

The purple flower spikes of Rosebay willowherb are a prominent feature in the landscape at this time of year, but until the 20th. century this was an uncommon species in the countryside.

This handsome plant began to make an impact on the landscape during the First World War, when widespread felling of timber left open spaces in forests that the plant readily colonised – especially on ground that had been burned. In North America the plant is known as fireweed, on account of its propensity to colonise the sites of fires, and during the Second World War it began to become a familiar feature of burned-out bomb sites of cities that had been devastated by the Blitz. Since then it has spread throughout the country and, sooner or later any bare ground is likely to be colonised.

Rosebay willowherb has light, wind-blown seeds that are swept aloft in rising air currents and can be carried for miles downwind. During August, when its seed capsules ripen, even the slightest breeze will release a blizzard of seeds. Once they germinate the fast-growing plants send out creeping underground stems, so very quickly a single plant can spread to produce the vivid patches of purple flower that are at their peak of flowering in July. It's an invasive plant and can be a problem if it establishes in gardens, but its spread has had at least one beneficial consequence. The impressively large green and purple elephant hawk-moth lays its eggs on the plant and its foliage provides an inexhaustible supply of food for the caterpillars, which are unmistakable. If they are disturbed they rear up on their hind legs and their head swells, inflating four prominent eye-spots that give the caterpillar a threatening appearance that wards off predators.

Phil Gates

WALK INFORMATION

- ▶ **Distance:** 12 km /7.5 miles
- ▶ **Time:** 4 hours
- ▶ **Maps:** OS Explorer OL30 – always carry a map
- ▶ **Start/Parking:** West Burton green
- ▶ **Refreshments:** Pub and shop at West Burton.
- ▶ **Terrain:** Field paths and a quiet lane leads up into Walden valley, before a stony track climbs up onto White Hill. Our route then strikes north-eastwards alongside a wall up onto Harland Hill, with rough moorland underfoot and a few boggy patches. From Harland Hill, a slight detour takes us to a ladder stile across a wall, before continuing across the moorland ridge then down to join a bridleway (grassy/stony track). This leads quite steeply back down into Walden, with road walking to finish.

▶ **How to get there:** From the A684 near Aysgarth Falls, follow the B6160 to reach West Burton.

▶ **Open Access Land:** This walk follows a rough path across Harland Hill (Open Access land). Grouse shooting season begins on 12th August. It is essential to check the Open Access website to ensure this moorland will be open on the day of your visit. If there is shooting taking place then do not continue on your walk beyond White Hill, but turn back to West Burton. NB: dogs are not permitted on this moorland.

Caution: This walk climbs up onto Harland Hill (535 metres), with rough paths and moorland. Hill-walking gear, OS map and compass essential. Do not climb the walls as they may collapse – always use gates and stiles. The descent back into Walden is quite steep.

