

# THE COAST TO COAST WALK

ST BEES TO ROBIN HOOD'S BAY

by Terry Marsh

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JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,  
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL  
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*Front cover:* South-facing view along Haweswater to Speaking Crag (Stage 4)

banks enlivened in spring by the bright yellow of lesser celandine and marsh marigolds. Heading downstream, Park Bridge is soon encountered (but not crossed), and after a short wander away from the beck to follow a minor stream lined with trees, a wider track forms, rising slightly to cross a side stream to a gate and step-stile. Turn right along a fence line, climbing easily to pass to the right of High Park barn. ►

Shortly after the barn, bear half-left across pasture to a prominent gate and stile, about 200m away. Now cross two more fields on indistinct green tracks to reach Rawhead Farm, where a stile gives on to the farm access, keeping right of the buildings to a minor metalled roadway.

Cross the road and traverse a short damp stretch, bearing left through gorse before dropping to a road again near **Rosgill Bridge**. ►

Do not cross Rosgill Bridge, but turn right onto a broad farm track, with the River Lowther off to the left. A short way on, turn onto the track leading up to farm buildings, but immediately go left (do not climb the farm track) on a narrow path beside a wall to a stepped and gated stile in a wall corner. Moving on, roughly parallel to a continuing wall and then a fence across a pasture to pass an area of low crags known as Fairy Crag.

Keeping ahead, a few more minutes brings the route to a gate and a delectable corner where Parish Crag Bridge spans Swindale Beck, a tributary of the River Lowther.

Climb steps above the bridge, and then strike directly across the ensuing field to a group of ruined farm buildings on the skyline. Pass through the enclosure there, and after a gate bear right to meet a minor road at a bend.

Head up the road for about 200m, and turn left through a gate at a signpost. Cross boggy ground to a gate, and through this cross an ancient earthwork in the form of a water-filled ditch and mound. Now take to an indistinct green path towards a wall. As the wall bears right, follow it briefly, but then pull half-left, crossing the shoulder of a sloping pasture dotted with several small

Briefly, there is a fine retrospective view of the fells surrounding Mardale and the lower ground northwards of the Lowther valley.

Rosgill Bridge spans the River Lowther, which flows from Wet Sleddale to meet the Eamont near Penrith, and between here and Shap Abbey the way is never far from its company or influence.

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granite erratic boulders. On the brow of the pasture, Shap Abbey appears to the right, not immediately obvious among its ring of trees. Drop to cross a stream and keep on to reach and pass through a wall gap high above the River Lowther.

Through the gap, bear right and soon strike across a sloping pasture, aiming for the abbey. On approaching the abbey, take to a narrow path (not easily located) that crosses a slight hollow above the river, and climb to a gate in a wall. Through the gate, the route bears left, away from the abbey, to cross Abbey Bridge into a small car park, and then goes forward along an access road to climb out of the river valley.

### SHAP ABBEY

*Shap Abbey ruins*



The abbey at Shap was one of the many monastic houses established in England during the 12th century. It belonged to an order founded by the German Saint Norbert, and owes its foundation to a baron named Thomas son of Gospatric, who held lands in the Westmorland of William of Lancaster, the feudal lord of Kendale and Wyresdale.

Towards the end of his life, Thomas made arrangements for the establishment of an abbey on his own estates at Preston in Kendale, but

Take care crossing the access road, both to avoid the huge lorries that use it, and to minimise the quantity of cloying limestone mud sticking to your boots.

limestone plateau, soon joining a broad, stony track, although not one frequented by the huge lorries that travel the quarry access. ◀

Across the access, bear left along the track, towards the hidden hamlet of **Oddendale**, but as it is approached, bear right, and shortly leave the road leading into Oddendale for a broad, gently rising track on the right – a Roman road – striking across the moorland expanse of **Crosby Ravensworth Fell**, and now within the extended Yorkshire Dales National Park.

**Oddendale**, which sits on the carboniferous limestone of an escarpment that runs north-westwards from Kirkby Stephen towards Carlisle, is very much a shy and secluded place, a world apart from external haste and harassment. It lies at the heart of a vast area renowned for its wealth of prehistoric communities, no less than 11 early British settlements being found within a short compass. Oddendale stone circle (NY 592 129), a double ring of stones, lies only a short distance from the Roman road, and is worth a short diversion. An indistinct grassy path leads to it.

