

Walks

Ainthorpe Rigg, Little Fryup Dale & Danby Castle

Walk information

Distance: 9 km (5.6 miles)

Time: 2-3 hours

Maps: OS Explorer OL26 – always take a map on your walk

Parking: Pay & Display car park at the Moors Centre, Danby in Esk Dale.

Refreshments: Tearooms at the Moors Centre; Fox & Hounds at Ainthorpe.

Terrain: Mixture of field paths, farm tracks, country lanes and a moorland ridge. Rough terrain in places, with some quite steep slopes.

How to get there: From the A171 Whitby to Guisborough road near Scaling Reservoir; a minor road leads south down to reach The Moors Centre at Danby.

Please note: This walk involves a fairly steep decent from Ainthorpe Rigg down into Little Fryup Dale.

Points of interest

THE villages of Ainthorpe and Danby lie in the heart of Esk Dale, and are named after the Danish settlers who came to this valley over 1,000 years ago; Danby means 'village of the Danes'. The Danes were not the first people to settle in this area as the surrounding moors are littered with prehistoric remains dating back to the Bronze Age and Iron Age. From the Moors Centre, which is housed in the 17th Century Danby Lodge that was once the shooting lodge of the Dawnay family who bought the Manor of Danby in 1656, it is a short walk by way of the River Esk and the Esk Valley Railway to the lovely village of Ainthorpe. This quiet village has a delightful position on the southern slopes of Esk Dale and boasts an assortment of stone cottages and farms, village green complete with quoits pitch and a pub that dates back to 1555. The village also lies at the foot of Ainthorpe Rigg and Danby Rigg, a finger of heather-clad moorland that separates Little Fryup Dale from Danby Dale. This ridge

of land has one of the greatest concentrations of Bronze and Iron Age remains in the country with over 800 cairns, earthworks, ditches, enclosures, settlement and field systems, and a stone circle of which only one massive standing stone remains, all of which dates back around 3,000 years. An old sunken path rises steadily up across this ridge of moorland before it comes to a steep escarpment high above Little Fryup Dale, where a wonderful view unfolds across this valley.

Our route follows tracks and paths down through Little Fryup Dale to reach the ruins of Danby Castle. Dating from the early 14th Century, Danby Castle was built by Lord Latimer as a sign of his wealth and power, as he owned vast estates throughout Esk Dale. By the late 14th Century, the estate passed to the Neville family; in the 1534 John Neville married Catherine Parr (famous as being Henry VIII's sixth wife,) and their marital home was Danby Castle. Today it is a farm and wedding venue, with the farmhouse incorporated into one of the four original corner towers. This is where the ancient Danby Court Leet still meet, a throw back to feudal times. In 1655 the manor of Danby was sold off with many of the tenant farmers buying their farms, who subsequently set up a locally elected body to control the use of the common land. Most Court Leets declined after the Enclosure Acts; however, Danby Court Leet has continued to flourish and still has powers to fine people for encroachment upon the common. The ruins are on private land, but are still impressive with arches, towers and walls as well as commanding views across Esk Dale.

The walk

1 From the Moors Centre car park, cross the road then at the entrance gate to the Moors Centre take the footpath to the left through a bridle-gate (signpost 'Danby Village') and follow this down alongside a fence on your right (Moors Centre across to your

right) to reach a large footbridge across the River Esk. Cross the footbridge then continue straight on alongside the fence then a hedge to reach a crossing over the Esk Valley Railway (take care - beware of trains), after which follow the rough grassy track straight on to reach the road. Turn right along the road and follow it down into a small 'dip' passing Kadeldans Farm just after which take the path to the left through a small gate (signpost). Follow the clear path keeping close to the hedge on your left following the field boundary (ignore path to the left towards 'Danby Castle') to soon reach the top corner of the field where you follow the hedge turning sharp right (still with the hedge on your left) on to reach a stile across your path at the end of the hedge. Cross the stile and carry straight on alongside a wall on your right to reach a gate at the end of the field that leads onto a clear enclosed track. Follow this track straight on into Ainthorpe.

2 Turn left along the road passing the pub on your left then carry on up out of the village. Follow this road rising steadily up passing the tennis courts then, just before the road bends sharply round to the left, take the bridleway that branches off to the right (signpost 'bridleway'). Follow the clear sunken path up through thick gorse then across heather moorland to soon reach a gate in a fence across your path. Head through the gate and follow the clear wide path straight on rising steadily up across the heather moorland of Ainthorpe Rigg to reach a prehistoric standing stone after 550 metres. Continue straight on up across the moor for a further 500 metres until you reach the ridge above Little Fryup Dale. From the ridge, follow the path bearing to the right steeply down the hillside to join the road at the bottom of the valley at a road junction.

