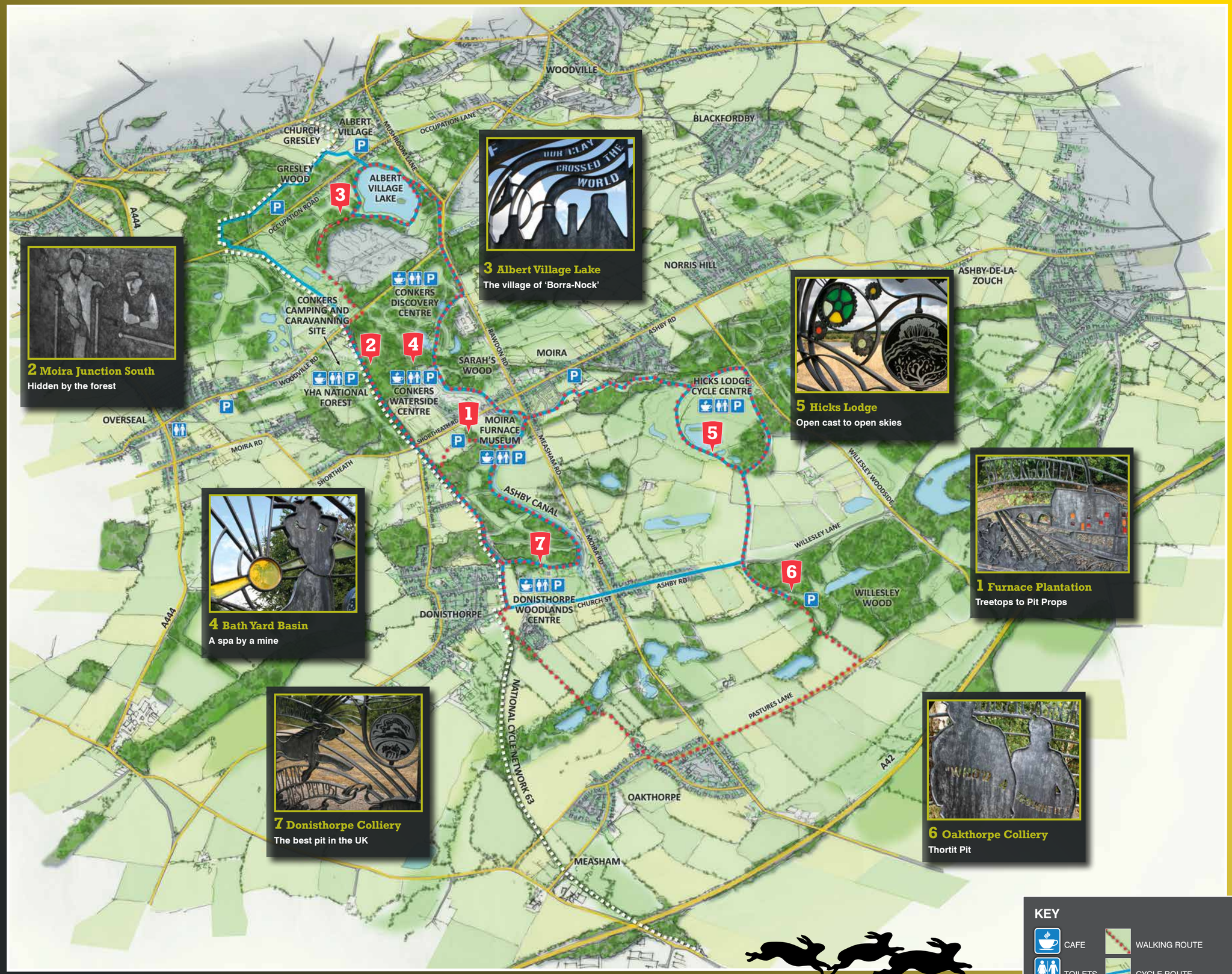


2 Moira Junction South
Hidden by the forest

3 Albert Village Lake
The village of 'Borra-Nock'

4 Bath Yard Basin
A spa by a mine

5 Hicks Lodge
Open cast to open skies

1 Furnace Plantation
Treetops to Pit Props

7 Donisthorpe Colliery
The best pit in the UK

6 Oakthorpe Colliery
Thortit Pit

KEY

- CAFE
- TOILETS
- PARKING
- WALKING ROUTE
- CYCLE ROUTE
- NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK NCN 63

Tree rabbits are very special creatures that have occasionally been seen around Donisthorpe. After living underground and accompanying men down into the pits, they were known as "*coal bunnies*" due to their fur turning black. When the pits were threatened with closure, the rabbits evolved an extra thumb-like claw which allowed them to climb the pit props and out of the mine. They now live their lives in the trees. Keep your eyes open in the Heart of the Forest and, if you are very lucky, you may spot a tree rabbit!

