

# Walks Levisham, Skelton

## Tower and Newton Dale

Schematic map – take OS Explorer OL27 with you

### Walk Information

**Distance:** 7.25 km (4.5 miles)

**Time:** Allow 2 – 3 hours

**Map:** OS Explorer Sheet OL27

**Start/Parking:** Levisham station or village.

**Refreshments:** Horseshoe Inn, Levisham

**Terrain:** Clear moorland and woodland paths and tracks almost all the way, with a number of steep inclines.

**Steam Railway:** Why not start and finish this walk in style aboard a steam train on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. Trains run daily until the end of October. Check train times before you set out: [nymr.co.uk](http://nymr.co.uk) Fares apply.

Alternatively, you can start this walk from Levisham village.

**How to get there:** From the A169 between Whitby and Pickering, turn off through Lockton then head down and up a steep road into Levisham (SE 833 905).

**Caution:** Some of the paths are quite steep.

### Points of interest

There is no doubt about it, this is a beautiful walk. In fact, I would go as far as to say that the view from Skelton Tower across the dramatic Newton Dale is one of the finest anywhere, and the Horseshoe at Levisham is one of my favourite pubs. All of which combines to create a great walk.

The village of Levisham was first settled by a Saxon farmer called Leofgeat over a thousand years ago. Levisham has retained its medieval layout with houses clustered around a central green. From Levisham, a lane and then a track leads across Levisham Moor to reach Skelton Tower, which stands sentinel on a promontory of land overlooking Newton Dale. This tower was built in 1850 by Robert Skelton, Rector of Levisham as a folly where he could clear his mind and write sermons. Newton Dale is the finest example of a glacial meltwater channel in this country, scoured

out over 10,000 years ago by great torrents of water thundering down this once small valley. This is known as a “misfit” valley as the tiny stream of Pickering Beck is obviously too small to have created such a vast valley by itself – it had to have had help by melting glaciers.

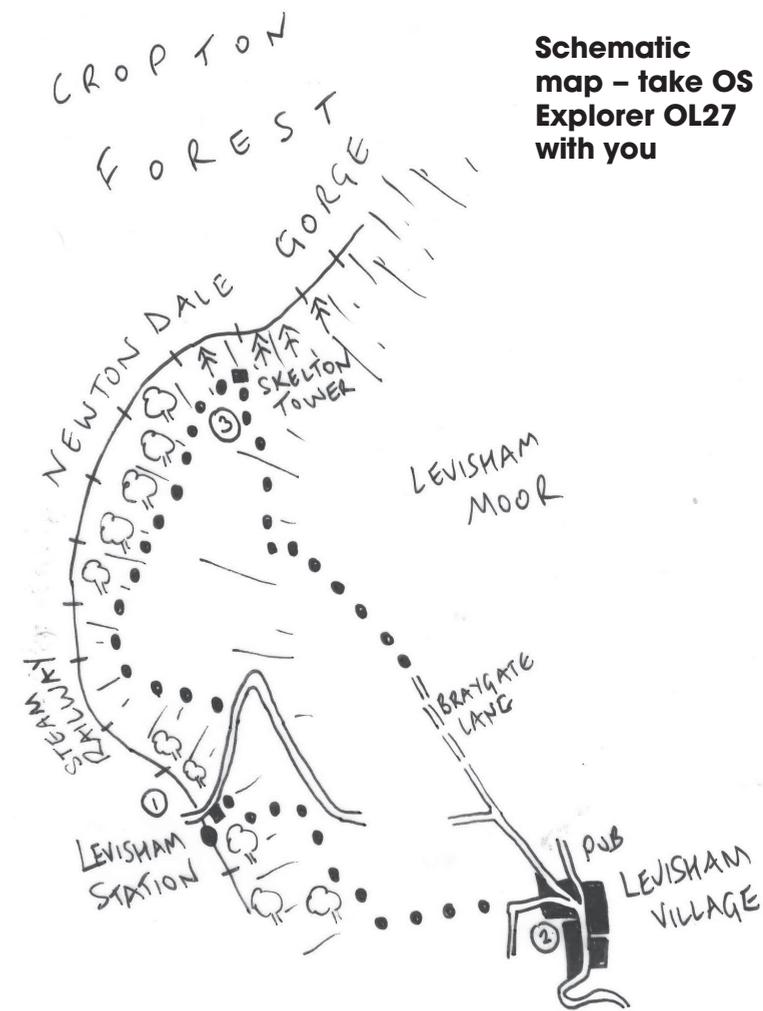
Threading its way along the floor of this valley is the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. This historic line was completed in 1836 between Pickering with Whitby, built to provide a stimulus for its flagging whaling and shipbuilding industries. Designed by George Stephenson, the Father of the Railways, this was one of the first passenger railways in the world, although the carriages were initially horse-drawn. George Hudson, the Railway King bought the line in 1845 and set about upgrading it for locomotive use. He built new bridges, tunnels, stations and connected the railway with the main Scarborough to York line. Following the Beeching Report, the section between Grosmont and Pickering was controversially closed in 1965, although the Esk Valley line from Middlesbrough to Whitby remained open thanks to concerted local campaigning. The North Yorkshire Moors Railway Preservation Society was formed in 1967 and subsequently bought back the line from British Railways, reopening it fully to the public in 1973 as a preserved steam railway. The evocative sound of the steam engine’s whistle echoing down Newton Dale as well as the rhythmic chuff-chuff from its funnel are some of the highlights of this walk. It is always a joy to sit at Skelton Tower waiting for a steam train far below, or even better, wait at Levisham Station for a closer look at the powerful engines, all powered by fire, water and steam.

