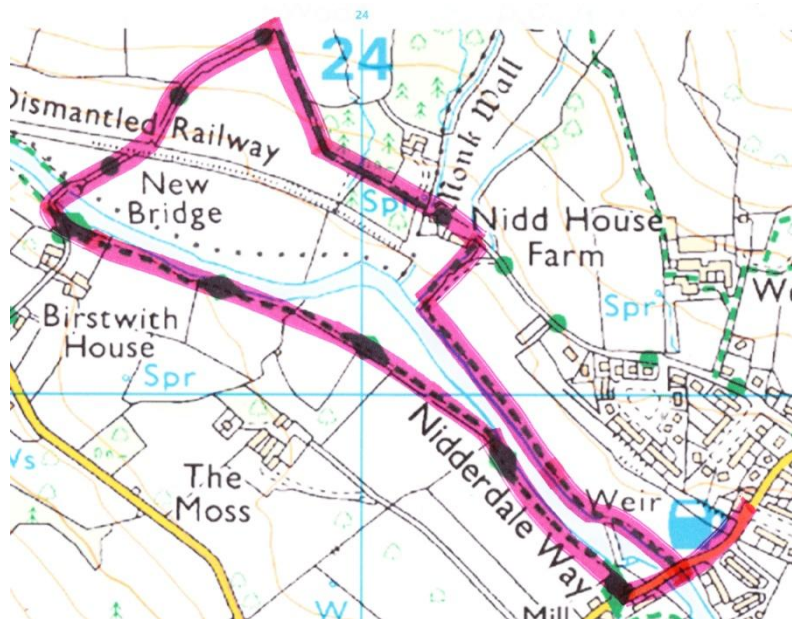


# PACKHORSE BRIDGE WALK

A delightful casual riverside walk with interesting wildlife and many heritage features



**Start:** The Station Hotel, Birstwith

**Distance:** 2 miles (approx.)

**Time:** Allow one and a half hours to two hours, although the walk can be completed in an hour at a brisk pace.

**Buses:** A regular service between Harrogate and Pateley Bridge, number 24, get off at Broomfield

**Facilities:** The only facilities available on this walk are at the pub.

**Description:** It can be muddy in places but generally a flat easy walk. You may encounter cattle or sheep on this walk so keep dogs on a lead. There are several stiles to negotiate so the walk may not be suitable for all.

- The walk starts from the pub car park.
- Turn right towards the river and go through the gate and over the stile just before the river bridge. There is a weir to the left hand side.
- Continue along the river and along the edge of the field.
- When you reach the hedge the path turns right, follow it up a metalled road and turn left past the houses clustered round Nidd House Farm.
- Continue along the track with the wood on your left. The path leads uphill alongside the wood and enters an open field.
- Walk alongside the wall until you reach a gate on your left, be careful not to miss it. If you reach the top of the field you have gone too far.
- Go through the gate on your left and drop down onto Tinker Lane. Follow the lane down to the old railway track.
- Cross over the railway line and shortly you reach the Packhorse Bridge.
- Cross over the bridge and take the stile on your immediate left.
- Follow the riverside path across a few fields until you reach Birstwith Cricket Ground. The footpath doesn't enter the cricket ground but continues along the boundary edge away from the riverside. Swarcliffe Hall can be seen on the hillside on the right.
- At the end of the field climb over the pair of stiles and walk alongside the field keeping to the field edge. Do not allow your dog to foul this area.
- Eventually you will reach Birstwith and the goit or mill race.
- Walk to the road and turn left to cross the river bridge.
- Continue towards The Station where a warm welcome, fine ales and excellent food await you.

## **POINTS OF INTEREST**

### **The Mill**

The weir was used to power Birstwith Mill. It was once known as Wreaks Mill and there was originally a corn mill nearby until in the 1790's a cotton spinning mill was erected. It was taken over by the Greenwood family in 1805. There is a date on the goit gates of 1822 which is presumably when the weir was built. The river is unusually straight – it may have been straightened when the weir was built.

### **Ancient Boundary**

Just past the farm through a gate you will see an old stone trough. The wall alongside is the old monk's wall and marks the boundary between Birstwith and Hartwith parishes. The trough is particularly splendid and may indicate that in medieval times it was used as a washing facility to ensure that the plague was not passed from parish to parish.

### **Woodland, Walls and Tracks**

The woodland is thought to be an ancient woodland due to the large number of stones on its floor and the many ancient woodland plants within it. It has been replanted in recent times and is called Catstone Wood, perhaps indicating that the wild cat once inhabited these parts!

The walls in this area have large stones called orthostats in their base, an indicator of a very old wall. There are also earthworks in this field and the Hartwith Heritage Group believes that there may have been houses here in the past. The area is also where a number of tracks meet and there is evidence of an outgang, a cattle herding system of walling further up. The houses therefore may have been connected with droving although there is no clear evidence.

One of the tracks is called Tink(l)er Lane; tinkers were itinerant sales folk who walked between villages with their wares.

### **T'new Brig**

The Packhorse Bridge is called New Bridge ("t'new brig") because it replaced an older structure. It also features in the ancient rhythmical direction, "Up Swincliffe, down Swarcliffe An' ower t'new brig inta Hartwith". It was built around the 1820's.

### **Swarcliffe Hall & The Station Hotel**

The Greenwood family, who also owned cotton mills in Keighley, bought Swarcliffe Hall in 1805 and bought land in the surrounding area in the early nineteenth century. The hall was rebuilt in 1848 by Hawkins for Frederick Greenwood, whose daughter Mary married Hawkins in 1853. They also owned Wreaks Mill. The Greenwoods were responsible for building both Birstwith Church, dedicated to St James (1857-58) and Birstwith School. The estate was sold off in 1949. The Station Hotel, Birstwith was sold for £8,000 and bought by the Ramsden Brewers. It was described as "an attractive and substantially built property well situated in the village of Birstwith, close to the railway station".

### **Wildlife**

This area teems with wildlife and for the careful observer can bring rich rewards. Goosander, dipper and kingfisher are probable and swallows and house martins swoop through the sky.