THE NATIONAL FOREST

Heart of the Forest

Follow a route through a fascinating tale of industrial heritage and natural regeneration.

Black to Green

Black to Green is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund to conserve and enhance the industrial heritage and natural history within the Heart of the Forest. This is an area of roughly 10 square miles across North West Leicestershire and South Derbyshire.

The Heart of the Forest has seen the most significant increase in tree coverage over the last 25 years, with woodland cover increasing from 1% to 27%. It is an exceptional story of rapid change from 19th century deep coal and open cast mining, clay extraction and associated industrial activity, to a 21st century sustainable landscape led by the creation of The National Forest.

Black to Green focuses upon telling this story of the extraordinary landscape change, celebrating the areas rich industrial past, whilst providing opportunities to learn about and appreciate the local wildlife. Through a 3 year programme of volunteering, training, events and interpretation, the project seeks to reconnect with this new landscape whilst conserving its past.

Black to Green is delivered through a partnership between the National Forest Company and Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Heart of the Forest Forum.

We are grateful to The Magic Attic, Heart of the Forest Heritage, South Derbyshire Mining Preservation Group and members of the community for their pictures and help in telling the stories of the Heart of the Forest.

This Heart of Forest Trail has been provided through the Black to Green project, supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Designed and produced by Differentia and Wildlight.

THE NATIONAL FOREST

heritage lottery fund
LOTTERY FUNDED

North West Leicestershire District Council

For more information please see:
www.blacktogreen.org.uk

The story of the Heart of the Forest

These hubs are inspired by the stories of the communities who have lived and worked in the villages in and around the Ashby Woulds, between Swadlincote, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Measham and Overseal. This area forms the Heart of the Forest.

Northern circuit

Distance 7.25 km/4½ miles

Terrain Pavements, surfaced trails & cinder tracks that can be muddy after rain. Walking boots are best.

Starting point Free car park off Furnace Lane, Moira DE12 6AT

Furnace Plantation

The humps and bumps that break up the ground in this wood are spoil heaps from the Earl of Moira's first mines. Around 1800 the Earl and Joseph Wilkes transformed the Woulds. They both invested in the canal, the Earl sunk mines and built the Furnace and Wilkes mastered brick-making, banks and roads.

It's hard to believe today, that people lived in the furnace until as late as the 1970's.

Mr and Mrs Thompson left the Furnace for a terrace house.

1 From the car park keep the playground on the **left** and walk along a broad tarmac path bearing **left**, following it round to its end.

2 Where the tarmac ends **turn right** through woodland then left at a signpost. Use the steps on the right (do not go through the wooden gate ahead) onto **Ashby Woulds Heritage Trail**.

3 **Turn right** to the next Hub near the National Forest Youth Hostel.

Moira Junction South

Hidden in the Forest are the relics of the old railway that was so important in taking the area's coal to the power stations of the Trent Valley and Midlands. There was a signal box here to move the points and signals directing trains west to Burton or east to Coalville. This is the only surviving picture of a signal man in the Moira South signal box (around 1960-64).

Picture courtesy Mark Ratcliffe collection.

Continue along the **Ashby Woulds Heritage Trail**, ignore paths left or right, to meet Woodville Road in Spring Cottage.

4 **Turn right** and cross the railway bridge, then the road to access 5 a stile to the right of a new housing development.

Follow the cinder path downhill.

6 **Keep left** of the road using a fenced right of way to reach a footpath crossing on the right.

Take care when crossing the access road to a landfill site.

7 **Bear right** at the junction to reach the next hub.

Albert Village Lake

The lake at Albert Village was once a deep claypit when South Derbyshire fireclay was used in pipes and drains sent all over the world. The smoke from the kilns was so acidic it would rot curtains and the landscape was so pitted that one local man described it as 'it was like it had been blitzkrieged in the war'. Despite the hard times, people still had a sense of fun. These 'ladies' aren't all they seem!

Keep Albert Village Lake on the **left** as you walk along Conkers Circuit. Just past the bird screen 8 **turn right** and walk uphill to take a 9 sharp right bend at the top of the hill. You are walking parallel to Moira Road.

10 **Turn right** on the road making use of a wide pavement. Cross the road to Overseal then go through the 11 metal barrier ahead continuing along **Conkers Circuit (NCN 63)**.