### Walk

**1** From Levisham Station (with your back to the level crossing and the signal box on your right),

walk along the road away from the station and over a cattle grid, just beyond which (as the road climbs up) take the path to the right immediately after the house on the right (signpost Levisham), over a stream and through a gate into woodland. A clear path leads up through woods to reach a gate that brings you out on the open hillside then head straight uphill, bearing slightly to the right, to reach a stile next to a gate that leads onto a grassy track. Turn right along the track then almost immediately head up the wide, grassy path that branches up to the left slanting up the hillside (signpost ‘Village’). The path gradually climbs up across the hillside for 0.5km (superb views across Newton Dale to your right) then levels out (beside a bench) and bends round to the left into the side-valley of Keldgate Slack). At the head of this side-valley turn right along a narrow path that traverses this valley up to a wall stile. Cross the stile then turn left alongside the wall on your left across two large fields to join a road, which you follow straight on into Levisham.

**2** As you emerge onto the village green in the centre of Levisham, turn left along the road and follow it passing immediately to the left of the Horseshoe Inn towards Levisham Station. Follow the road out of Levisham for 0.5 km then, where it turns sharp left towards Levisham Station, continue straight on along the lane (Braygate Lane). Follow this lane straight on for 0.75 km (lane becomes a rough track) to reach a gate at the end of the enclosed track, with the open moorland of Levisham Moor ahead (signpost Goathland). Head through the gate and follow the grassy track straight on across heather moorland keeping close to the stone wall on your left (signpost ‘Bridleway’) then, where this wall bends away to the left after 0.5 km, continue straight on along this track over open moorland to reach the crest of a steep bank (West



Side Brow). A clear track slants down this bank to the right then levels out and heads across a shelf of moorland to reach Skelton Tower (ruin) overlooking Newton Dale.

