

Walks Askrigg's waterfalls

Walk information

Distance: 6 km (3.75 miles)
Time: 2 - 3 hours
Maps: OS Explorer OL30 - always take a map on your walk
Parking: On-street parking throughout Askrigg, as well as a small car park at the top of the village.
Refreshments: Pubs and cafe at Askrigg; no facilities en route
Terrain: Field paths, stony track, woodland and stream side paths (muddy) and country lanes. Some stiles.

How to get there: Follow the A684 through Wensleydale to Bainbridge, then take the turning passing to the right of the Rose & Crown and follow this road to Askrigg.
Please note: There are muddy paths and a small stream to cross. There are steep drops to the side of the path in places down through Mill Gill.

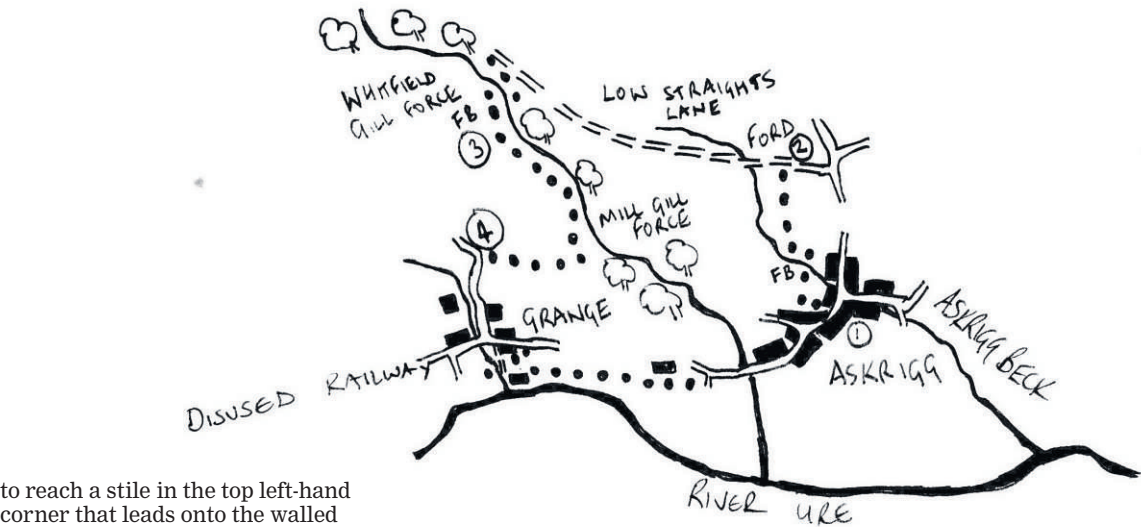
Points of interest

THE history of Askrigg stretches back to pre-Conquest days, and the village grew as a trading centre as it lay just outside the boundaries of the old Forest of Wensleydale and so was exempt from the Norman forest laws. A market charter was granted in 1587 and Askrigg developed into an important market town; however, by the turn of the 19th Century the market had lapsed and Hawes gradually began to take over as the 'capital' of the upper dale. The village is quiet now, but it is not hard to imagine the hustle and bustle of the market place as you rest on the stone steps of the old Market Cross and look out across the cobbles towards the sweeping main street with its elegant three-storey Georgian houses. Askrigg's heyday was in the 18th & 19th centuries when industries such as lead mining, textile production and clock making flourished. In the 1970s and 1980s the village was used as the setting for the TV series 'All Creatures Great and Small' with the Kings Arms doubling as the 'Drovers' whilst the grand three-storey house near the Market Cross was 'Skeldale House'. Askrigg church, dedicated to St Oswald, dates from the 13th Century and is the largest church in the dale serving several communities and

still retains some original features including lead on its roof from local mines.
Askrigg was also the first village in Yorkshire to be lit by electricity, with power generated by a turbine attached to one of the mill wheels. There were once three mills along Mill Gill, powered by the fast-flowing waters. This ravine is famed for its two spectacular waterfalls, Mill Gill Force and Whitfield Force, both of which are set in a steep-sided wooded ravine with overhanging rocks and trees - a superb sight after heavy rain. Our route passes Mill Gill Force; the path to see Whitfield Force is not recommended due to fallen trees and slippery rocks. These waterfalls are caused by the Yoredale Series of rocks, which are comprised of layers of sandstone, limestone, slates and mineral bearing rocks sandwiched together and therefore eroding at varying rates.

The walk

1 From the old Market Cross in the centre of Askrigg near the church, walk up along the Main Street passing the Kings Arms on your left then, immediately before the Crown Inn, take the narrow passageway to the left up some steps (enclosed by walls), marked by a signpost. Follow this enclosed passageway up to soon emerge onto a field behind the pub (quoits pitch), where you walk straight on along the track alongside the wall on your left, through a squeeze-stile beside a gate then carry straight on across the field (leaving the track to bend up to the right towards a converted barn) heading alongside the wall on your left and through another squeeze-stile. Turn right immediately after this squeeze-stile and walk up the field, passing a roofless barn on your left, then drop down to a squeeze-stile and over a footbridge across Askrigg Beck. After the footbridge, turn left along the rough track and follow this for 75 metres then, where the track bends left, turn right up through the right-hand of two gates, marked by a signpost ('Low Straights Lane'). After the gate, walk up the field alongside the wall on your left and follow this for 350 metres



to reach a stile in the top left-hand corner that leads onto the walled track of Low Straights Lane.