12 **Turn right** at the barrier and pass Conkers Discovery on the right. Keep the car park on the left.

Can you believe Conkers Discovery was built on the site of the demolished Rawdon colliery? Beneath your feet was once the constant rumble of belt conveyors bringing up coal from deep below the ground.

A fence on the right leads you through a 13 tunnel and then ahead to reach Moira Canal Basin where you will find another hub.

Bath Yard Basin

You can still see a kerb in the car park which was the original edging of the canal. This can be seen on the above photograph which shows the Moirabaths Hotel and canal barges transporting coal from Marquis and Rawdon pits.

14 Keep canal on left and continue on tow path.

15 **Cross the road.** Keep the lock on the left and Co-op on the right eventually reaching Moira Furnace close to a swing bridge.

(To join the southern circuit of the trail cross the swing bridge.)

To complete the northern circuit take the surfaced path opposite the swing bridge to reach a crossroads near a brown signpost. Take the access road ahead soon reaching the car park on the left where you started.

Southern circuit

Distance 8 km/5½ miles

Terrain Pavements, surfaced tracks and field paths that can be muddy after rain. Walking boots are best.

Starting point Free car park off Furnace Lane, Moira DE12 6AT

1 Leave the car park heading to the access road and **turn right** towards Moira Furnace.

Walk up the path to the left of the furnace going uphill to a swing bridge that crosses the restored Ashby Canal.

2 **Cross the bridge, turn left to reach 3 Measham Road, turn right; cross the road with care.**

Soon a green footpath sign appears on the left. 4 Take this path, the track bed of an old horse-drawn tramway, that leads gradually uphill.

Ignore paths to the right and emerge through a gate into a small field.

Cross the field keeping the hedge on the left.

5 Go through a gate to a rough track. **Turn right** and aim for a 6 green metal barrier on the right that gives access to a surfaced track.

You are now walking across what was once a massive pipeworks - Newfields Works.

Follow this track through open woodland. It takes a meandering route and eventually meets a T-junction.

7 **Turn right** to continue the circuit.

If you wish for a break or to use toilets turn left.

This track leads to Hicks Lodge cycle centre where there is a cafe.

(Retrace your steps back onto the track past the lake to the next Hub).

Hicks Lodge

There is no better place to reflect on how this landscape has changed from 'Black to Green'. Imagine the great hole in the ground, and the sounds and smells of the heavy machinery taking the land away. Breathe in, and compare that to the lakes, woodland and wildlife you can see and hear today.

Continue along the track and 8 **turn right** at the next junction. This leads to Ashby Road.

Cross the road with care.

9 Take the tarmac road opposite and walk downhill to Oakthorpe picnic site. Here you will find another Hub.

Thortit Pit

Local people still use the name 'Thortit Pit', and although coal mining has ceased, the legacy of strong friendships, nick-names and the language used in the pits remains strong in the Heart of the Forest. This is a great spot for 'snap time'.

Continue along the tarmac to reach an open area where Oakthorpe Colliery used to stand. The large concrete blocks mark the site of the pit shafts. Ashby Canal was on the right; an information board tells the story. Ignore paths left and right.

10 Pass through a gap in the hedge to continue along the grassy track to reach Pastures Lane to the right of the farm house.

11 **Turn right.** Walk up to cross 12 Measham Road in Oakthorpe. Continue ahead along New Street,

13 **turn right** at a T-junction. Continue ahead to join Canal Street and walk downhill.

14 The road becomes a cinder path and passes between a fence and a hedge on the left and continues downhill to reach a causeway between lakes.

Follow the causeway, then cross a bridge.

Keep the hedge on the left and walk uphill to reach a metal stile by houses on the edge of Donisthorpe village. A path continues ahead and soon you reach **Ashby Woulds Heritage Trail**.

15 **Turn right.** Walk up to cross the road 16 into Donisthorpe Woodland Park (DC on the gates).