Walks

by Mark Reid

POINTS OF INTEREST

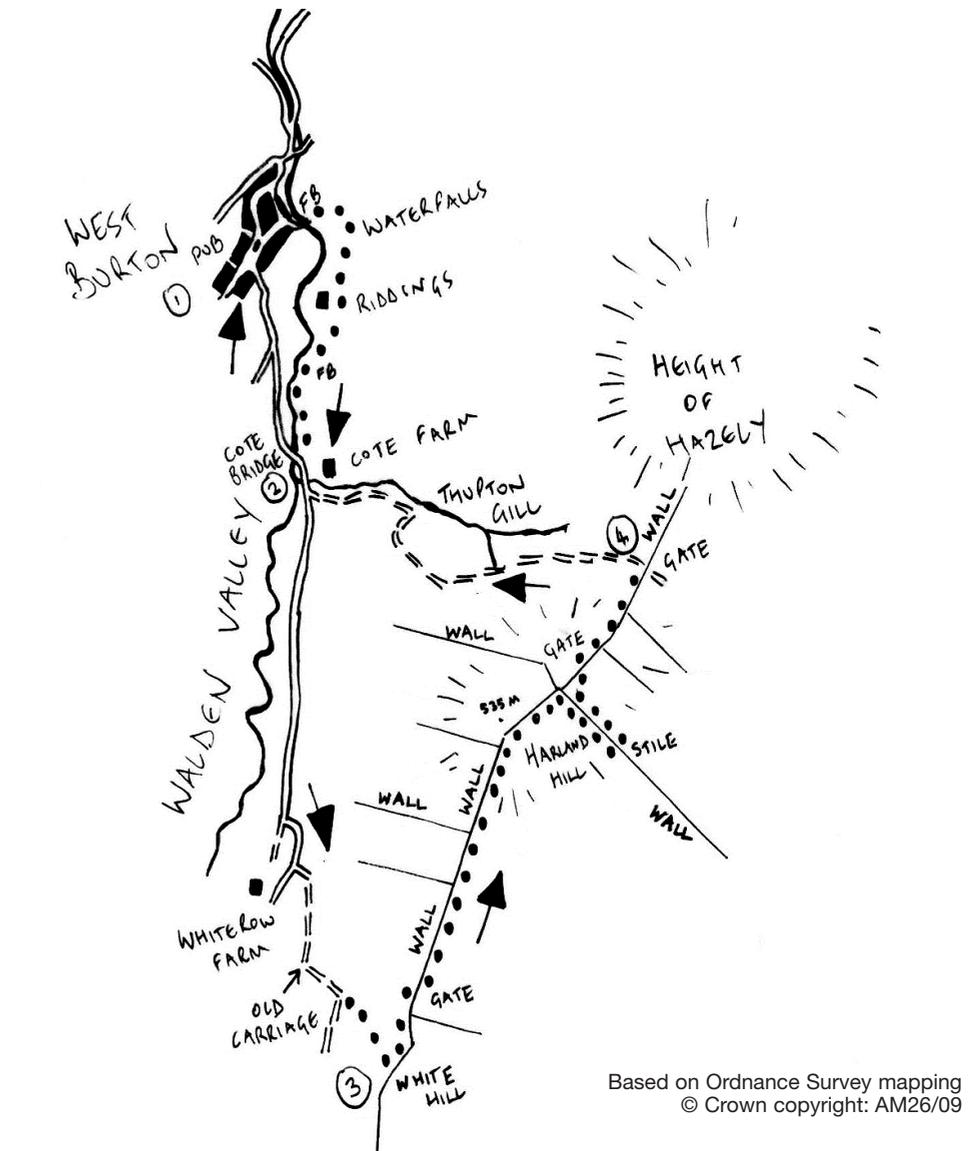
Walden valley is a rarity for it does not have the suffix 'dale' in its name. This is a remote and hidden valley, the last retreat of the Celtic tribes fleeing from the invading Norse and Anglo-Saxons, indeed 'Walden' means 'Valley of the Welsh' as these tribes were known. It is a valley of stark beauty, with steep gills cutting deep into the surrounding moorland reminiscent of neighbouring Coverdale. Walden Beck is born on the flanks of Buckden Pike, which dominates the dale head, and only has a short journey before it meets Bishopdale Beck just beyond West Burton. This steep-sided valley with its scattering of farmsteads has changed little over the centuries; you would be forgiven if you thought that you had stepped back in time. It is also one of the most remote and least visited valleys in the Dales, mainly due to the fact that only narrow 'dead end' farm lanes wind their way into its upper reaches.

Our route follows the old packhorse route up onto Fleensop Moor, before striking north-eastwards across Open Access Land onto the flat moorland plateau of Harland Hill, 535 metres above sea level. The retrospective views towards the head of Walden are superb, with Buckden Pike dominating, whilst all around is a vast expanse of lonely moorland. The views from the flat summit plateau are not as good as you might expect, but the descent into the 'saddle' of land between Harland Hill and Height of Hazely affords expansive views right across the flat vale towards the North York Moors, whilst the descent back into Walden offers superb views across Bishopdale.

It is important to always use stiles and gates on this walk, even if this means a bit of a detour. Never climb over drystone walls because if you disturb the capping stones then you will unbalance the wall and it will ultimately collapse. And anyway, the ten-minute detour down to reach the ladder stile across the wall on the flanks of Harland Hill reveals some lovely views across Coverdale.

THE WALK

1 From the Fox & Hounds at West Burton, head left down across the green to the bottom right corner where a lane leads down ('Waterfall') passing Mill House to reach West Burton Falls. Cross the packhorse bridge over Walden Beck and follow the path up to the left to a small gate, then head right up along the enclosed path to another gate beside a barn. Head through the gate and



continue up across the field (wall on right) then, where this wall turns away after 100 metres, head right keeping close to the wall/fence ('Rookwith Bridge, Cote Bridge') on to reach a wall-gate. After this wall-gate, head straight on rising up to soon join a track which quickly leads up to another wall-gate (beside a gate). Head through the gate and carry straight on across fields through a series of wall-gaps passing Riddings Farm just across to your right after which continue straight on through a further two wall-gaps then head down to the right through a bridlegate in the field corner then bear left across the next field to reach Rookwith Bridge over Walden Beck. Do NOT cross this bridge but turn left immediately before it and head straight on along the field perimeter (and Walden Beck) on your right to join a track to the right of a barn that leads on to join the road beside Cote Bridge.

