

Location & Access

OS: 130 • **GR:** SK 982 438 • 6.40ha (16.00 acres) • Freehold 1971

Habitat type: Grassland

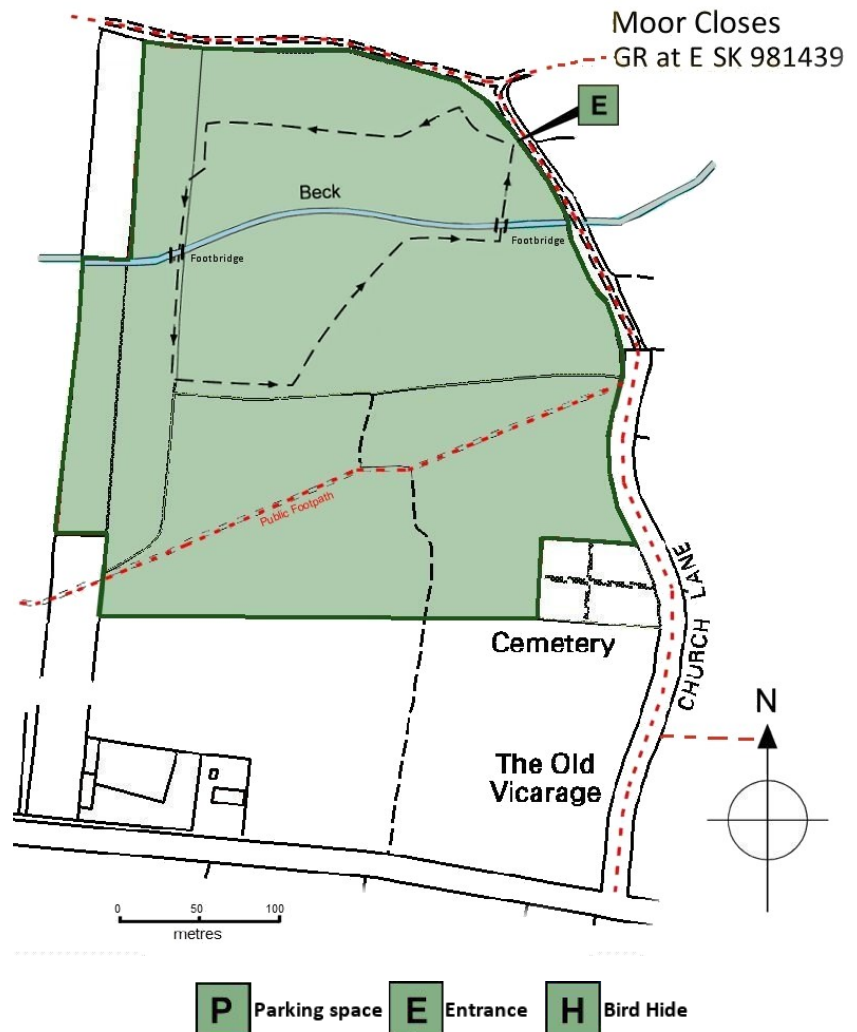
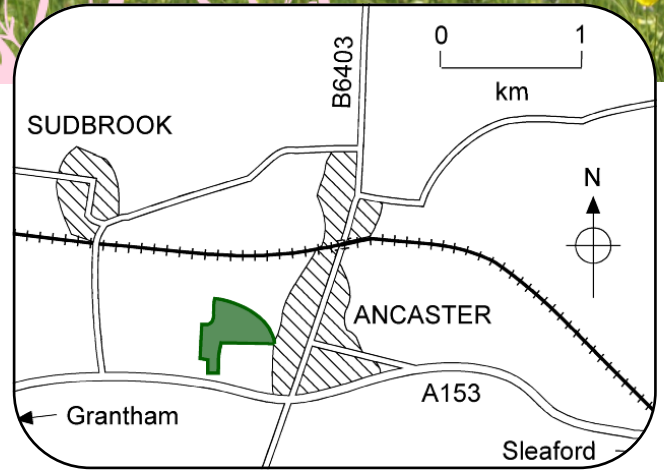
The four fields of the reserve are close to the village of Ancaster. At the south end of Ancaster is the crossroads of the A153 Sleaford-Grantham road and Ermine Street. A short distance west of the crossroads, along the main road, a lane turns right and passes the west end of the church. The reserve entrance gate is reached on foot on the left after about 500 m. Parking space is available in the village near the church. The lane may be reached by walking through the churchyard. Visitors are requested to keep to the waymarked route.

Description & Management

These old pasture fields lie on the floor of the Ancaster Gap on sands and gravels carried from the Trent Valley through the gap in the limestone by glacial overflow waters. A small stream intersects the reserve, which is mostly low-lying and wet, although the land rises a little on the north side to give better drained and drier conditions.

The low areas have a rich, wet meadow and marsh flora with a variety of grasses, sedges and rushes and localised plants, such as marsh arrowgrass, ragged-robin, marsh valerian, devil's-bit scabious, adder's-tongue, and an abundance of marsh and spottedorchids. The drier areas have a similarly varied flora, including dropwort, meadow saxifrage and the distinctive inland sub-species of thrift *Armeria maritima elongata*. This rare thrift, with long stems, formerly occurred on a number of sites on the old Lincoln Heath, extending into Leicestershire, but is now confined in

Britain to the reserve and the nearby graveyard. The ecological interest of the reserve is further enhanced by the stream (where there are old pollarded willows) and by large hedges with a variety of trees and shrubs. Traditional management by grazing with cattle is being continued in order to maintain the richness and interest of the site.



