

# Walks Ketton Bridge and Patches Lane

## Points of interest

Brafferton is a delightful linear village with old stone cottages and working farms, interspersed with more modern buildings, set back from the road behind a long and narrow green that runs almost the entire length of village. This layout dates back to medieval times. From Brafferton, our route heads across fields to reach Ketton Hall. This imposing building is most famous as the home of Charles Colling who lived here in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. Colling bred short-horns and in 1796 produced what was to become known as the Durham Ox, a mighty beast that became well-known throughout the country, with several pubs named after it.

Just to the south of Ketton Hall is Ketton Bridge, a fine example of a narrow packhorse bridge that dates from the late 17th Century, although there has been a bridge on this site since medieval times. It formed part of Salters Lane, an ancient road that once connected the salt pans along the North-East coast with the market towns of northern England. Salt was a valuable commodity in medieval times as it was used to preserve food. Between Newton Ketton and the former Great North Road (A167), Salters Lane is just a field path or farm track; however, in medieval times this would have been busy with packhorses. Remarkably, the bridge now stands some 50 metres away from the River Skerne which it once spanned. The river's course has been altered in the intervening years to improve the flow and provide more water power further downstream. Note the cast iron sign on the east side of the bridge "Ketton Road Ends Here", which marked the boundary for which responsibility for the maintenance of the road ended for the local landowner.

Beyond Ketton Bridge, our route follows Salters Lane to join the old Great North Road before heading westwards to join Patches Lane. This muddy track is a delight to walk, and will be especially lovely in spring. The village of Coatham

Mundeville was once much larger than it is today, as there is evidence in the surrounding fields of a deserted medieval village. Nearby, Hall Garth Hotel stands on the site of a 13th Century hunting lodge of the Prince Bishops, although the present building is primarily 17th Century.

## The walk

**1** From the Village Hall on the green in the centre of Brafferton, walk down along the road back to reach the road junction at the bottom of the village where you turn left then almost immediately left again (before the bridge across the railway line) along a track that leads down through woodland (passing between the two road 'chevron' signs). Follow this track straight on gently dropping down through woodland then, where the track levels out, carry straight on (ignore the track to the right that leads to a tunnel beneath the East Coast Mainline) along the enclosed track. Where the clear track bends sharply right towards a second tunnel beneath the railway line, carry straight on along the enclosed grassy path/track to reach a gate across your path at the end of the track (just beyond a small stream).

**2** After the gate, head left alongside the fence on your left then, where this bends to the left after 75 metres, carry straight on across the middle of the field, heading towards Ketton Hall sheltered by trees in the distance, to reach a fence across your path. Head left alongside this fence to reach a metal gate in the field corner. Head right through this gate and walk straight on along the enclosed track for 150 metres then head left through another metal gate in the fence, immediately after which turn right up alongside the fence on your right. As you reach the top corner of the field, follow the field boundary bending to the left to soon reach a bridlegate to your right (set in a slight dog-leg in the fence). Head through this bridlegate and walk up alongside the fence/hedge on your right then, as you reach the top of the field, with woodland in front of you (and Ket-

## Walk Information

**Distance:** 9.5 km (6 miles)

**Time:** 3 hours

**Maps:** OS Explorer 304

**Start/Parking:** On-street parking throughout Brafferton

**Refreshments:** Hotel and pub at Coatham Mundeville.

**How to get there:** Brafferton lies off the A167 to the north of Darlington (just south of A1(M) Junction 59).

**Terrain:** A mixture of field paths, farm tracks and lanes.

**Caution:** Many of the paths and tracks are very muddy. Take care crossing the A167. (Ketton Hall just across to your right), head left alongside the fence/woodland on your right and follow this curving round to the right (with the woodland on your right) then, as you reach the top of the field, head left to quickly reach a gate that leads onto the farm lane (Ketton Lane).

