

# Walks Middleham & Cover Banks

## Points of interest

**T**HIS is a lovely short walk, full of interest and ideal for families, with castles and legends along the way. The walk starts from Middleham where, hidden behind the elegant Georgian stone-built houses, stands the ruins of Middleham Castle. This castle dates back to 1190 and has played an important role in the history of England as this was once the stronghold of the powerful Neville family, Earls of Warwick, for over 200 years from where they ruled their vast Northern estates virtually as a separate kingdom. The heyday of the castle was during the 15th Century especially during the War of the Roses. Richard Plantaganet, later the Duke of Gloucester then Richard III, grew up at the castle where he later met his wife Lady Anne Neville, the daughter of the Earl of Warwick. Their son Edward, Prince of Wales was born at the castle. Richard became king in 1483 but was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. The castle soon fell into disrepair and remained Crown property until 1625 when passed into private ownership. Much of the stonework was plundered in the 17th Century, thanks to Cromwell's destructive tendencies, and went to build local houses.

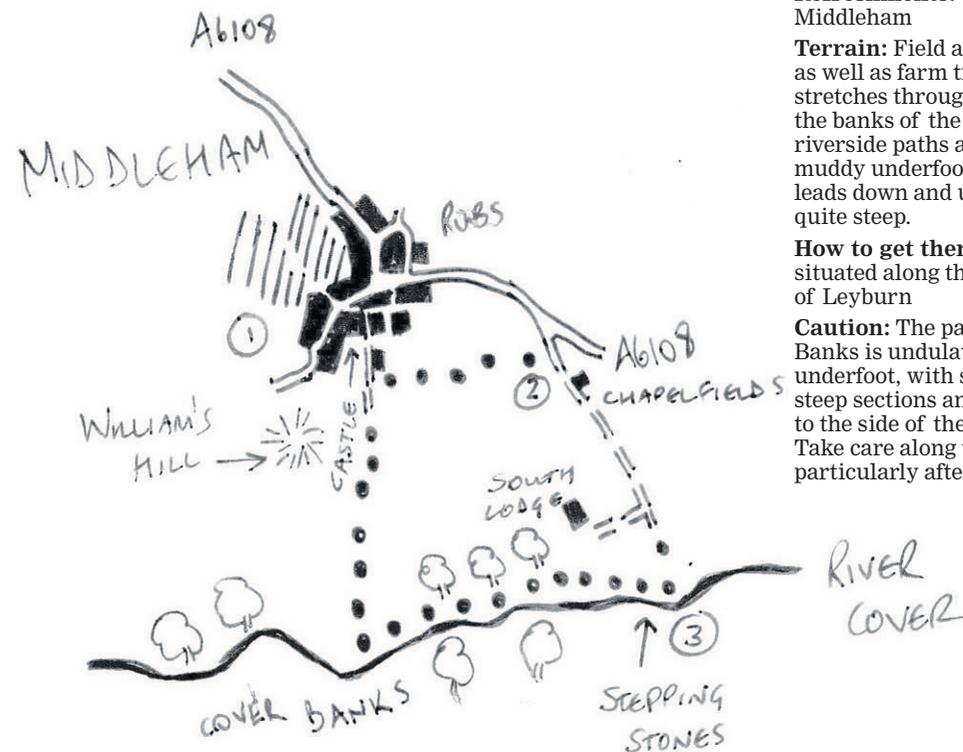
Our route heads past the castle, then across fields and along tracks to reach the steep wooded banks of the River Cover. This stretch of the river is really beautiful, with wooded slopes and rushing water - it is known as Cover Banks. It is also the haunt of the legendary Kelpie. The Kelpie is a supernatural water horse that dates back to Celtic folklore thousands of years ago. This horse-like creature is said to lure the unwary traveller into the turbulent waters and then drown them. Such legends of mythical river creatures are quite common

in Scotland and Ireland, but less so in the North of England. There is a bust of the Kelpie's head at the nearby Cover Bridge Inn.

## The walk

**1** From the Market Cross in the centre of Middleham, head up along the Coverdale road that leaves the top of the Market Place passing the Black Swan on your left (signed 'Middleham Castle') and follow this road up to quickly reach the Swine Cross (weathered stone animal) and Water Fountain in the small market place known as the Swine Market. Turn left along the lane to quickly reach the entrance to Middleham Castle, just after which turn right along the track and follow this up (with the Castle on your right) then, just before the gate at the top of the walled track (just beyond a bungalow on your left), turn left through a wooden gate along an enclosed grassy path. Follow this path straight on to reach a kissing-gate that leads out onto a field. Walk straight on, keeping close to the field boundary on your left (passing the sports field on your left) to reach a squeeze-stile in the bottom left corner of the field. After the squeeze-stile, walk on across the large undulating field, bearing left to join the field boundary on your left, which you follow down to reach a stile in the bottom left corner of the field that leads onto an enclosed track (Straight Lane).