Waymarked Route

1km (0.6 miles)

The route commences at the gate, which is the only entrance to the reserve. Follow the arrows slightly to the right, walking initially over sandy soil, which supports the long-stemmed form of the sea pink or thrift. Meadow saxifrage, yellow rattle and lady's smock all pepper the field with white, yellow or pink in their respective seasons. The path soon runs through a damp lowlying area, where there is a variety of sedges and rushes, meadowsweet, marsh thistle and many orchids.

After walking along the edge of the rushes, turn left at the post along another low-lying area, where ragged robin and early marsh-orchids are found. Then cross the field, and so to the first foot-bridge. The bridge crosses the Ancaster Beck, which runs clear over a sandy bottom. Mallard frequent the banks, and the holes in the old willows provide homes for small mammals as well as birds. Brooklime grows at the water's edge.

The next field has good cover on both sides, with dense scrub beneath the trees. This quiet area is often the best place to watch for birds, squirrels and foxes. Marsh thistles are frequent.

Turn left at the post to enter the wettest and largest field, where the greatest numbers of orchids grow, sometimes in their thousands. Marsh marigolds grow at the edge of the sedge area and provide cover for nesting snipe. In winter the far end of the field can become flooded and attracts coot and duck. Adder's-tongue, a scarce plant that is difficult to find, also occurs.

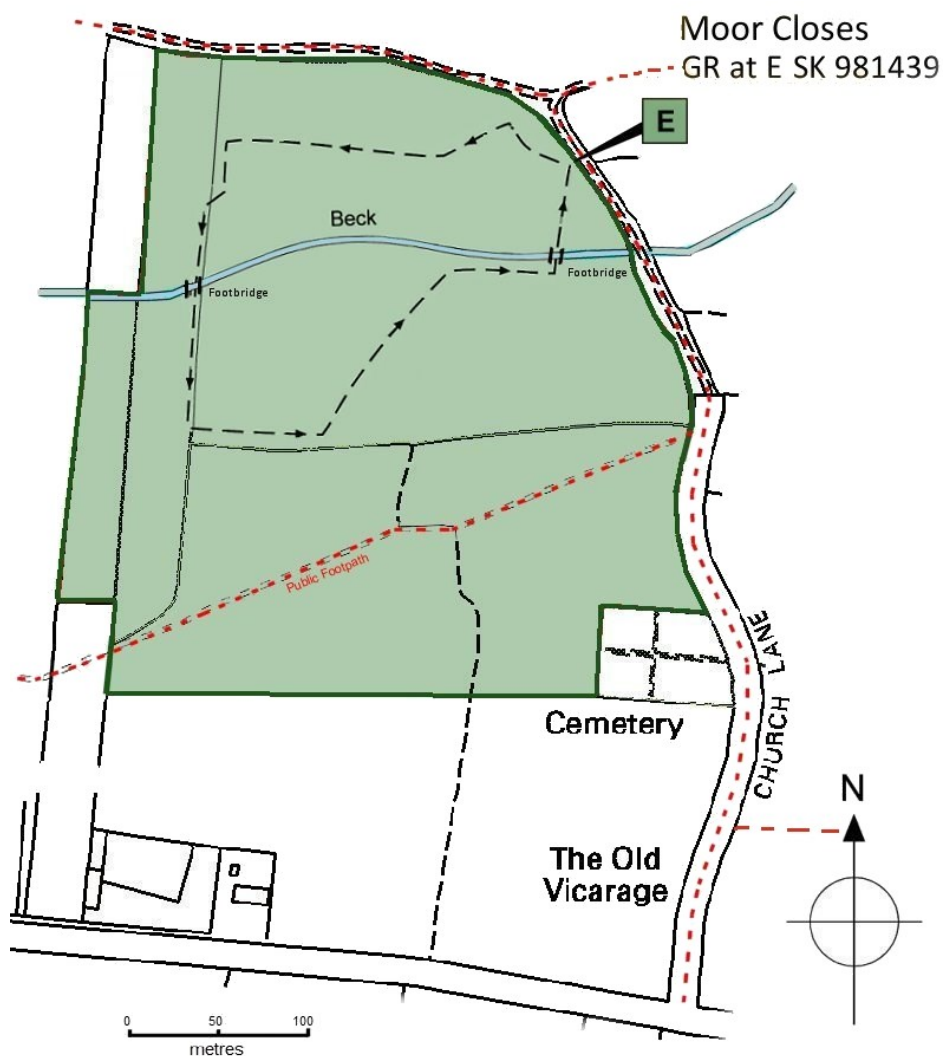
Turn left at the post near one of the

several guelder roses found on the reserve to cross the field and you will again face the beck. Head towards the willows, walking through large patches of blunt-flowered rush and short herb-rich areas, where purple moor-grass, devil's-bit scabious and marsh valerian occur.

Follow the water downstream past many alder trees, with water-cress, water forget-me-not and lesser

waterparsnip at the water's edge. The second bridge is hidden among hawthorn bushes. Look for sticklebacks in the stream.

On the other side, the gate at the end of the route will be seen. Walk towards it, looking for bugle in spring, and oxeye daisy and rough hawkbit in summer.



P Parking space **E** Entrance **H** Bird Hide