2 Turn left along the track, over a ford/footbridge across Askrigg Beck after a short distance then continue rising steadily up along the track for 1.2 km to reach a gate at the top end of the walled track, where you turn left over a stile just before this gate (signpost 'Mill Gill, Helm'). After the stile, walk straight on to soon join a wall on your left, with the steep wooded slopes of Mill Gill down to your right, and follow the clear path straight on heading gradually down (take care - steep drops) alongside the wall for 275 metres then follow the clear path bending sharply down some steps to the right (take care - steep bank) to reach a footbridge across Mill Gill Beck, just above a small waterfall.

3 Cross the footbridge and follow the path to the left, heading down through the wooded valley with the stream on your left, to soon reach a path junction (Whitfield Force), where you carry straight on along the clear path with the fence/wall on your right (stream on your left) to reach a small gate, after which drop down the bank and over some stepping-stones across a side-stream. After the stream, head on out into a clearing to soon reach a 4-finger signpost, where you carry straight on through the small wall-gate ahead. After the wall-gate, walk straight on alongside the wall on your left (stream still on your left) up the bank then, where the path levels off after 100 metres,

turn left through a wall-stile. After the stile, turn immediately right alongside the wall (stream down to your left) and follow this on for about 100 metres to reach a path junction (footbridge down to your left), where you turn right over a wall-stile (signpost) - ignore the footbridge. After the wall-stile, head to the left alongside the wall on your left, heading across the field (wooded ravine still to your left), through a wall-stile across your path then carry on to reach a wall-stile in the corner of a wall that leads back into woodland. Follow the path straight on (wall now on your right) then drop down to the left (signpost 'Askrigg'), passing a limekiln to soon reach a path junction, with a path to your left to Mill Gill Force (worth the short detour). At this path junction, turn right over a wall-stile out onto open fields - head straight on keeping close to the wall on your left heading along a grassy track (through a couple of gates) that leads on to reach a road.

4 Turn left along the road and follow this down to reach a T-junction with another road beside the bridge across Grange Beck. Turn left along the road (take care - face oncoming traffic), passing the houses of Grange on your right (parking lay-by) then, just after the last house on your right, take the footpath to the right (signpost). After the stile, head to the right, skirting just to the left of the buildings and walls heading across fields to reach an enclosed

stony track. Cross straight over the track and walk on across the small field to quickly reach a packhorse bridge across Grange Beck, after which turn left alongside the stream and through the old bridge supports (bridge missing) of the old railway line, immediately after which turn left over a footbridge back across Grange Beck. After the footbridge, walk straight on over the track then along the clear path passing behind a house, after which continue straight on alongside the old railway line on your left, passing the old railway station after 750 metres, to reach a stile beside a gate at the end of the field just beyond the old railway station. Cross the stile (signpost) and head left along the stony track over a cattle grid to quickly reach the road. Turn right along the road towards Askrigg, following the pavement on the left-hand side of the road then, just after Low Mill Outdoor Centre, take the flagged footpath to the left heading up across two fields towards the Church to reach a small gate at the end of the second field that leads onto a grassy path which you follow straight on passing in front of a row of cottages then through the churchyard to emerge in the centre of Askrigg near the stepped Market Cross.

Mark Reid

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Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

THE numbers of diving ducks visiting Britain in winter has been in steady decline in recent decades, probably because weather conditions in northern Europe have been milder enabling many to remain nearer their breeding grounds.
Species including scaup and pochard, pictured, seem to have been benefitted from many more lakes and rivers remaining ice-free, enabling them to stay closer to home instead of crossing the North Sea.
Historically, scaup were very plentiful right along the north east coast with accounts from the early 20th Century mentioning

many thousands off Teesside. Numbers then declined sharply although 120 were at Seal Sands in February 1970 while in the same month of 1991 there was a day count of over 300 passing north at Whitburn.
Since then numbers have been very low although this month, perhaps as a result of severe weather in northern Europe and those recent chilling easterly winds, small numbers have arrived to give birders the opportunity to see them at close quarters. A scattering has occurred on fresh water with, for example, four at Hetton Lyons Country Park, seven at East Chevington and one or two

at other localities. Drake scaup in their black, grey and white plumage are really handsome birds as are the females with their striking white band at the base of the bill. I watched a small group of them this week and, looking back, realised that it was probably seven or eight years since I'd had a really good look at the species.
Similarly, pochard with their chestnut, grey and black plumage, were once a common winter visitor to local lakes, ponds and reservoirs. They too have been pretty scarce in recent years but now more appear to have arrived in the region. A drake which turned up on a pond I visit almost weekly was the first

there since 2013. Among other diving duck, smew, have also been rare in recent winters although Durham's first of the winter was reported this week at Hurworth Burn. A couple of females have also been in Northumberland with sightings from Bolam Lake and Monks' House Pond near Bamburgh.
The strong on-shore winds over the weekend produced a few more glaucous and Iceland gulls, some light movements of great northern drivers and also an unseasonal great skua at Burniston and a pomarine skua at Boulmer.
The rarities of recent weeks

have remained. These include the eastern black redstart at Skinningrove, the Pacific diver which continues to show extremely well at East Chevington, and the other trans-Atlantic rarity, the drake black soter still off Goswick.

