

Walks

Marske and Skelton Moor

Walk Information

Distance: 9.5 km (6 miles)

Time: 3 – 4 hours

Map: OS Explorer OL30 Yorkshire Dales Northern & Central

Parking: Parking area beside the bridge and road junction in the centre of Marske.

Refreshments: No facilities

Terrain: A clear track leads from Marske to Orgate Farm across pastures and through woodland (muddy in places), then tracks and lanes lead up through the valley to Telfit Farm. Rough grassy tracks then head up onto Skelton Moor, where rough and boggy tracks lead across this moorland. Clear tracks, lanes and field paths back to Marske, with a muddy riverside path to finish.

How to get there: From Richmond, follow the A6108 west towards Leyburn then turn right over Downholme Bridge up to reach Marske.

Caution: Many of the paths are muddy underfoot. The track across Skelton Moor is rough and boggy in places, as well as slightly indistinct in a couple of short sections. This moorland is exposed. OS map essential.

Points of interest

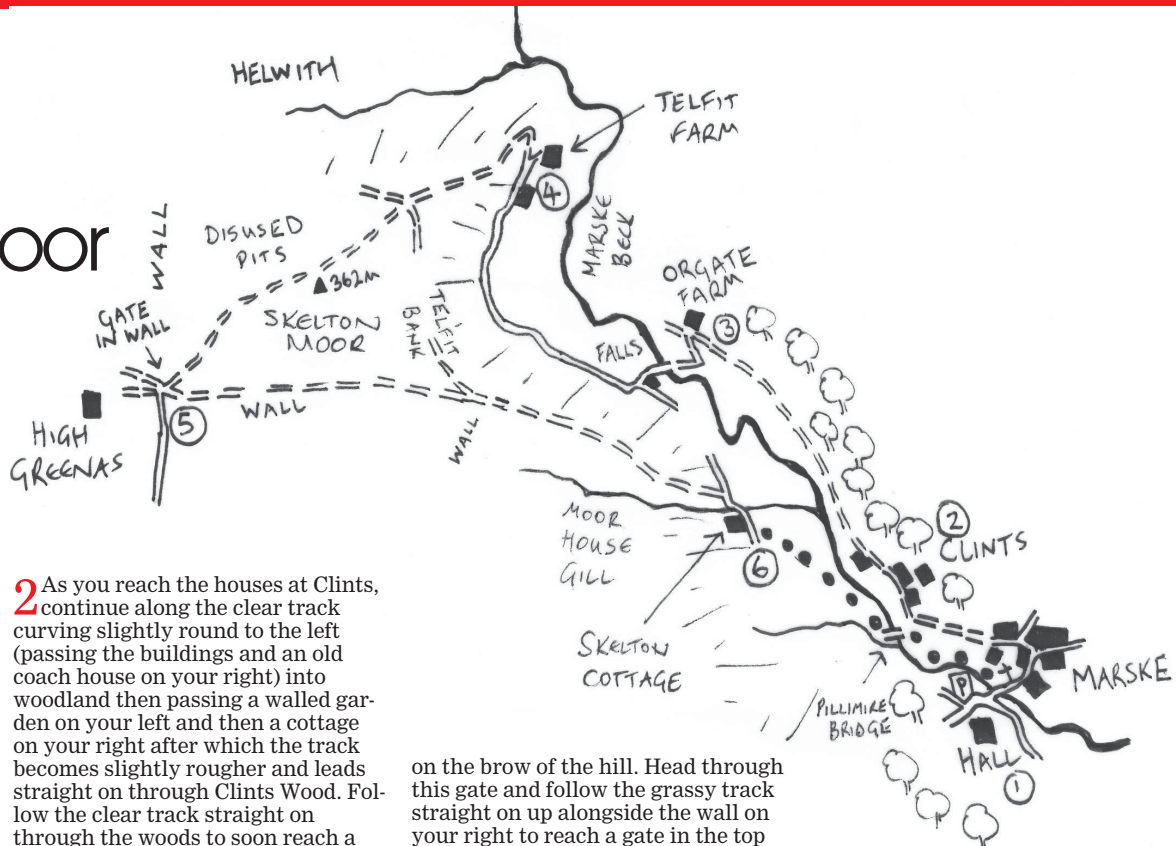
THE hidden village of Marske lies sheltered in a beautiful valley that feeds into Swaledale in the very north-eastern corner of the Yorkshire Dales. Marske Beck is spanned by a 13th Century bridge that forms the focal point of the village; in medieval times this was the main road between the market town of Richmond and the villages of Swaledale until the Turnpike Road (now the A6108) was built in the 19th century. During the 18th and 19th Centuries trains of packhorses laden with panniers of lead ore and coal from the countless mines that once littered the surrounding moors would have crossed this bridge en route to Richmond. The historic St Edmund's Church lies set back from the road screened by ancient yew trees. This low stone building dates back to the 11th Century and boasts many original features including much Norman stonework. It stands on a site used for Christian worship since the Dark Ages for it is said that the re-

