Walks

Willance’s Leap & Richmond Racecourse

Walk information
Distance: 11 km / 6.6 miles, Time: 3 - 4 hours
Maps: OS Explorer Sheet 304 Darlington & Richmond
Parking: Parkland available throughout Richmond
Condition: This walk is not suitable for dogs.

The walk
1. Leave Richmond along Victoria Road (A6108 Reeth/Leyburn road), passing the turn for Hudswell then continue along this main road for a short distance then, where the road swings round to the left, in the turning off to the right passing to the right of West End Stores. Follow this road (Westfield)straight on rising up out of Richmond. As you reach the last houses (just before ‘Dead End’ sign) bear off to the left through a kissing gate by a small parking area, then follow the clear path straight on walking parallel with the road alongside a fence/ hedge on your right. Keep quite close to the fence/top of the wooded escarpment on your left, to reach some stiles over a fence across your path, after which bear left down to a stile in the bottom corner of the field then continue straight on alongside the fence/ top of the escarpment on your left to reach a stile in the corner of a small plantation. Cross this stile and continue straight on (with the plantation on your right) along the path along the top of the escarpment for 150 metres to reach the Memorial at Willance’s Leap.

2. As you reach Whitcliffe Farm, carry straight on along the lane passing in front of the farm then continue along alongside the lane for 300 metres to reach High Loses Farm. As you near the farm there is a gate in the field corner then head diagonally to the right (45 degrees) across the rough pastureland heading towards the right-hand corner of Beacon Plantation to reach a stile (signpost) that leads onto the road towards the far right corner of the field. Turn right along the road (take care) for 50 metres then turn left through a gate by the corner of the plantation (signpost ‘Public Bridleway’), then follow the rough grassy track straight on with the plantation on your left and an area of felled forest on your right for 175 metres to reach the end of the felled forest on your right. Carry straight on along the wide grassy path/track into the dense forest and follow this very muddy/waterlogged track straight on heading gradually down for 255 metres to emerge into clearing in the upper reaches of the valley of Aske Beck. Cross the stream then carry straight on alongside the muddy path up through the forest again for 225 metres to reach a fence/ wall and stile across your path at the end of the forest. Do not cross the stile/gate but turn right heading up the hillside. You will reach a fork across Aske Beck at Coalsgarth Gate.

3. Cross the stile then walk straight on across the middle of the field, bearing very slightly left (do not walk alongside the wall on your right) keeping quite close to the fence/top of the wooded escarpment on your left, to reach some stiles over a fence across your path, after which bear left down to a stile in the bottom corner of the field then continue straight on alongside the fence/ top of the escarpment on your left to reach a stile in the corner of a small plantation. Cross this stile and continue straight on (with the plantation on your right) along the path along the top of the escarpment for 150 metres to reach the Memorial at Willance’s Leap.

4. Head through the kissing gate to visit the Memorial, then return back through the kissing-gate (with the two radio masts ahead of you) then head diagonally to the right (45 degrees) across the rough pastureland heading towards the right-hand corner of Beacon Plantation to reach a stile (signpost) that leads onto the road towards the far right corner of the field. Turn right along the road (take care) for 50 metres then turn left through a gate by the corner of the plantation (signpost ‘Public Bridleway’), then follow the rough grassy track straight on with the plantation on your left and an area of felled forest on your right for 175 metres to reach the end of the felled forest on your right. Carry straight on along the wide grassy path/track into the dense forest and follow this very muddy/waterlogged track straight on heading gradually down for 255 metres to emerge into clearing in the upper reaches of the valley of Aske Beck. Cross the stream then carry straight on alongside the muddy path up through the forest again for 225 metres to reach a fence/ wall and stile across your path at the end of the forest. Do not cross the stile/gate but turn right heading up the hillside. You will reach a fork across Aske Beck at Coalsgarth Gate.