The circle is part of the complex of cairns, stone circles and standing stones that includes the ‘Shap Stone Avenue’ of monuments, which is itself one of three important complexes of megalithic monuments in East Cumbria. The circle has seen a number of stages in its history that reaches back almost 5000 years, and is just a small part of a legacy around Shap and Crosby Ravensworth that is rich in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age field monuments.

The track continues rising easily, eventually leveling as it passes stands of woodland at Potrigg. Another plantation now appears on the left and soon a waymark is reached at a fork in the track (NY 598 119). Here, bear left, descending on a green path to the corner of the plantation off to the left. Beyond, a path climbs away from the plantation to cross a limestone edge and onward to

STAGE 6

Kirkby Stephen to Keld

Start	Kirkby Stephen town centre (NY 775 086)
Finish	Keld road junction (NY 891 010)
Distance	Blue route: 11 miles (17.5km); red route: 11 miles (17.9km); green route: 12 miles (19.2km)
Total ascent	Blue route: 2115ft (645m); red route: 2085ft (635m); green route: 2120ft (647m)
Total descent	Blue route: 1575ft (480m); red route: 1535ft (468m); green route: 1575ft (480m)
Walking time	5–6hr
Terrain	Farmland leads upwards to the potential quagmire that surrounds Nine Standards Rigg. This, once civilisation is left beyond, is upland farming land and then bleak moorland beyond, the crossing of which ideally requires a fair day.
Accommodation	None en route

The main object today is the crossing of the watershed of Britain on Nine Standards Rigg. Because of the bogginess of the terrain and the threat of excessive erosion, the National Park has plotted three routes across for different seasons. The original route – now marked as the ‘blue route’ – is taken to be the default route here, but the other options are also described for those passing through in spring or summer. They do not vary greatly in length or ascent. The state of the terrain is the main consideration. The ‘red route’, which heads more or less south from Nine Standards Rigg over Lady Dike Head and Cogill Knott is recommended for May to July, while the ‘green route’, which avoids Nine Standards Rigg takes a lower line around the head of Dukerdale.

The route south of Nine Standards Rigg has always been problematic, because of the state of the ground conditions which are fragile, extremely boggy and with little vegetation. At times it had been difficult at best to follow the route originally proposed: walkers have found themselves lost here and in 2016 a walker became so immersed in the peat that the Kirkby Stephen Mountain Rescue team had to be called out to free him.

To combat this, almost 400 metres of reclaimed stone flags have been laid along parts of the route. These flags float on top of the damaged peat

## NINE STANDARDS RIGG

Arrival at Nine Standards Rigg is a moment of some occasion. It lies on the watershed of Britain, that great north–south divide sending waters one way to the Irish Sea, and the other to the North Sea, although there are times on rainy days when you gain the distinct impression its sends them nowhere at all!

No one has yet come up with any historical fact about the origins of the Nine Standards. They stand on the former county boundary between Westmorland and the North Riding of Yorkshire, and, more than likely, therein lies their origin, although one fanciful notion suggests they were built to persuade marauding Scots that an English army was camped up there, which as Neil Hanson points out ‘suggests a contempt for Scottish intelligence that even the English would find hard to maintain’.

Happily, after a prolonged period of neglect, the cairns have seen much restoration in recent years and are worthy of heritage protection. Recent research has shown that the nine cairns appear on old maps, and reference has been found in documents from the Brough Court indicating their existence as early as 1507. It is evident that they have adorned the Kirkby Stephen skyline for more than 500 years, and possibly much longer. Low-level oblique aerial photographs of the summit reveal the possible outline of a rectangular enclosure with the cairns running diagonally through it, and this may indicate some underlying archaeology.