mains of St Cuthbert were brought here in the 8th Century to escape Viking raids along the Northumbria coast before the saint's remains were finally laid to rest at Durham in 995AD, above which Durham Cathedral was built.

This walk explores the delightful valley of Marske Beck that strikes northwards into the hill country above Swaledale. Initially, the walk follows an old track from the hamlet of Clints through Clints Wood. The woods are left behind and a wonderful scene unfolds across this hidden valley with the limestone screes of Clints Scar rising above. The valley grows narrower and wilder above Telfit Farm with dramatic limestone crags and moors rising above. From Telfit Farm, a rough track climbs up onto the heather-clad Skelton Moor. The views are superb, with the hidden hamlet of Helwith far below at the mouth of the dramatic ravine of Holgate Beck (which feeds into Marske Beck) – this is surely one of the most remote settlements in England. A track strikes across this moorland, passing the Trig Point (362 metres) just across to your left; this moorland is littered with long-disused bell pits and workings from the old lead mining days. The final pat of this walk joins the old Helwith Road, now just a track that runs along the top of the steep Telfit Bank above the valley of Marske Beck. A wonderful end to a beautiful walk.

The walk

1 From parking area beside the old bridge across Marske Beck, head left at the road junction towards Whaston, Ravensworth over the bridge and follow the road rising up through the village to reach a road junction (by a phone box) where you turn left along the road (passing a post box) to soon reach another road junction where you take the left-hand road (Dead End sign and broken sign Unsuitable for Motor Traffic). Follow this to soon reach a gate at the end of the road on the edge of the village (signpost). Head through the gate and follow the track straight on across fields then through woodland to reach the hamlet of Clints.



2 As you reach the houses at Clints, continue along the clear track curving slightly round to the left (passing the buildings and an old coach house on your right) into woodland then passing a walled garden on your left and then a cottage on your right after which the track becomes slightly rougher and leads straight on through Clints Wood. Follow the clear track straight on through the woods to soon reach a fork in the track, where you follow the right-hand track (ignore left-hand grassy track down across fields) rising gently up through Clints Wood for a further 400 metres to reach another fork where you follow the left-hand track straight on to soon reach a gate across the track at the end of the woods. Head through the gate and carry straight on along the enclosed grassy track heading up through the valley until you come to a crossroads of concrete farm lanes immediately before Orgate Farm.

3 At the crossroads turn left and follow the concrete lane winding down the hillside to reach Orgate Bridge across Marske Beck at the bottom of the valley (with the lovely Orgate Force waterfall just upstream). Cross the bridge and follow the lane up to reach a junction of lanes beside a large barn on your left. Head right along the lane and follow this along the foot of the steep Telfit Bank heading up through the valley of Marske Beck for 1.25 km to reach a house beside the lane on your right. Continue along the lane rising up for a further 125 metres then, where the main lane bends down to the right into the yard of Telfit Farm, branch left up along a rougher track through a gate (waymarkers).

4 Head through the gate and follow the rough unenclosed track climbing quite steeply up the hillside then swinging round to the left rising steadily up to reach a gate in a wall

on the brow of the hill. Head through this gate and follow the grassy track straight on up alongside the wall on your right to reach a gate in the top right corner of the field, after which carry straight on along the grassy track to quickly reach a crossroads of tracks (with the stony track of Helwith Road across your path). Head straight on along the rough track ahead rising up onto Skelton Moor. The track soon levels out and leads on passing old bell pits and then the Trig Point (across to your left), after which continue along the rough track heading in a south-westerly direction across Skelton Moor for 800 metres to reach a gate in a wall and a junction of tracks and lanes (signpost).

