

Nottingham Road to Tithby Road bridge

This first, wooded, section begins with an embankment that changes to a deep cutting before the Tithby Road Bridge.

Near the Nottingham Road entrance, an open upward slope immediately gives way to dense blackthorn that covers, and almost hides, the old station platforms. The white flowers, which appear before the leaves, are amongst the earliest to be seen in spring and by August and September the bushes yield an abundance of sloes. Some people enjoy the raw, bitter taste, whilst others may use the fruit to make sloe gin. Blackthorn along with hawthorn and, to a lesser extent, dog rose may be encountered throughout the length of the park.

A high arching avenue of sycamore follows and, as the avenue opens out, on the right there is an ash tree and several guelder rose shrubs. Guelder rose is much used in roadside landscaping, and has creamy white flowers in May and clusters of almost glowing, red berries in August and September when the green of the leaves is replaced by red and then rich purple.

A silver birch tree on the left and a wych elm on the right precede a small clearing containing the once rare rose bay willow herb, which is being crowded out. There is also field maple on the left and wych elm just before the Tithby Road Bridge. Many of the trees along this first stretch were planted some years ago, but the wych elm has taken hold probably from the adjacent spinney. In spring, the fruit is most clearly seen from the top of the bridge.

Honesty and forget-me-not flowers occur in the more open parts.

Because there are houses along either side of this first section of the park many garden birds may be seen, including the robin, blackbird, and small flocks of the less common long-tailed tits. Tawny owls are more often seen than heard. Theirs is the familiar t'wit t'woo call, the first syllable given by a female, with a male answering with the second part. Song thrushes, the rather less common mistle thrush and bullfinches can be heard in the trees. Throughout the spring and summer common residents of the wooded sections are the speckled wood, holly blue and orange tip butterflies.

Tithby Road bridge to the A52 bypass tunnel

The cutting between these bridges progressively becomes less steep. It continues to be wooded, but less heavily and there are remnants of the original grassland to be seen on the left hand side.

Initially, there is much wych elm as well as ash and sycamore. Grassland may be seen through the trees along the left edge of the old track bed.

A large whitebeam tree is half way along on the right, with a number of hazel bushes on the left. The thorn scrub becomes dense on either side, and this has almost eliminated the cowslips, which once were common along here. However, woodland species including wood avens, bluebells, dog violets and sweet violets, many of which display the white form of flower, have become established. Rabbit burrows may be seen on the left, until a small clearing opens immediately before the A52. A small oak tree is in the clearing. Knapweed and ragwort give sustenance to summer butterflies. Sunny days throughout the spring and summer may reveal the soaring flight of the comma butterfly.

A52 tunnel to first farm bridge

Here, the cutting becomes increasingly shallow. Trees and shrubs become less dense and give way to grassland.

Beyond the A52 tunnel there is a bramble patch on the left and planted cherry trees on the right. The grassland begins to become more evident, first on the left where it is dotted with hawthorn with its beautifully scented may blossom in the spring. Some of the blossom is red indicating a form of Midland hawthorn on which the fruit, or haws, has two or three seeds instead of one. Buddleia bushes on the left of the track bed provides late summer sustenance for a number of brightly coloured butterflies including the migratory painted ladies and red admirals.

Clumps of hazel are growing on the track bed, and the grassy slope on the right is dotted with cowslips.

Years ago, local fires caused either accidentally by a passing train or deliberately by railway workers contributed to the rich mosaic of flowers amongst the grassland. As part of the current management plan a series of 'scrapes', where the surface has been removed to simulate the conditions caused by fire, has been made to give annual and biannual flowers a chance to thrive. The first of these scrapes can be seen on the left just prior to the bridge. Rare brown argus and small copper butterflies have been seen on and around the scrapes, the latter in greater numbers than ever previously recorded. The food plant is sorrel, which is also now growing on the scrapes.

The rare lesser toadflax, once feared lost from the area, has colonised in spectacular fashion this and other scrapes. heralding the spring, one of the earliest flowers to be seen is coltsfoot.

In recent years, kidney vetch has been found growing on the track bed either side of the farm bridge. Common elsewhere on chalky soils, it is not known in the wild within 10 miles of Bingham.

First to second farm bridges

From the first of these two bridges, the cutting continues to become less deep, and has almost disappeared by the second. The clinker on

the track bed allows plants to survive that would be crowded out in richer soil, whilst the grassy slopes are species rich.

The unusual yellow-juiced poppy occurs immediately beyond the bridge on the left. The familiar field poppies flourish on the scrapes and elsewhere where there is soil disturbance.

The grassland, which dominates this stretch, supports good numbers of ox-eye daisies and field and common bindweed. This is the food plant of the nationally rare four-spotted moth. Other day-flying moths that may be seen occasionally include colourful five-spot burnet and the cinnabar, whose black and yellow caterpillars may be found on ragwort that occurs throughout much of the park.

Flowers that are beginning to increase in numbers on the sparse soil of the track bed include common and mouse-ear hawkweed. From this area, to the end of the site lady's bedstraw is commonly found. Various umbel flowers are to be seen including burnett saxifrage. Purple knapweed is a valuable source of nectar as well as adding colour throughout the summer.