3 At the road, head straight on (ignore the road up to the right) and follow this down into the valley

bottom, passing between two cottages then on passing the large farm buildings of Stonebeck Gate Farm. Turn left after the large stone barns into the farmyard passing in front of the farmhouse (Stonebeck Gate Farm) then continue straight on along the clear enclosed stony track heading down the valley. After 850 metres follow the stony track bending down to the left towards Forester's Lodge then, as you reach the front of the house, head to the right through a gate. After the gate, head down to the left (passing to the right side of the house) to reach a gate in a wall. Head through the gate then follow the rough grassy track straight on which soon opens out onto a field – carry straight on alongside the fence on your right and follow it as it bends round to the left then leave the fence behind and continue along the indistinct grassy track down to join a wall on your right which you follow down to reach a gate at the bottom of the hill and a small bridge across Little Fryup Dale Beck. Head through the gate and follow the wide enclosed grassy track heading up, through another gate then follow the sunken track (keeping close to the wall on your right) up to join the road.

4 Turn right along the road and follow this for 800 metres to reach Danby Castle. Continue

straight on along the road passing the castle then follow the road bending round to the left (ignore turning to the right) then take the path to the right through a gate (150 metres after the turning – signpost). Follow the path down alongside the wall on your right heading towards Castle Houses Farm then, as you reach the farm buildings, pass to the left-hand side of the barns and buildings then (when you are alongside the large barns on your right), turn left down a clear farm track across the middle of the field (away from the farm buildings) to reach a wooden gate (waymarker). After the gate, bear to the right down across the field (along the track) to a gate in the bottom corner of the field (next to a small kissing-gate). After the gate, head straight up the slight incline and across the field to join a path running along a hedge. Turn left along the hedge, through a gate in the corner of the field, after which turn right to reach the road. Turn right along the road and retrace your steps passing Kadeldans Farm then take the path to the left just after the house on the right, signpost 'Moors Centre', and follow the clear path over the railway line (take care – trains) and footbridge across the River Esk back to the Moors Centre.

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Birdwatch

By Ian Kerr

EVEN though we have another six weeks or so of winter to come, it doesn't take much at this stage to prompt some of our birds into spring mode. On bright and frosty dawns on Sunday and Monday I awoke to a song thrush in full voice high in the bare branches of a sycamore behind my cottage.

With their larger cousins, mistle thrushes, they are always amongst the earliest of singers, often long before spring has arrived. The local blackbirds, if not yet in song, have certainly been tuning up too. I've also heard snatches of song from dunnocks, robins and blue tits. It's certainly something

to cheer us all up and give us a welcome foretaste of better things to come.

Other species are also showing early signs of spring. On the coast, shags once again have the distinctive crests they develop for the breeding season and I've noticed a few black-headed gulls starting to get their dark spring hoods. Our wintering ducks need very little encouragement to display and over the past few days I've enjoyed the sight and sound of drake teal and wigeon trying to impress the females in their flocks. I was also lucky enough to come across a small party of long-tailed ducks indulging in off-shore

courtship, the drakes excitedly splashing and chasing low over the water, the wind catching and raising the needles of tail feathers which provide their name.

Meanwhile, the good run of rarer wintering species has continued. Iceland gulls have again been an attraction with sightings of juveniles from Whitburn, South Shields, Hartlepool fish quay and other localities. The only adult reported was a single at Hunmanby Gap. Three juvenile glaucous gulls were off Whitburn on Tuesday and two were at Hartlepool. Others remained at North Shields. Little gulls are normally

a summer and autumn visitor to our coast making an adult which appeared on the beach at Saltburn noteworthy.

The long-staying shore larks continued to show well at Hartlepool and at Druridge Bay, as did the eastern black redstart at Skinningrove. Roving parties of waxwings have continued to turn up with groups in localities including Bishop Auckland and Chester-le-Street.

Last week's super-rarities continued to attract admirers. The incredibly obliging juvenile Pacific diver moved back to Chevington North Pool from

neighbouring Ladyburn Lake and was present until at least Monday. Reeds fringing this former opencast mining pool made it more difficult to get the very close views hundreds enjoyed last week. The male pine bunting continued to show well at Dunnington in North Yorkshire.

