick to the main path which is wider, often less steep and well used. This helps to limit erosion of the hill and damage to plants.
- 4 Can you spot common bird's-foot trefoil which adds a splash of yellow to the grassland in summer? If you are lucky you may see the common blue butterfly, which lays its eggs on this plant.
- 5 By the sides of the paths are rocky outcrops; look here for the aromatic wood sage and wild thyme rooting in the cracks between the rocks.
- 6 There are many rare species of moss on North Berwick Law; an attractive common moss to look for is the grey cushioned grimmia which forms round, furry tufts on the rocks.
- 7 As you reach the hill summit, there are stunning views across the Firth of Forth. Throughout history many people have used this hill as a look out, often lighting warning fires if enemies were spotted.
- 8 This brick and concrete building was used in the First and Second World War as an observation post.
- 9 This stone ruin is a watch house used during the Napoleonic war. It is now covered in beautiful lichen called sea ivory. In summer months look for meadow saxifrage flowering nearby. See if you can find the buttercup and use the wild flower guide in this leaflet to discover which species it is.



- 10 The arch you can see is a fibreglass replica of a whalebone jaw. There has been a whalebone on North Berwick Law summit since 1709, thought to have been a good omen for whaling boats passing to and from Leith in Edinburgh.
- 11 To descend the hill, please use the same main path and take care on the steep slippery surfaces.
- 12 Before you return to the car park, explore the habitats along the path around the base of North Berwick law. On the south-west side there is a quarry which provided materials for local buildings. See if you can spot the common polypody fern in cracks in the rocks.

- 13 On the north-east side of the base of the Law there is an area of marsh, where you can find common horsetail. This has green, whorled branches that look like a scouring brush or as the name suggests, horse tails. Another plant which likes moist conditions is the cuckoo flower. This is an important plant for the orange-tip butterfly; the flowers provide nectar for the adults, while the developing seeds are food for the caterpillars.

### Important Plant Areas (IPAs)

North Berwick Law is internationally significant for its threatened wild plants and is one of 52 Important Plant Areas (IPAs) in Scotland. For more information and to discover other IPAs to visit, go to [www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland)



# The plants of North Berwick Law

Unusual conditions mean a unique mix of wild flowers, lichens and mosses grow on this hill. They include:



**A** **Common gorse**  
*Ulex europaeus*

Bright yellow flowers which smell of coconut can cheer a winter walk and are an important nectar source throughout the year. Gorse thickets are an important home for birds and insects. On hot summer days, listen to the cracking of its seed pods.



**B** **Common bird's-foot trefoil**  
*Lotus corniculatus*

This striking plant is also known as "eggs and bacon" due to its deep yellow flowers often tinged with red. A member of the pea family, its seed pods are arranged on the stem like birds' feet. It flowers from June to September.



**C** **Wild thyme**  
*Thymus polytrichus*

This creeping, matt forming plant has pinkish purple flowers in clusters at the top of its stems. It has a subtle aromatic scent and is known for its antiseptic properties. In Scotland people brewed thyme tea for courage and to keep away nightmares.



**D** **Wood sage**  
*Teucrium scorodonia*

Like all members of the dead-nettle family, wood sage has a square stem. It has wrinkly aromatic leaves and cream flower spikes which bloom from July to September, although you can see the plant all year round. Its seeds provide food for many birds.



**E** **Grey cushioned grimmia**  
*Grimmia pulvinata*

This moss forms round cushions on base-rich rocks and is also known as the "hedgehog moss". The leaf tips have long, silvery hairs; in dry conditions this gives the moss an almost furry appearance. In moist conditions the cushions appear dark green.



**F** **Sea ivory**  
*Ramalina siliquosa*

This grey-green lichen is found on rock and stone walls along Scottish coastlines and is very tolerant of salt spray. It has been used to make a dye for wool.



**G** **Meadow saxifrage**  
*Saxifraga granulata*

With snow-white, five-petalled flowers this species is a beauty to spot on top of North Berwick Law. A plant of old grasslands, this once common plant is in decline due to a loss of habitat. It flowers from April to June.



**H** **Bulbous buttercup**  
*Ranunculus bulbosus*

To spot the difference between this and the creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) look at the green leafy parts (called sepals) underneath the yellow flowers. If the sepals point down towards the ground it is the bulbous buttercup. If the sepals curve upwards around the petals, it is the more common creeping buttercup.



**I** **Common polypody**  
*Polypodium vulgare*

This evergreen fern has triangular leaflets, or pinnae, positioned like rungs on a ladder. Its sweet root was once considered edible when boiled with beetroot, but may actually be toxic.



**J** **Cuckoo flower**  
*Cardamine pratensis*

Also known as lady's smock, this elegant plant has four white to rose-pink petals arranged in a cross shape. Its pale pink flowers bloom from April to June, around the same time as the cuckoo starts to call.



**K** **Maiden pink**  
*Dianthus deltooides*

This plant is so rare we've not located it on the map but if you're very lucky you might spot it flowering from June to September. Its attractive flowers have fringed pink petals with pale spots and are scentless. It is classed as a Nationally Scarce Plant.



**L** **Purple milk-vetch**  
*Astragalus danicus*

This uncommon plant is worth keeping an eye out for. The rich blue-purple flowers occur on dense stalk heads in June and July. If you want to get involved in monitoring this and other rare species, why not become a Flora Guardian with Plantlife Scotland? Details at [www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland)