On the right, just before the bridge, there is one of many apple trees that have become established, presumably from discarded apple cores.

Second farm bridge to pylons

The site narrows as the cutting gives way to a section on a level with the surrounding farmland, which in turn yields to the start of a long embankment.

The fern, black spleenwort, grows on the brickwork of the bridge.

Immediately after the bridge, on the right is a solid mass of blackthorn, whilst on the left there is a substantial bramble patch. This area provides cover for visiting warblers, whitethroat and lesser whitethroats. The bramble flowers provide food for brown butterflies including meadow browns, ringlets and gatekeeper. The caterpillars of these species feed on grass and may be seen along any sheltered, grassy part of the site.

The third of the scrapes has been made in this section, where common poppies are thriving. St Johns wort and the once rare but now common rose bay willow herb are in good numbers. Toadflax can be seen in flower in late summer.

The cutting ends beyond an access gate on the left. On either side there is hawthorn and dog rose. A few yards beyond the gate, on the south there is a single example of

The Linear Park Bingham

A brief guide
for a walk
from
Nottingham Road
to the
River Smite

Produced by the
**Bingham Heritage
Trails
Association**

plant is characteristic of open, less improved grassland, conditions that are scarce in Nottinghamshire. The Ash Grove supports a number of species that can also be seen in the wooded area at the beginning of the park

Ash Grove to the River Smite

A high embankment continues to the bridge over the River Smite. Mostly it is wooded or scrubby, but accessible. Beyond the Smite the track is almost impassable.

Immediately beyond the Ash Grove, there is a clearing, where in spring a patch of ground ivy produces a mass of blue. Here also, and continuing up to the Smite, there is an abundance of creeping cinquefoil, a member of the rose family and closely related to wild strawberry. The cinquefoil flowers throughout the summer and is the food plant for one of our local rarities, the grizzled skipper. This butterfly is of particular interest in that Bingham is now virtually the furthest north it flies in the country. Both the flower and the butterfly may be seen anywhere from the end of the cutting to the River Smite, but the range of both has reduced considerably in recent years. Other butterflies, related to the grizzled skipper, but not under threat, include large Essex and small skippers.

A bridge over a farm track was removed some years ago, and recently installed steps have improved access to the final stretch of the park. The stinging nettles that grow in this area provide food for peacock and small tortoiseshell butterflies.

From the bridge over the Smite it is possible to see chubb in the river below, and occasionally a kingfisher will fly under the arches of the bridge. The buzzing call of willow tits can be heard in the adjacent scrub. These birds are now scarce in Nottinghamshire.

Bingham Heritage Trails Association was founded in 2000 with the aim of raising the level of public awareness of Bingham's heritage. The Association takes an holistic view of heritage, including geology, archaeology, history, the built environment and natural history of the parish of Bingham.

Credits: Text prepared by Bill Bacon. Photographs by Bill Bacon and Peter Allen

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Local Heritage *initiative*



purging buckthorn, a shrub which occurs locally in hedges to the east side of Bingham. Buckthorn has clusters of white flowers in spring and black berries in late summer and autumn. It provides food for the brimstone butterflies, which are most often seen during May.

Green woodpeckers, which are seen more usually at the further end of the park, may visit the anthills that are found on the left. The disturbed soil allows feverfew, stoncrop and other annuals to gain a hold. Occasionally, greater spotted woodpeckers may be seen near to the pylons.

There are ash trees near the pylons. Beneath them in May and June the locally rare Smiths pepperwort can be seen. This is a member of the peppergrass family, related to cabbages. There are several other places on the embankment where this flower may now be found.

Pylons to Ash Grove

The embankment becomes high and windswept and takes up beyond the parish boundary. The grassland of the cooler, north bank has largely given way to scrub, whilst the south bank is mainly grass with clumps of blackthorn.

On the left there is a single specimen of wild privet, which is distinct from the more familiar garden privet that originates in Japan.

Skylarks, linnets and yellow hammers frequent the bushes all the year round

The well-drained old track bed continues to support knapweeds, hawkweeds, ox-eye daisies, and centaury, which give a spectacular show in July. The yellow flowering wild parsnip, can be seen in good numbers in late summer. Ground-hugging plants include black medick and birds foot trefoil. Common blue butterflies and the small heath butterfly may be found a large numbers here in the shelter of the blackthorn and other shrubs. Though present in other parts of the park, they seem to fare best along here. Just beyond the hedge marking the parish boundary on the west, is a solitary, rare musk mallow, whilst further along, on both sides the embankment, horsetails are quite common. These are survivors from a group of plants that evolved before flowering plants. Fossils of them are found in the Coal Measures, formed 360 million years ago. Some children know horsetails as 'Lego Plants' as sections of the stems can be pulled apart and the fitted together again.

Water is not a feature of the park. Nevertheless, in late summer the occasional dragonfly may be seen here.

Near the Ash Grove fairy flax flowers in late summer. This