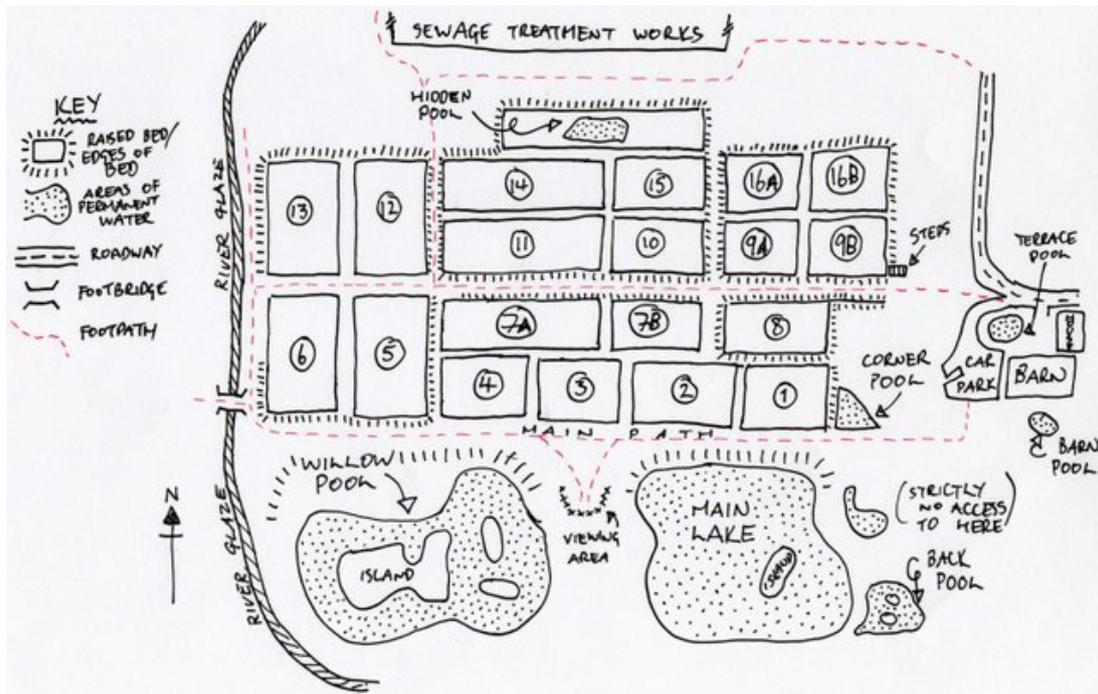


HOPE CARR NATURE RESERVE

by Ian McKerchar

Please note that the site has become considerably overgrown in recent years and remains a shadow of its former self.

The last of a dying breed, Hope Carr's old settling beds, where treated effluent is pumped, has always attracted waders once promoting the site to the counties premier waders location. Since 1992, these beds and the lakes to the south built by United Utilities have been regularly birded and produced some excellent results although in recent years the lakes have become desperately overgrown as have some of the settling beds and although treated effluent is still pumped onto them it is rapidly extracted by local farmers as fertilizer for their fields. Funnily enough, it is only this latter practice that keeps the use of the setting beds (and their continued attraction to waders) open, otherwise the effluent would be sent elsewhere (Pete Berry pers comm.).



Above: Map of Hope Carr Nature Reserve and settling beds. (Ian McKerchar)

The site is accessed off the A580, turning north at the roundabout with the Greyhound Motel/Sporting Lodge onto Warrington Road (A574).

At the next set of traffic lights turn left (west) onto and continue until the mini roundabout, taking the first exit, left (west again) down the small track. There is parking at the open tarmac area at the end of the track or in the education centre car park if the barrier is open, please note though that both barriers, especially the one at the end of the track off the mini roundabout are closed at certain times and warning is usually given as to what time that will be by means of a small sign. Please do not park in front of the terraced houses there and if the barriers are closed parking should be along the road around the mini roundabout. The main path is suitable for wheelchair users as all gates have access but some of the other footpaths would be difficult terrain and unsuitable, especially along the River Glaze, the path in between the setting beds and the path up to the viewing area for the lakes is quite steep.