2 Turn left and follow the road heading steadily up through the Walden valley passing Cote Farm and then the old Smelt Mill Chimney on your left after a short distance then continue up along the road for a further 1.5 km to reach the turning for Whiterow Farm on your right where you continue along the road bending sharply up to the left to reach a cattle grid across the road at the top of this hill (road levels out) just after which take the stony track to the left (signpost 'Fleensop Moor'). Follow this clear stony track up to quickly reach a gate in a fence, after which follow the track bending to the right climbing steadily up across the hillside then turning sharply up to the left (at an old railway carriage) to reach a gate in a wall at the top of the climb. After the gate, head straight on along the stony track for 125 metres then, where this track bends sharp right, carry straight on (signpost) on along the rough grassy path heading across the top of the open moorland of White Hill for 500 metres to reach another gate in a wall (SE 021 827).

3 Do NOT head through this gate but turn left immediately before it alongside the wall on your right (Open Access Land) and follow this gently rising up for 400 metres up onto the slight rise of North Tarn Hills then, where the wall on your right becomes broken (with a fence running parallel with this broken wall), continue straight on alongside this broken wall/fence on your right gently dropping down into a slight 'dip' for 150 metres (heading towards the bulk of Harland Hill ahead) then head right through a small gate in this wall onto the right-hand side of the wall. After this gate, carry straight across the flat moorland, with the wall now on your left, for a further 600

metres following an indistinct quad-bike track to reach the steep slopes of Harland Hill in front of you. Carry straight on climbing up alongside the wall on your left onto the top of Harland Hill, a flat moorland plateau (SE 028 843).

4 Carry straight on along the quad-bike track alongside the wall on your left across the top of Harland Hill (flat moorland) until you reach a wall across your path and the wall on your left ends (SE 030 844) – our route continues straight on beyond this wall, however, to cross over this wall we need to turn right (do NOT climb the wall), alongside the wall on your left heading down towards Coverdale for 400 metres to reach a ladder stile over the wall to your left (SE 033 842 – be observant). Cross this ladder stile and re-trace your steps back up alongside the wall onto Harland Hill for 400 metres so you are back at the wall corner (but now on its north side). At this wall corner, carry on across the broad moorland ridge alongside the fence on your left for 75 metres to reach a gate in this fence, where the fence adjoins a wall. Head through this gate onto the left-hand side of the wall, and continue alongside the wall (now on your right) for 700 metres down into the 'saddle' of land between Harland Hill and Height of Hazely to reach a rough track across your path and a gate in the wall on your right, at the bottom of this saddle (SE 035 850 – end of Open Access section).

5 Turn left along the rough grassy track (ignore the gate) heading across the 'saddle' of land then, after 100 metres, follow the track bending slightly left then almost immediately right, down (track becomes much clearer) to quickly join a wall on your right (views of Bishopdale ahead). Follow the grassy track heading down alongside the broken wall on your right then, where this wall ends after 500 metres, continue heading down along the grassy track, with the ravine of Thupton Gill falling away to your right, for a further 500 metres to reach a wall/fence corner across your path. Follow the track bending sharp right down alongside this wall/fence for 150 metres then sharp left through a gate in the end of this wall. Head through the gate and follow the clear enclosed track heading quite steeply down all the way to join the road just beyond Braithwaite Lead Mine Smelt Mill chimney. Turn right along the road back to reach Cote Bridge, where you continue along the road over the bridge then straight on back into West Burton.

Mark Reid
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Birdwatch

Where have all our swifts gone? It's a question that has been asked increasingly as one of our most familiar summer visitors has become much less so over recent times.

This year I've seen fewer than ever but there are still places in the North where large concentrations are being reported. For instance, Spurn Point, Yorkshire's most easterly spot at the Humber mouth – as I mentioned a fortnight ago thousands per day have been reported heading south there during weather-related mass movements.

It happened again last Saturday only this time with an even more remarkable extra dimension. In late June the passage was spiced by involving up to four Alpine swifts from southern Europe. At the weekend the surprise fellow traveller was from the other side of the world – a Pacific swift, a species with a summer range extending across Siberia and south to Japan and Vietnam.

Fortunately Spurn watchers monitoring the swift flow noticed the individual with significantly different features – about the same body length but with a much bigger wing span, a white rump patch and a more deeply forked tail. It didn't hang about – an hour later it was also seen 40 miles away, passing Gibraltar Point, where the Lincolnshire coast turns south-west into The Wash.

Spurn can rightly declare Pacific swift as a speciality for of only five previous British records, the last two were also seen there – in 2005 and 2008. Earlier birds were in Northamptonshire (1995) and Norfolk (1993), with the very first found exhausted on a gas platform 30 miles off Norfolk's coast and subsequently released in Suffolk (1981).

Extreme rarities, of course, cannot compensate for the decline of our common swift population. Their demise is at least partly due to their dependency on nesting under roof eaves – access to which is being denied increasingly due to modern building techniques.

Brian Unwin