5 Do not head through this gate but turn left back on yourself along the rough grassy bridleway track and follow this to quickly join a wall on your right. Follow this rough bridleway straight on alongside the wall on your right for 1.3 km to eventually join the stony track of Helwith Road once again at a gate in a wall across your path (on the brow of Telfit Bank). Head straight on through the gate and follow the track alongside the wall on your right gently dropping down along the top of Telfit Bank to reach another gate after 0.5 km. Head through this gate and follow the clear enclosed track quite steeply down to join the road beside a house.

6 Turn right along the road and follow it for 200 metres then, just after the entrance driveway to Skelton Cottage, take the footpath to the

left through a wall-stile (signpost) just after a small stone barn on your left. After the stile, head diagonally to the right across the middle of the field to reach a bridlegate in a fence (just to the left of where the line of trees end), after which walk straight on alongside the fence on your left (above the banks of Marske Beck) across two fields then, where the fence ends on your left, head down the broad spur of land to reach the stone-built Pillimire Bridge across Marske Beck. Cross the bridge then turn immediately right and follow the riverbank heading downstream for 400 metres then, a short distance beyond the narrow and very muddy riverside section and just before a wall across your path (houses of Marske up to your left), head right through a small gate that leads onto the riverside. Follow this riverside path downstream for a short distance, then up some steps that lead back onto Marske Bridge. Turn right over the bridge back to the parking area.

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Country diary

DUK falls early on winter afternoons, making this a good time to watch owls that begin to hunt as soon as the light fades – but catching a glimpse of their prey is much more difficult.

Wood mice and voles, that are major items in a tawny owl's diet, can be abundant in the early winter months but they tend to move around in a network of surface runs under matted grass and remain hidden from view. The full extent of their activity only becomes obvious during the thaw after a prolonged snowfall, when these small mammals move around under cover of snow and leave more distinctive runs near the surface of grass. Wood mice and bank vole runs are usually close to hedges or woodland edges, where they can find cover in the tangle of shrubs and brambles that provide some protection from a swooping owl or kestrel, but field voles venture into more open grassland. Voles also seem to thrive particularly well in young conifer plantations, while the small trees are still well spaced and there are extensive areas of rough grassland

between them, and in these habitats they often reach very high numbers.

Unlike wood mice, which are mainly active after dark, voles are often active throughout the day – which makes them prime targets for short-eared owls which tend to do much of their hunting during the daylight hours.

Both of these small mammals are important food items for foxes which patrol hedgerows during their foraging at dusk. Sometimes, if you follow fox tracks in the snow you'll suddenly come to the tell-tale clues of successful hunting when the neat line of regularly spaced fox footprints stops and is punctuated by a longer gap and then a patch of churned-up snow – where the predator has pounced.



Phil Gates

Birdwatch

THE White-tailed Eagle is Britain's biggest bird of prey with a broad, eight-foot wing span making it look a bit like a flying door. A juvenile which appeared in Durham skies last weekend must have proved a startling sight for a few lucky birders. It first cruised southwards over Rowlands Gill and Chopwell Wood on Saturday before reappearing on Sunday over flooded fields at Bradbury where it was last seen heading southwards, mobbed by a squadron of crows and gulls.

These eagles were once widespread in Britain and one is depicted in the Lindisfarne Gospels, showing perhaps that they were familiar to its 7th Century illustrators. They were wiped out by persecution in England around 1800 and in Scotland in 1916. A re-introduction programme, using nestlings from Norway, has established a breeding population of over 50 pairs in western Scotland, giving a big boost to its tourist industry. A similar release scheme has just been completed in Fife to restore them to eastern Scotland.

Several of these east coast birds have appeared in Northumberland, at the Farne Islands, Morpeth and Prestwick Carr, so sightings in Durham have been eagerly awaited. The Bradbury observer spotted the eagle while he was driving north on the A1M. But he commented on the Durham Bird Club website that he didn't think an emergency stop, even for an eagle, would have been appreciated by other drivers and a nearby police motor patrol!

Small groups of Waxwings were still present with sightings in new areas including Holme Hill estate in Easington Colliery, Elemore Woods, the Dale Centre at Stanhope and around Saltburn Cricket Club. The first Smew of the winter was at Crookfoot Reservoir. A Great Northern Diver was an attraction in Hartlepool marina while in Northumberland, more unusually, singles were short distances from the sea at Bothal Pond and on the River Coquet at Warkworth.

Ian Kerr