**2** Turn right along the track and follow it passing Chapelfields house on your left then continue along the track for a further 500 metres (passing a couple more houses/buildings) then, where the clear track bends sharp right around an open-sided barn up towards South Lodge, head straight on along the enclosed rough track ahead (off this sharp bend) to soon reach a gate that leads out onto a



field. After the gate, walk straight on across the field alongside the wall on your right to reach the brow of the steep bank above the River Cover. Drop down the bank to reach the riverside, where you turn right over a stile to reach some stepping stones across the river just beyond.

**3** Do not cross these stepping stones, but continue straight on along the riverside path through woodland. The path soon opens out into a field - head straight on keeping close to the river to reach a small gate in the far right corner of the field beside a large bend in the river, from where steps lead back up into the woodland. A clear undulating path now threads its way across the wooded slopes of Cover Banks (take care) to reach a

stile over a wall at the end of the woods, after which carry straight on across the open wooded pastures (with the river to your left) to soon cross an old tumbledown wall then continue on along the riverside path for a further 175 metres to reach another old wall across your path, with the river immediately on your left. Turn immediately right after this old wall and climb up to the top of the fairly steep bank then, at the 'crossroads' of paths at the top of the steep bank, continue straight on through some undergrowth/trees and out onto a large field. Walk straight on, keeping close to the fence/wall on your right, up across the large field for 450 metres to reach a gate in the top right-hand corner of this field at the top of the wide ridge of

## Walk information

**Distance:** 4.5 km / 2.75 miles

**Time:** Allow 1 - 2 hours

**Map:** OS Sheets OL30

**Parking:** On-street parking throughout Middleham

**Refreshments:** Choice at Middleham

**Terrain:** Field and riverside paths as well as farm tracks, with some stretches through woodland along the banks of the River Cover - the riverside paths are undulating and muddy underfoot. The path that leads down and up Cover Banks is quite steep.

**How to get there:** Middleham is situated along the A6108 to the south of Leyburn

**Caution:** The path along Cover Banks is undulating and rough underfoot, with some short, but steep sections and some steep drops to the side of the path in places. Take care along the riverside paths, particularly after heavy rain.

**Mark Reid**  
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## Countrydiary By Phil Gates

**T**HERE are many old country sayings that claim to predict our weather from natural phenomena. Some, like 'red sky at night, shepherds' delight' have some factual basis, because a red glow at sunset on the western horizon often brings fine weather on the following day. Others, like the belief that a heavy berry crop in autumn forewarns of a hard winter are fanciful, because the size of the berry crop depends on flower pollination back in spring, not future winter weather. But some things in nature - notably pine cones - respond within minutes to changes in the weather.

The only living parts of a ripe pine cone are the seeds. The woody bracts that they sit on are dead but respond quickly to changes in moisture, so in damp, humid weather the woody fibres within them take up moisture and expand, closing the cone.

In dry, sunny weather they quickly lose moisture and contract, creating internal tensions that twist the bract back and allow

the seeds to fall out.

Mechanisms like this, where moisture changes produce movements in parts of plants long after they are dead are quite common.

One of the most beautiful examples can be found in the tiny rings of teeth that surround the open ends of moss spore capsules. These dead structures respond almost instantly to the slightest change in atmospheric moisture.

The most remarkable example of this 'life after death' behaviour can be found in wild oat seeds, which have a whisky 'tail' which straightens when wet but curls and rotates as it dries, literally drilling the seed into the ground.



## Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

**W**INTER storms usually produce some good seabird movements and last weekend's two days of strong northerly winds and rough seas were no exception. Large numbers of little auks were swept from the Atlantic into the North Sea. As they battled to return northwards, they provided some excellent sea-watching for those determined enough to brave the elements.

More than 300 passed Whitburn with smaller numbers logged right along the coast from locations including Burniston, Saltburn and several headlands in Northumberland. A few pomarine skuas, velvet scoters and Iceland gulls also featured. Among common species, the season's first returning gannets and good numbers of fulmars also appeared. I enjoyed watching some of these gannets and fulmars planing into the teeth of the gale, skimming through the deep troughs and riding the up-draughts from wavetops. Both species are superbly designed for

life in rough seas. I know we shouldn't attribute human sentiments to birds, but whenever I see them like that I cannot help but feel that they really enjoy the elements.

Ring ouzels are always one of our earliest spring migrants but occasional individuals, particularly males, can remain in winter. That probably explains the discovery this week of one feeding around a beet pile at Roxby, North Yorkshire. I recall once finding a superb male on New Year's Day during a winter when several others remained in the region. The pick of the rarities this week was also in North Yorkshire, a drake American wigeon in a gathering of 400 common wigeon at Nosterfield.

The recent RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch could break records. 115,000 people submitted sightings of four million birds within a couple of days, the biggest and fastest response recorded. Organisers are now appealing for everyone else to submit their counts by February 16.