**3** As you reach Skelton Tower, turn left back on yourself slightly following the rim of the wooded escarpment on your right. Follow the narrow path straight on across the flat moorland, with the rim of the escarpment on your right, for 300 metres to join a wall on your right (and Yorfalls Wood). Continue straight on along the narrow path (waymarker Levisham Station Walk) alongside this wall and woodland for 800 metres then, just before the end of the wall and woodland, carry straight on along the narrow path (ignore the bridlegate in the wall to your right). The path now leads straight on, leaving the wall and woodland behind, very gently

bearing slightly right along the sloping edge of the escarpment (heading towards the arrow-straight railway line and Newton Dale in the distance) for a further 200 metres (waymarker posts) then, as you approach some woodland, follow the path curving to the left across the flat moorland (away from Newton Dale) for 600 metres to join an unfenced road just down from a hair-pin bend. Turn right along this road and follow it quite steeply down back to Levisham Station.

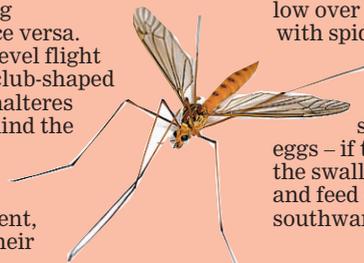
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## Country diary

**N**OW that evenings are drawing in, the lights are going on a little earlier every week and are attracting insects into houses through open windows – just when the “daddy-longlegs” season is upon us.

When a “daddy longlegs”, or crane-fly as it’s more formally known, enters a room and settles on a wall it’s worth taking a close look because these insects clearly reveal one of the features that allows flies with only one pair of wings to maintain level flight. When insects flap a single pair of wings there should be a tendency for their owner’s body to move upwards on the wing downstroke, and vice versa. But they maintain level flight thanks to a pair of club-shaped appendages called halteres that are located behind the wings and beat in opposition to the wing’s direction of movement, counterbalancing their



influence. These are particularly long and well developed in a crane-fly, making them very easy to see. The value of these stabilisers is best displayed in the fast-flying hoverflies, where they allow the insect to maintain a perfectly stationary hover, despite the furious beating of its wings.

Crane-flies’ other notable characteristic is their tendency to shed legs very easily. As autumn progresses many end up with less than their full complement of six, but maybe there is some advantage in shedding legs so readily. Crane-flies lay their eggs near the roots of grasses, so fly low over pastures that are often festooned with spiders’ webs. Perhaps the ability to shed a snared leg or two as a last resort allows many individuals to escape capture, survive a little longer and lay more eggs – if they don’t fall victim to the last of the swallows that skim low over the fields and feed on crane-flies, to fuel their long southwards migration.

Phil Gates

## Birdwatch

**M**ORE evidence is emerging about the impact on our breeding birds of the wettest spring and summer since records began. Data from the RSPB suggests that among garden species Blackbirds and Robins had poor breeding success and Song Thrushes suffered worst of all with a 27 per cent drop in fledged young compared with last year. Wet and cold weather made it harder for adults to find food and extra time spend in searching left chicks vulnerable to chilling and predation.

Larger more spectacular species also had a poor year. I reported recently how some Peregrines failed when floodwater cascaded down on cliff ledges and washed away eggs or small young. Now, a new report reveals that Red Kites also had a disappointing year. In warm and sunny March, a record total of 26 pairs established territories and 18 pairs went on to lay eggs. Friends of Red Kites (FoRK), which monitors the population, says that during wet April and May five nests failed with eggs or small young.

The remaining 13 pairs fledged 22 young. That compared with 12 pairs and 24 young in 2011 after a very hard winter when it was thought that many kites were in poor condition. Hopes were high that after the comparatively mild winter of 2011-2012 they would do better.

All breeding attempts were again in the core area of the Derwent Valley and adjacent areas of Durham. Apart from pairs around Derwent Reservoir-Muggleswick and Hamsterley Forest, there was no real evidence of kites colonising new areas. Unlike most large raptors, kites are gregarious and seem reluctant to move until forced out by a lack of suitable breeding sites which presumably has yet to occur in our local population. Wandering, presumably non-breeding birds were also seen during the season at Darlington and Hetton Bogs and in western areas at Bollilhope, Romalldkirk, St Johns Chapel and Tunstall Reservoir.

Ian Kerr