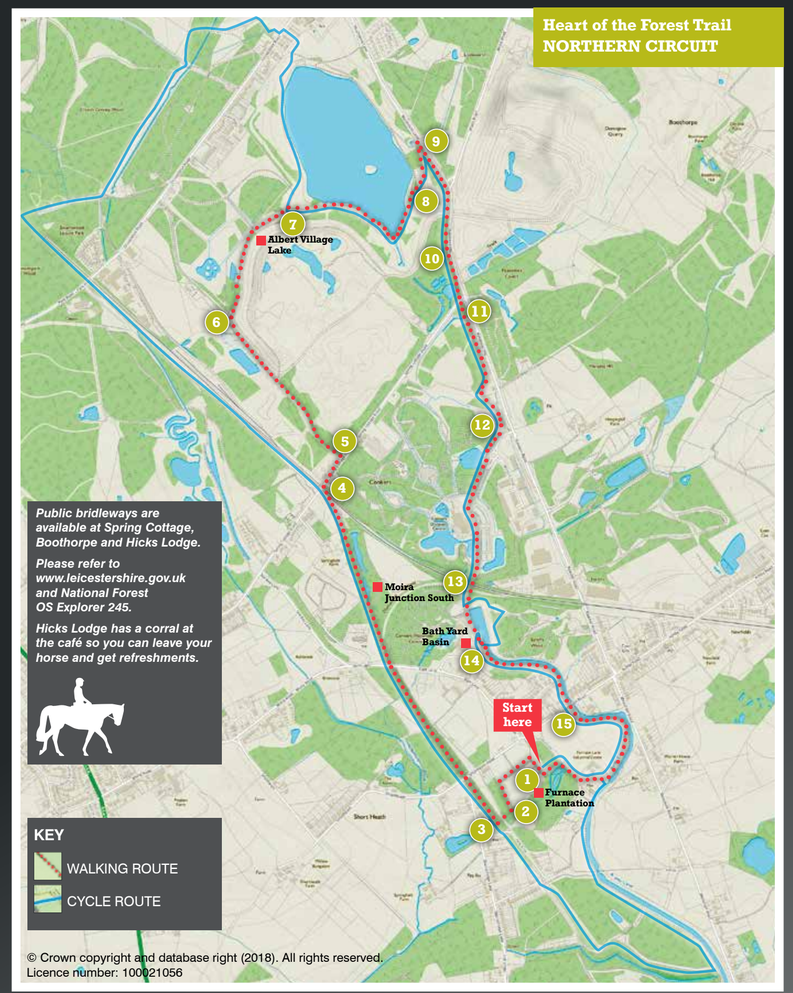
17 **Take the next right** (signed Moira Furnace) and ignore paths left and right.

The next hub appears by the Woodland Centre often called DM's by locals as it was their miners' welfare centre.

Donisthorpe Colliery

In 1947, when the National Coal Board (NCB) was created to run a nationalised coal mining industry, Donisthorpe Colliery had 733 employees underground, and 285 above ground. The area of the "take" was about two miles from north to south and approximately two and a half miles generally from east to west. Underneath your feet were a network of underground roads and tunnels which led to the coal faces, with conveyor belts and trucks bringing the coal to the surface.

18 Continue ahead to reach the canal towpath. Bear left and follow the tow-path back to Moira Furnace.



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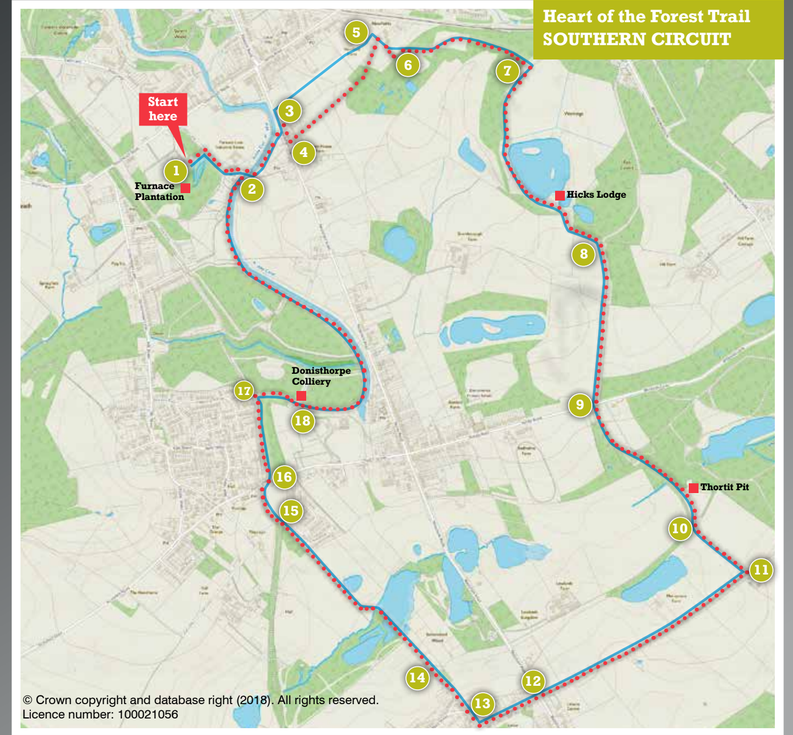

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