From the car parking area a path runs south and towards the main path which runs along the southern most edge of the settling beds and to the lakes continuing towards the River Glaze. All paths generally meet at one point or another and a circular walk is usually quite a short journey.



Above: The main path in between the lakes (to the left of picture, hidden behind the trees) and the southern edge of the settling beds (to the right). The area over the nettles on the right is number 1 bed, home of the 2007 Grey Phalarope that entertained so many county birders during it's stay. (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: Proof that Hope Carr can still produce the goods and is to be ignored at your own peril, the 2007 Grey Phalarope feeding with Common Teal. (Photo by Dean MacDonald)



Above: The footpath in between the settling beds can become very overgrown with nettles and virtually impenetrable during the summer months. None of the settling beds are in fact visible from this footpath (all are surrounded by embankments) and the only option would be to climb the metal 5 bar gates half way along the path to very carefully (so's not to disturb any waders) view the beds. This action is of course trespassing and carries some serious health and safety implications so I'm certainly not advising that anyone should do such a thing! (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: Number 1 bed, site of the Grey Phalarope and a favourite of wildfowl, particularly Teal (but often with Garganey) and can be easily viewed from the main path. (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: Number 3 bed. Now fully overgrown, this bed was THE location in the county for waders at one time, attracting flocks of 15 Curlew Sandpipers, 60 odd Dunlin, over a dozen Little Stint and many, many more, nowadays though it only manages Moorhen and Reed Warbler at best! (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: The main Lake, now without the hide that used to overlook it (but was never open!) and somewhat obscured by trees but still attracting good numbers of wildfowl, including good numbers of Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal, ever increasing Goosander and also Kingfisher. Visitors should refrain from walking past the metal fence there and along the lake (however appealing it seems) as this always disturbs the wildfowl. (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: The Willow Pool, now seriously obscured by the ever increasing number of trees and practically unrecognisable from the collection of bare stony islands, complete with scrape that used to attract so many waders and wildfowl years ago. Despite this it does still attract some wildfowl (you just can't see them!) and in 2006 it's shallow water drew 3 Little Egrets to feed there for a couple of days, Water Rails can often be found along the bare edges particularly the farthest point to the right along the reeds. (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: Number 7B bed. Originally one long bed it's claim to fame was the 2 Pectoral Sandpipers that found themselves together on it's disgusting looking surface. Now split into 2 beds, 7A is overgrown and the haunt of Moorhen but 7B (seen here) still carries potential. (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: Number 8 bed, a current favourite for Green Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover, particularly when it receives decent numbers of both in late July/early August with up to 14 of the former and 23 of the latter in past years. A large expanse of 'sludge' it still holds an attraction and potential for other waders but a great danger for other species like the Moorhen that I once helplessly watched loose it's struggle to release itself from the black sludge, eventually disappearing from view. (photo Ian McKerchar)



Above: Number 9 bed and another Green Sandpiper favourite haunt, it could be carefully viewed by using the concrete steps leading up to it from the gate at the beginning of the path running in between the beds, if it wasn't probably trespassing © (Photo by Ian McKerchar)



Above: The car park by the education centre (barn to the left). The trees around here often attract Siskin and Redpoll (both Lesser and occasionally Mealy) and large tit-flocks so is worth careful checking, the gate at the centre of the photo leads to the main path and as long as any valuables are kept out of view car parking at this site has always been secure. (Photo by Ian McKerchar)

During the week (9am-5pm) local farmers draw off the treated effluent from the beds to use on their fields so disturbance is always prevalent but any waders and wildfowl generally find and settle in the undisturbed areas so please exercise caution, good fieldcraft and try not to cause them anymore undue disturbance should you go looking for them.

There is no doubt that Hope Carr is still a shadow of its former 1990's glory and possibly due to this it receives a tiny amount of coverage but more recent Little Egrets, Osprey, Temminck's Stint and Grey Phalarope surely prove that the site still has much to offer and should be worth a look, perhaps at least in conjunction with a trip to nearby Pennington Flash.

Ian McKerchar, October 2007

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