

# Thorswood Near Stanton

**T**he 150 acres of Thorswood nature reserve make up a special corner of Staffordshire. Part of the Churnet Valley Living Landscape, this species-rich habitat was much more common in the past. The land here hasn't had fertilisers or herbicides applied, and the ground has not been ploughed and had just the right level of animal grazing. Modern intensive farming methods result in grasses thriving and outgrowing the wild flowers, which means the wildlife value decreases.

**1** From the car park take the kissing gate which leads uphill. This first meadow was restored by the Trust around 12 years ago and is now a thriving haymeadow. In summer the lower meadows come to life with purple spikes of knapweed and common spotted-orchid. Keep an eye out for the rare greater butterfly-orchid, a species which is increasing in number here. In mid to late July this meadow will be cut and the hay removed. This management technique ensures the wildflowers here continue to thrive.

**2** Pass through the kissing gate and climb to the top of the plateau. The soils on top of the plateau are much thinner and so the plants that grow here tend to be different. Look for a carpet of mountain pansies on the first section of the plateau, and see if you can spot wild thyme, salad burnet and early-purple orchids.

**3** Continue on the path along the plateau. Here you'll notice several bumps and hollows as you carry on along. Two of the largest mounds here are Bronze Age burial barrows, around 3,000 years old.

**4** Pass through the next gate. The path starts to go downhill here and there is a magnificent view. The high ground on the horizon is Cannock Chase.

**5** The path heads left through a kissing gate which takes you through a plantation of beech trees. As you follow the path you will see the ground rise in lumps around you. In the 1600 to 1700s the land that is now a nature reserve was a profitable lead, zinc and copper mine making the most of the mineral deposits in the

limestone rocks. Some of the shafts drop down to 300 feet.

**6** Head through the final two fields back to the car park. The final field is the one which over time has had the most fertiliser applied to it, and so it is the hardest to restore to species-rich grassland. The Trust has started restoration work in this field, so come back in the future and hopefully this field will be as spectacular as the rest of Thorswood's grassland!

We hope you've enjoyed your stroll around Thorswood nature reserve. The mine shafts and uneven terrain left from mining made intensive agriculture difficult here and so the unique habitats of Thorswood have been preserved.

#### Take care

There has been extensive mining activity at Thorswood. We therefore ask visitors to observe any access restrictions and keep to the way-marked routes.

#### Parking

There is a small parking area at the entrance to the reserve.



## Thorswood

The reserve is located just to the north west of Stanton, East Staffordshire. The nearest postcode is DE6 2BY. Map reference: SK 115 470



## 7 to spot

**1 Greater butterfly-orchid** - Grows up to 60cm tall, producing around 40 whitish to yellow or green flowers along the flowering spike.

**2 Hare** - If you walk quietly around the trail you may disturb one lying in the grass. Look out for the characteristic black tips on the ears.

**3 Bronze Age barrows** - These scheduled ancient monuments were created as burial places in the Bronze Age.

**4 Wild thyme** - Forming mats low to the ground, its fragrance will punctuate the warm air around you - a delightful, sensory experience.

**5 Cow conservation team** - Cattle from the farm next door help us to control the grasses and allow space for the wildflowers to thrive.

**6 Common spotted-orchid** - Identify by



its green leaves with abundant purplish oval spots, and densely-packed flowers in short, cone-shaped clusters.

**7 Mountain pansy** - These pretty yellow or violet flowers have dark cat's whisker-like markings on them.