**3** Turn right along the farm lane, passing the entrance to Ketton Hall to soon reach a fork in the lane where you head left over a cattle grid. Follow this lane down across the field for 500 metres to reach a second cattle grid. Turn right along a track immediately before this second cattle grid and follow it along the edge of the field to reach Ketton Bridge, a narrow packhorse bridge situated in a field at a junction of tracks (NB: The legal line of the bridlegate to Ketton Bridge cuts across the field 100 metres before you reach the second cattle grid; however, to avoid damage to the crop, follow the track around the field perimeter instead). As you reach Ketton Bridge, follow the track ahead (ignore track up towards Peartree House) to quickly reach a larger bridge across the River Skerne. Immediately after the bridge, where the track turns sharp right, head straight on along the muddy path across the middle of field to join a small stream and woodland at the far side. Follow the streamside path straight on (stream and woodland on your left) along the edge of the field for 500 metres to reach a concrete bridge across the stream to your left (just

before the end of the field) ignore this bridge, and carry straight on along the field edge to soon reach the railway embankment, where you turn right along the edge of the field to soon reach a track that leads beneath the railway line. Follow the track under the bridge then straight on for 150 metres to reach Low Beaumont Hill Farm. As you reach the farm gates, branch off to the right through the fence (way-marker) then follow the boundary fence on your left skirting to the left around the farm buildings (along the edge of the field). Just beyond the buildings, continue along the field boundary (walking parallel with the farm track) to soon reach the end of the field where a short section of enclosed path leads on to quickly join the road at Beaumont Hill. Follow this road to the right straight on to soon reach a T-junction with the A167.

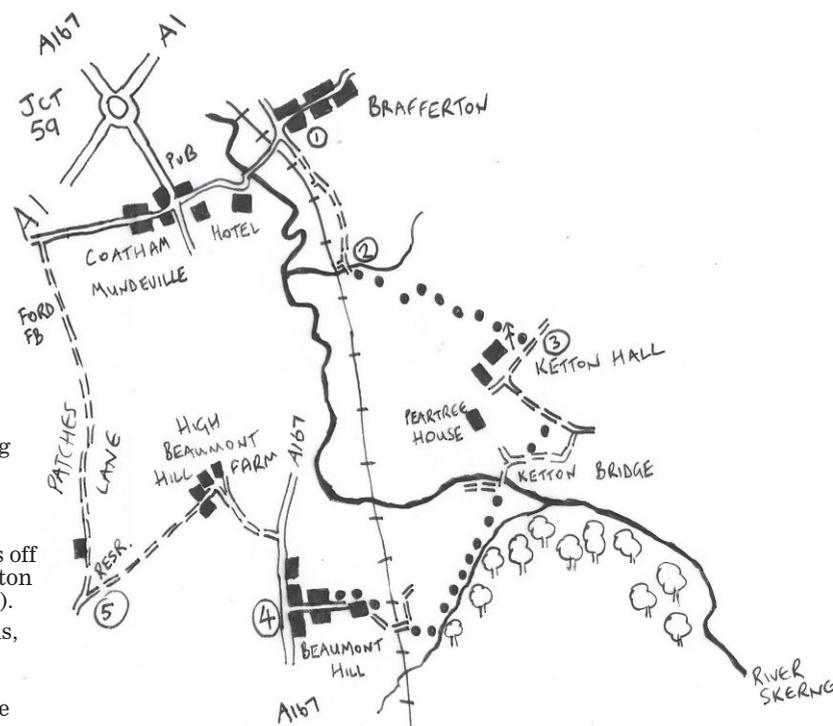
**4** Turn right along the road (pavement) for 350 metres then, 100 metres after the National Speed Limit signs, turn left (take care crossing the road) along a farm lane (signpost) and follow this up to reach High Beaumont Hill Farm. As you approach the farm buildings the track forks – follow the left-hand track up into the farmyard then, just before the white-washed farmhouse, follow the track bending sharp left in between the barns (waymarker). Follow this track straight on out of the farmyard then passing a house on your left – continue along this track across fields (hedge on your left) for

600 metres to reach a gate across the track beside the large grass-covered reservoir on your right. Head through the gate and follow the enclosed track straight on (reservoir on your right) for 125 metres to reach a junction with another track (large radio mast).