5. Cross the shallow ford, a few paces after which turn left over a stile beside a gate (signpost), after which follow the grassy track heading downwards through the valley of Aske Beck along the foot of the steep bank of Coalsgarth Edge to your right along the stream down to your left. Follow this track for 600 metres (passing a roofless ruin across the valley to your left) then, where the grassy track bends sharp left towards the unoccupied High Coalsgarth Farm (hidden amongst trees) head to the right through a gate in the field corner then immediately left (heading in the same direction as you have been walking down through the valley). Walk straight across the middle of the field heading down through the valley, passing to the right of an enclosed spring (Coalsgarth Spring) to reach a gate, after which carry straight on alongside the tumbling wall on your left heading across two large rough fields (with a plantation up to your right) to reach two gates at the end of this field and the end of the plantation on your right.

6. At the end of these large fields, head through the right-hand gate (waymarker) then turn immediately right alongside the wall and plantation on your right heading up the hillside. You soon leave the plantation behind - follow along the right-hand gate. You are now on the right path, and follow the old stone-built grandstand then straight down to reach the small parking area and the road.

7. Turn right along road (take care) and follow the road bending left at High Gingerfield Lane then turn left to soon reach a gate to your right in the bottom corner of the field (Richmond Racecourse signpost), Head through the gate and walk through the trees/undergrowth to soon emerge out onto the old Richmond Racecourse (caution - horses training). Walk straight on bearing slightly right using the old stone-built grandstand then straight down to reach the small parking area and the road.

Country Diary By Phil Gates

PICTURE a warm summer afternoon and one of the images that might spring to mind is a hoverfly, apparently suspended in a shaft of sunlight. Few other insects are capable of hovering in one spot for such long periods, but with the help of a magnifying glass it’s not difficult to see the special structures that give it this ability.

All flies have a single pair of wings and if they are imitated on three wings so they could fly, but would have a tendency to move up with every down-stroke and down with every up-stroke of their wings, so they’d follow a rollercoaster flight path. But just behind a hoverfly’s wings there’s a pair of straight, closely placed halteres which move in opposition to the wing strokes, smoothing out the flight path. Hoverfly wings beat extremely quickly and combined with the stabilizing action of their halteres, allows them to hang motionless in one spot, like a jewel in the sunlight.

Hoverflies are amongst the most useful insects in the garden. They largely feed on pollen but their larvae consume vast numbers of greenfly. Watch a hoverfly closely and you’ll see it deposit one of its white, oval eggs close to a greenfly infestation. When the small, slug-like grubs hatch it will create havoc amongst its victims and panic spreads through the greenfly colony. The attacked greenfly release a chemical alarm signal that causes those around it to stop feeding and drop to the ground. For every one that’s eaten, many more are forced to fall from the plant. The best way to tempt hoverflies into the garden is to plant plenty of flowers on the daisy family, which provide pollen for the adults.

Bird Watch By Ian Kerr

Owls, always a favourite with birders and the general public alike, could be heading for a bumper breeding season because of an abundance of voles, their main prey. It could compensate for a run of poor seasons caused by the bitter winters of 2010 and 2011 and last year’s cold late spring.

Barn owls, particularly in the uplands, have suffered high mortality in recent years but are staging an impressive revival. Several ringers have reported excellent results with many healthy early hatched broods. In my own village, barn owls are now a much more common sight. For the first time, we have two pairs just 250 yards apart and each has three large young. Tawny owls are also doing very well. Forestry Commission ornithologists who have monitored nest boxes for over 30 years tell me that for the first time they had a pair with seven eggs compared with the normal two to four. Short-eared owls, which usually only breed on our high moorlands in good vole years, are also taking advantage. A few pairs are now passing the major brush fells but this year a staggering 17 pairs have been found on the RSPB’s Gelt Salesforce reserve in the North Pennines. Vole populations normally rise over a four-year period and then crash. At the moment we seem to be at the peak of the cycle. This abundance should also benefit other classic vole-hunters, including kestrels. Still on breeding species, the region’s only true pair of ospreys have now seen almost three young take flight. The full annual family reunion will be on September 1.

A white-winged black tern at Saltholme, a purple heron at Whitby and a hobby chasing swallows at Bowburn were the pick of the latest rarities. Turtle doves, a rapidly declining breeder, were found at Thirsk and Sutton Bank at Druridge Bay.