

Wildlife Walk – 6 miles

Upper Wharfedale, Yorkshire

Discover a landscape of limestone pavement, glaciated valleys and flower-rich hay meadows in the glorious setting of the Yorkshire Dales. The farming of this area has moulded and created many interesting wildlife habitats: from hillside streams and craggy outcrops to blanket bog and dry-stone walls.

Getting there

Map & grid ref: OS Landranger 98: SD904790

Road: Yockenthwaite, 3 ml north west of Buckden, off the B6160

Bike: off-road cycling is permitted on bridleways, 13 ml signed on-road cycle route from Skipton to Kettlewell (around 5 ml from Buckden). See www.sustrans.org.uk.

Bus/Rail: Pride of the Dales no.72 from Skipton  to Buckden, also buses from Leeds  and Ilkley  (Sun, April-Oct)

Facilities and contact

Roadside parking at Yockenthwaite, pubs at Cray and Hubberholme. An exhibition of the area's history at Townhead Barn, Buckden, also car park, toilets, cafes, pubs. YHA hostel in Kettlewell. NT hill-walking leaflet and other trail guides from the Yorkshire Dales National Park centre, Grassington or by contacting us at upperwharfedale@nationaltrust.org.uk or tel: 01729 830416.

Points of interest

- **Flora:** roadsides bloom with wild flowers such as the aniseed-scented sweet cicely and pink splashes of bistort. Summer sees blue meadow cranesbill, fragrant meadowsweet and yellow rattle (it is said that when the seeds rattle, it is time to cut the meadow), bird's eye primrose, blue moorgrass and carnivorous common butterwort.
- **Woodland:** the limestone pavement in Strans Wood is made up of blocks ('clints') and cracks ('grikes'). Wild thyme, limestone bedstraw and bird's-foot trefoil inhabit the clints and shade-loving plants like hart's tongue fern, and caught tree seeds grow in the grikes.
- **Birds:** wading birds such as curlew and lapwing are seen in good numbers in spring. The meadows are also important for breeding yellow wagtail. The birdlife on the rivers and streams is quite different with ducks, goosander, kingfisher and grey wagtail. Dippers perch on boulders in fast-flowing streams preying on aquatic invertebrates.
- **Animals:** see brown hares 'boxing' in March. The limestone caves provide an important shelter for hibernating bats. You may see bats flitting around the river catching insects at dusk.
- **Invertebrates:** tiny Craven door snails on old walls and in moist shaded rocks; butterflies like the northern brown argus (associated with common rock rose) and the green-veined white.
- **River Wharfe:** varied bird and mammal life on the river surface, as described above, but below the water are many aquatic creatures. Bullhead (a small fish) and crayfish may be revealed on lifting a stone; and brown trout, eel and grayling are also present, indicating clean water.

NT places nearby

Braithwaite Hall, Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, Brimham Rocks, East Riddlesden Hall, Malham Tarn Estate



Drystone walls are typical of the Dales landscape. The hay meadows enclosed within them can be spectacular in late spring and summer when the wildflowers blossom

NTPL/Michael Caldwell



Melancholy thistles and many other meadow flowers can be seen in summer along the roadsides of Upper Wharfedale

Andy Cage



The common blue butterfly flies from May to October and is often seen over grassland. It is particularly associated with the plant, birds-foot trefoil which provides food for the caterpillars

Simon Ovenden

'A walk to lift the spirits: the hay meadows in summer are packed with wildflowers and the last section of the walk follows the River Wharfe where trout rise for insects, and oystercatcher and wagtails are seen among the shingle banks'

Stephen Morley, NT Nature Conservation Adviser, north east

Distance, terrain and accessibility

Moderately energetic circular walk of approx. 6 ml (9½ km). There is a rather steep climb from Yockenthwaite then it's fairly flat until the descent out of Cray. There's a short stretch of road into Hubberholme.

Route and directions

1. Start in Yockenthwaite (meaning Eoghan's clearing in a wood) Bridge and follow the footpath signposted to Scar House. Turn right off the farm track at another footpath sign, going through Strans Wood and emerge on to the open hillside.

2. In 1652 George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, stayed at Scar House and converted the farmer. The house later became a Quaker meeting place. A small enclosure with five trees here marks an old burial ground.