**5** Turn right along this track and follow it up to soon reach a boarded up house, just beyond which the track becomes a muddy path enclosed by trees and hedgerows (Patches Lane). Follow this clear, muddy track straight on for just over 1 km to reach a ford and footbridge across Dene Beck, after which continue along the track for a further 350 metres to reach a T-junction with a road (with the A1 just ahead). Turn right along this road and follow it into Coatham Mundeville to reach a junction with the A167. Cross over (take care – use traffic island) and follow the road opposite (passing the pub on your left) down through the village, passing Hall Garth Hotel to reach a bridge across the River Skerne. Cross the bridge and follow the road back up into Brafferton.

**Mark Reid**  
Author of *The Inn Way guidebooks*  
[innway.co.uk](http://innway.co.uk)

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## Country diary

**L**IKE many people who are fascinated by natural history, I have a list of animals that I've never been lucky enough to watch in the wild. Otters are near the top of that list and I'm hoping that this year my luck will change and I'll see one... and I think I know where to look.

Last week I spotted unfamiliar tracks in the soft silt left by flood water along the river Wear, a couple of miles from Durham. After consulting several field guides I'm 99 per cent sure that they were left by an otter and the location is plausible, as other people have seen otters in the vicinity and in the river Browney which joins the Wear at Sunderland Bridge. There was a time when these lovely animals were almost extinct in the county, after centuries of persecution, pollution and habitat destruction. Now, with full legal protection and improvements in river water quality over recent decades, their fortunes have changed and they are widespread throughout the North-East. In 2006, one was even filmed by security cameras near the Prince Bishop shopping

centre in Durham city, pilfering from rubbish bins.

You do need a lot of luck to see these animals in the wild. They are shy, adept at remaining hidden and usually only feed around dawn and dusk. They spend the rest of the day hidden in dens, known as holts, often under the tangle of tree roots and flotsam along river banks. When they are caught by surprise in the open they dive and can swim submerged for more than a minute. But now I know where to look, I'll be going back frequently until I spot one. This could be the year when otters are crossed off my "most wanted" list.



Phil Gates

## Birdwatch

**T**HE unusually mild weather of the past week, with temperatures up to 12C, has fooled some birds into thinking that spring is just around the corner. On several mornings I've been awakened at 4am by a blackbird in full song outside the window and others tuning up. Other people have had the same experience with both robins and song thrushes also going well.

Normally we don't expect even early spring song until the lengthening days of late February but with temperatures now back to the seasonal normal these optimistic songsters will realise that winter is far from over.

Most of the region's current birding interest seems centred around the Tees. A drake green-winged teal, the American cousin of our abundant wintering common teal, has been a big attraction at Saltholme. One or two turn locally in most winters, usually in the large flocks of common teal which flood in from northern and eastern Europe and Russia. Green-winged teal can remain for extended

periods as was shown by the area's last, a drake at Dorman's Pool from early March until mid-April last year. A bittern has also been showing at Saltholme, a spotted redshank at Greenabella Marsh while a smew remained at Hurworth Burn Reservoir.

I mentioned recently that it hasn't been a good winter for snow buntings so up to 47 in the North Gare and Seaton Snook area was notable. Gone are the days when these attractive trilling winter buntings appeared in their hundreds right along the coast with a few often venturing inland onto moorland. A caspian gull was reported in the same general area.

Waxwings have continued to be well-reported with, for example, 29 at Eaglescliffe, a dozen at Portrack Marsh and ten at Wolviston with larger numbers northwards, including 80 at Concorde in Washington, up to 40 around Waldrige Fell and 30 at Rainton Meadows reserve.

Ian Kerr