



Beltingham river gravels



What will I see?

An area of river deposits – sand, pebbles and cobbles - beside the South Tyne that are special because they contain the waste products of lead and zinc mining in the Pennine hills. The plant colonies that are able to grow in these contaminated situations are very rare – they are called calaminarian habitats. Beltingham river gravels are a Northumberland Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest.

How old is it?

Mining of lead and its associated minerals, silver, zinc and fluorite has taken place for many centuries in the hills and valleys of the northern Pennines. For several centuries lead residues and other heavy metals have been flushed far downstream.

Did you know?

That places like Beltingham shingles and nearby Williamston and the plants that grow on them are rare; their condition is fragile and needs to be constantly monitored.

Why it is here?

The waste from the mining upstream has washed down the rivers introducing heavy metals (eg lead, barium, cadmium), which are toxic to most other plants, into the river deposits and the soils that develop on them.

And wildlife?

The main heavy-metal tolerant plants are in quite a small area and are spring sandwort, alpine penny-cress, sea thrift (a variant), mountain pansy and dune helleborine.

Where is it?

Just east and north of Beltingham village [NY785643], which is close to Bardon Mill.



Want to know more?

- Northumberland Wildlife Trust
- NNP Geodiversity Audit
- Onshore GeoIndex
- iGeology
- Geological history of Northumbria
- Carboniferous rocks