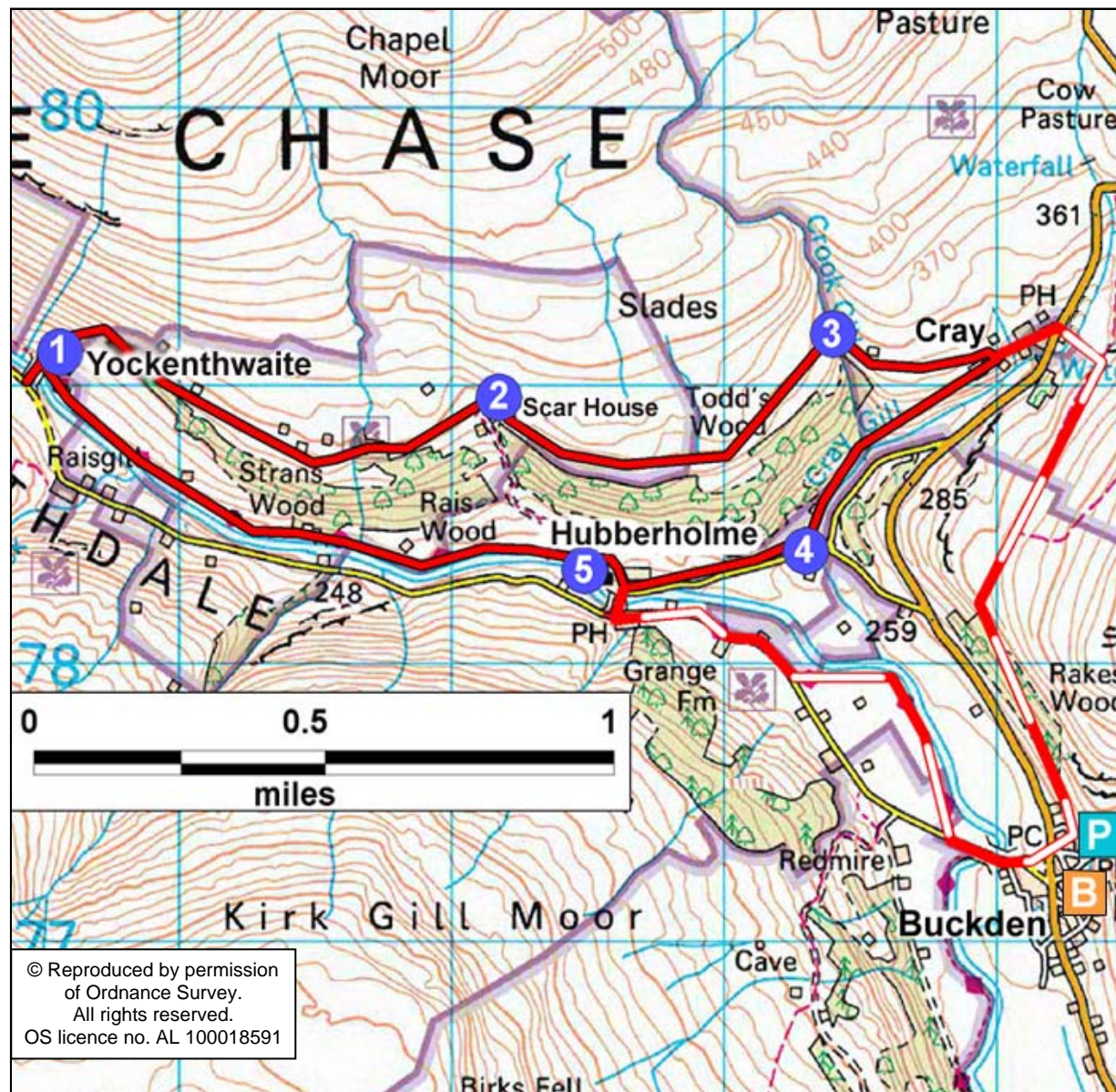
Continue towards Cray, keeping the woodland boundary on your right. (For a shorter walk, turn right at Scar House and follow the track into Hubberholme). Enjoy the view down Wharfedale's glaciated valley with its wide floor and ice-carved steep sides.

3. Cross Crook Gill and carry on through hay meadows to Cray. Enjoy the wildflowers and lots of birds throughout spring and summer. Hay is a valuable crop to farmers and it can suffer if trampled by too many feet, so please walk in single file.

4. Drop down to your right when entering Cray and follow a footpath along Cray Gill to a road. Turn right and walk along it for ¼ ml until you reach Hubberholme.

5. Return to Yockenthwaite via a footpath behind Hubberholme church and follow this route beside the river all the way back.

There are lots of other interesting places to discover around here. With an optional extra 3 miles on this route you can visit Buckden which has an exhibition of the area's history at Townhead Barn. Take the fellside path from Cray to get there, then take a riverside route from Buckden over to Hubberholme and rejoin this walk.



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