

1. WENSLEY BRIDGE TO AYSGARTH

This is part of a longer walk up the River Ure in Wensleydale and follows the river as far as footpaths allow. The river meanders between Redmire and West Witton and is joined by a main tributary, Bishopdale Beck, just below Aysgarth. Lower Wensleydale is rich farmland with Bolton Castle set in an elevated position on the north side just above and to the west of lovely Bolton Hall. Keep a look out for buzzards who are present in this area from their base on Preston Scar.

The walk is about 5 1/2 miles long and should take about 3 hours. O.S. Landrangers 98 and 99 are recommended, which show footpaths. You may wish to take copies and stick these together, to save using two maps. The area is rich in wildlife, including Canada geese, near Wanlass.

Start on the south side of the river bridge at Wensley, a charming little place, and take the riverside path through the pinewoods looking out for chaffinches and tits. In just under a mile, the road which has been following the path, moves away to the south and the walk becomes more peaceful. The path soon meets the access road crossing the river to Bolton Hall, which is set in beautiful parkland. Take a small detour to the bridge and look up and down the river as you could well see swans, shelduck and goosanders. There is a great view here of Bolton Hall directly ahead. If you look over the parapet you can often see trout and grayling on the unusual paved bed of the river. Retrace your steps to the path through the fields and in the third field cross to the river bank. Stop here to admire the excellent view which is helped by the bank height being in your favour. Look out for oystercatchers, which favour the lagoons on the opposite bank and pheasant in the parkland. The path now drops down to a lush meadow and, keeping to the riverside, continue along the next straight stretch and listen for geese noises, also watching for them on the far bank of the river as you approach the next left hand bend. There are islands here and a colony of Canada geese have taken up residence in their hundreds. The islands no doubt keep them safe, to some extent, from predators. The river turns away right soon and there is a very pretty wooded section opposite Redmire, and you soon hear the gentle sounds of Redmire force, a series of low falls. Spend a little time here to rest and enjoy the falls and watch for wagtails catching insects and dippers collecting caddis larvae from the bed of the shallower sections of water. The next mile of the walk is quite splendid and very quiet as the nearest farms are quite some distance away and the far bank is also deserted. Use your binoculars to watch for wildlife. There are goosanders on the river here and in early summer they are very easy to identify, the ducks being black and white and the females grey backed, with dark brown head and neck. They are fish eating ducks and have a long serrated bill. They swim around with their heads under the surface looking for fish, before diving to pursue them! Eventually the path by the river meets the bridleway from Redmire that crosses the river going south. Here you can have another rest and try out the enormous stones that have recently been placed in a horseshoe shape in the river bed to act as horse stepping stones! Cross the river a few times to get the hang of it.

You can continue the riverside path in the wooded belt by the river or take the bridleway going south. Both of these lead within half a mile to rejoin the road at the bridge over Bishopdale Beck. You need to cross by this stone bridge to allow you to move further upstream. Rejoin the footpath on the left side of the track to Hestholme and cross the field diagonally towards the river. After three more fields the path drops down to the river bank below some rapids and this is a great place to use your glasses on the river upstream, see if you can spot mallard, sandpipers, swifts and wagtails. Follow the path as it now climbs up the bank and passes above the mainly holly wood, and look across the river at the rocky river cliffs, home to jackdaws, until you come to the lower and best falls. The falls are quite magnificent, especially after heavy rain higher up the dale. Skirting the riverside wood, now a mixture of beech, birch, rowan, larch, ash and large mature beech with the rounded drumlins on your left, you come to a high point where you can see the middle falls through the trees, before the path enters a conifer wood. You soon emerge to cross a pasture and enter the east side of the churchyard at Aysgarth itself. Turn left at the road up the hill to the large car park, where the walk ends. You can reward yourself with some refreshment in the Palmer Flatts Hotel at the top of the hill. There is plenty to see and do in Aysgarth village, a little further on, or you can visit the information centre down the hill and across the bridge and also the museum in the old mill by the river, that at one time made red shirts for Mussolini's army.

Walkers tip:

Remember to take binoculars with you in the summer to help you birdwatch and always travel upstream along rivers to best view waterfalls. You tend to get closer to waterfowl this way as they often face upstream, whilst on the water.

