

# Choppington Community Woods

Local Nature Reserve



Educational Activities Pack

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# Choppington Community Woods



Choppington Woods is a great location for a variety of school and youth group visits. The site includes a pond with dipping platform suitable for pond dipping, areas of woodland which are great for the children to explore and study, together with grassland areas which are ideal for minibeast and scavenger hunts. The relatively large size of the reserve allows groups to explore different areas of the site over a series of visits.



## Parking and Facilities

Choppington Woods is easily accessed on foot from Guide Post or Choppington. Limited parking is available either at the Morpeth Road entrance, or on the road at the entrance next to the Choppington Social Welfare Centre where toilet and handwashing facilities are available by prior arrangement (Tel: 01670 822028).

## For more information

Choppington Community Woods is supported by a dedicated volunteer group. The Friends of Choppington Community Woods are involved in everything from fund raising for the reserve to helping with education projects and installing bird boxes and squirrel feeders on the reserve. For more information about the reserve or the Friends group, please get in touch with Northumberland County Council Countryside Team on 01670 533000.



Particular species of note at the reserve include red squirrels, roe deer and birds such as the willow tit, illustrated here.





# History of Choppington Community Woods

The attractive surroundings of Choppington Community Woods are the site of two former coal mines, High Pit and Low Pit. Low Pit was sunk in 1857 and by 1881 was 206 metres deep. In 1947, at the time of nationalization, 166,000 tons of coal were extracted with another 91,000 tons from High Pit. Looking at how peaceful the site is now, it can be hard to believe that for almost 100 years this was a thriving workplace for up to 1500 people. Unfortunately, this was not without a price, with no less than 57 deaths recorded for Choppington Colliery, including two thirteen and two fourteen year olds. In 1966 the mine was closed. Northumberland County Council acquired the site in 1971 and began reclamation works. The County Council continues to manage the site today in partnership with the Friends of Choppington Community Woods as a Local Nature Reserve.

High Pit Underground



Miners John Dawson, Bart Dawson, Thomas "Tucker" Dawson, George Wharton, Leighton Bush, Sammy Neal, and John Millan underground in Choppington High Pit.

Choppington Low Pit workers (1921)



# Pond Dipping



**Pond dipping provides a great opportunity for the children to explore a new habitat and learn about the creatures that live in it.**

**Suggested age of children: 4 – 14**

**Equipment can include:** Nets (preferably lightweight for children), white viewing trays, magnifying glasses or pots, identification charts (enclosed in this pack)

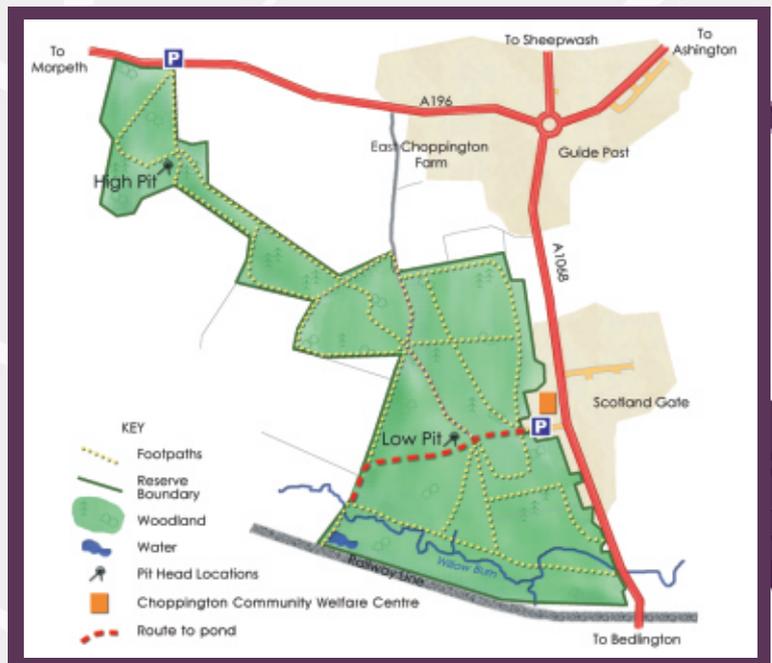
**Before the event:** Fill the white trays with pond water (NOT tap water) and place a short distance from the pond.



Children can work individually or in groups when taking turns using the net. Each group or individual should be positioned near one of the white trays containing pond water.

Demonstrate to the children how to sweep the net along in the water, sometimes at the surface, sometimes in mid-water and lastly in the mud at the bottom.

This will enable them to catch a wide range of pond creatures. After sweeping, the net should be emptied immediately into the tray so that the animals can be viewed. Remember to explain that pond creatures can be fragile and should not be handled. Children can use the identification sheet to tick off the creatures that they find. Ensure that all creatures are carefully returned to the pond at the end of the session.



## Health and Safety Advice

- Visit the reserve before the activity to familiarise yourself with the area and check for any hazards that you will need to either remove or make the children aware of eg litter, nettles.
- Be clear with the group about their boundaries on the reserve and mark out any areas they should not enter.
- The children will need to wash their hands after the activity before eating or drinking.
- Ensure that there is a safe area to dip from eg boardwalk, platform or dry bankside.
- Make sure that the children do not lean too far over the water with their nets.
- If using a small dipping platform, make sure that you limit the number of children on the platform at any one time.

Good quality pond dipping equipment including nets, trays and magnifiers can be obtained from:  
[www.gbnets-uk.com](http://www.gbnets-uk.com)  
tel: 01208 873945 or  
[www.alanaecology.com](http://www.alanaecology.com)  
tel: 01588 630173



# Pond Life



Pond snail



Ramshorn snail



Snail eggs



Mayfly nymph



Damselfly nymph



Dragonfly nymph



Freshwater hoglouse



Freshwater shrimp



Caddis fly



Cased caddis fly



Fly larva



Leech



Bloodworms



Lesser boatman



Whirligig beetle



Tadpole



Water skater



Stickleback

# Frog Lifecycle Race



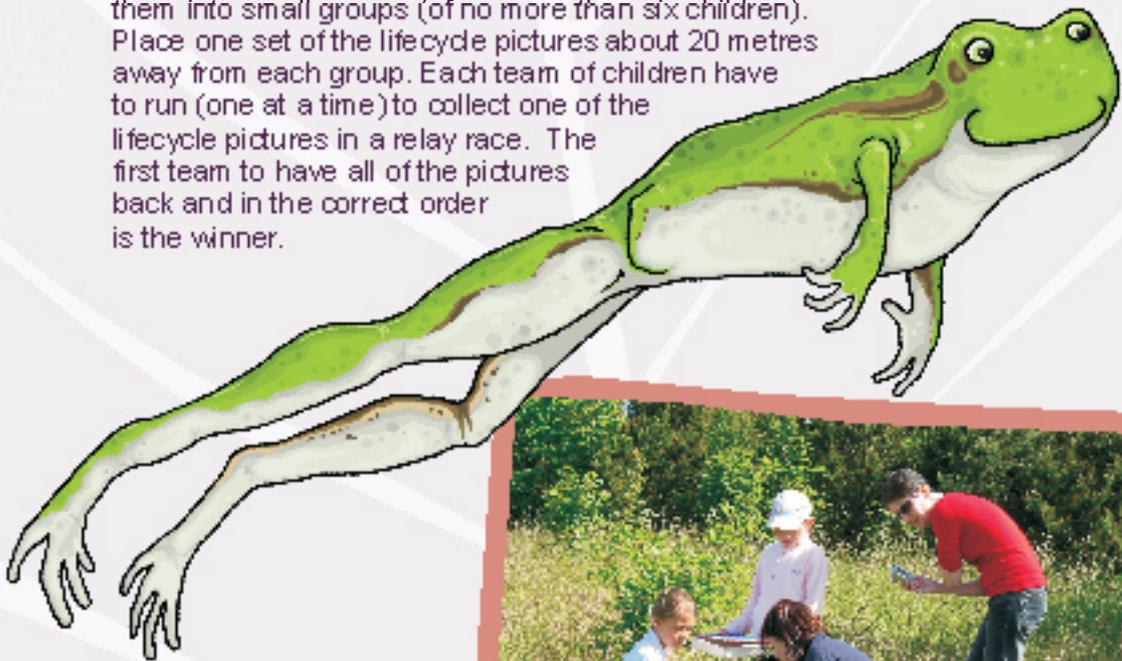
This game introduces the children to the lifecycle of the frog. It is an active game, so it is also a great way to use up some energy before a quieter, more focussed activity.

**Suggested age of children: 4 – 14**

**Equipment needed:** Frog lifecycle picture cards (enclosed in the pack).

**Before the event:** Copy and cut out the appropriate number of sets of lifecycle picture cards.

Talk to the children about the frog lifecycle. As a group, get them to put the pictures into lifecycle order from frogspawn, to tadpole, to froglet, to frog. Once the children are confident with the order, split them into small groups (of no more than six children). Place one set of the lifecycle pictures about 20 metres away from each group. Each team of children have to run (one at a time) to collect one of the lifecycle pictures in a relay race. The first team to have all of the pictures back and in the correct order is the winner.



## Health and Safety Advice

- Visit the park before the activity to familiarise yourself with the area and check for any hazards that you will need to either remove or make the children aware of eg litter, nettles.
- Be clear with the group about their boundaries on the reserve and mark out any areas they should not enter.
- The children will need to wash their hands after the activity before eating or drinking.
- Make sure that there will be enough space for the children to run without colliding with each other.



# Frog Lifecycle Race



# Minibeast Hunt



**Minibeast hunts are a great way for children to explore their environment and learn about habitats.**

**Suggested age of children: 4 – 14**

**Equipment can include:** Soft paint brushes, magnifying pots or glasses, white sheet, plastic tubs, pooters, keys and identification charts (included in this pack).

The minibeast hunt can be split into a number of activities that catch creatures in different ways using different equipment. Once the children catch a minibeast, they can identify and tick off the species on the identification chart.



## **Paintbrushes and magnifiers**

Brushes can be used to safely catch small minibeasts by gently brushing them into a container with the soft bristles. Minibeasts can then be transferred into the magnifying pot so that children can have a closer look.

## **Bush and tree shaking**

This is a good way to catch minibeasts that are hiding amongst leaves and on branches such as leaf hoppers, earwigs and harvestmen. Lay a white sheet beneath a tree or bush and shake it so that minibeasts fall onto the sheet. They are very visible on the white background and may be brushed or scooped into a magnifying pot or collected in a pooter.