On a clear and fine day there are few places that give a wider, more inspiring panorama of the massive, sprawling beauty of the wild moorlands of northern England than Nine Standards. It is the most far-reaching view seen on the crossing, extending from the mounds of Cross Fell, the Dun Fells and Mickle Fell in the north, to the lofty escarpment of Wild Boar Fell across the upper Vale of Eden. It is truly a place apart – somewhere certainly to take a break, to cast your eyes back the way you have come, to the now hazy-blue Lakeland heights. From here the route heads into the Dales, and Swaledale in particular, and although there is nothing to come that is higher than Nine Standards, it would be a mistake to think it is downhill all the way from here.

From the trig, both the Blue Route and the Red Route head south in the direction of **White Mossy Hill** to a signpost indicating the direction of these two seasonal routes.

### **Blue Route (August to November)**

From the signpost take to a paved section that heads left across the moorland terrain, then descends eastwards,

keeping to the north of Craygill Sike, to that stream's eventual confluence with Whitsundale Beck.

**Whitsun Dale** is a charming retreat, echoing to the call of curlew, buzzard and golden plover, where, on balmy days, the breeze sighs a soft accompaniment to a melody of light and shade, herons patrol the stream, and the miles that have gone and are to come seem like a distant world. Close by, the ever-growing beck fashions an indolent course, unhurried, reluctant yet to seek out its destiny of joining the Swale. Sheepfolds proliferate, their sometime occupants dotted about the fellsides, but there is otherwise little to betray the hand of man in this secluded spot.

Keeping on the west side of Whitsundale Beck, continue along its course to fenced enclosures at Fawcett Intake, where a stile facilitates onward progress to intercept the alternative route at NY 855 030, near a ruined barn just above Ney Gill.

### Red route (May to July)

The red route also makes use of the path beside Faraday Gill, climbing east to the **Nine Standards** and then strikes south to the trig and undistinguished **White Mossy Hill** and to the signpost. From here the route continues in a roughly southerly direction across gloopy bog now partially flagged. ► The route bears gently to the right and then left towards a rocky outcrop (NY 828 043) and a pile of stones. Onward the objective is a tall but skinny cairn (NY 830 038). From this, continue roughly southward, basically targeting a track (not marked on the OS map) that leads east to rejoin the blue route.

Depending on the conditions, you may not precisely intercept this track, but an alternative objective that is more re-assuring is the Nateby to Keld road (**B6270**), and this will serve just as well, leaving it at Rowantree Gill (NY 831 028).

In 2016 and 2017, almost 400 metres of flagging were laid across the worst sections of Nine Standards Rigg. The flags start south of the trig point and weave through bare peat to reach the county boundary. The flags then split and cover part of both the blue and red route (approx 80 metres each way). This section was completed by the North pennines AONB. The Yorkshire Dales National Park has also carried out some flagging in Whitsundale.



It is also feasible to stay alongside the wall, rather than climbing up and away, if conditions allow, following this around the head of Dukerdale.

### Green route (December to April)

Apart from walking the road all the way, this is the easiest (but longest) way from Kirkby Stephen, but does not visit Nine Standards Rigg (although you could make an up-and-down diversion using Faraday Gill).

Follow the main line as far as the turning into Faraday Gill, but then continue parallel with a wall, but gradually climbing from it to a sign at a junction that points, right, to a wind shelter. From here, drop back towards the wall, crossing Rollinson Gill (boggy) and then follow the wall as it gently descends across moorland to the Nateby to Keld road (**B6270**, NY 809 042). ◀ When the wall changes direction to head in a northwest direction, walk southwest and then south to reach the road.

Turn left along the road (B6270), and follow it for 1¾ miles (2.8km) to a steep-sided gully where Rowantree Gill meets the road (NY 831 028) – on a bad or tiring day there is merit in staying on the surfaced road all the way to Keld. Climb sharply out of the gill on an improving path that rises across moorland to intercept both the Red Route near Little Gill and, a little further, on a more pronounced track. Follow this past a shooting hut (NY 840 028) to be reunited with the main (Blue) line not far beyond a line of grouse butts that drop down the north side of Ney Gill.

Once the routes have combined, the onward way through the dale tends to keep above the stream, preferring the flanks of adjoining moorland to the twists and turns of the dale bottom. On approaching **Ravenseat** (possible refreshments at the farm), the route swings round beside a wall to cross Ney Gill on stepping stones, and then down to meet a minor road by which it enters this remote farming community.

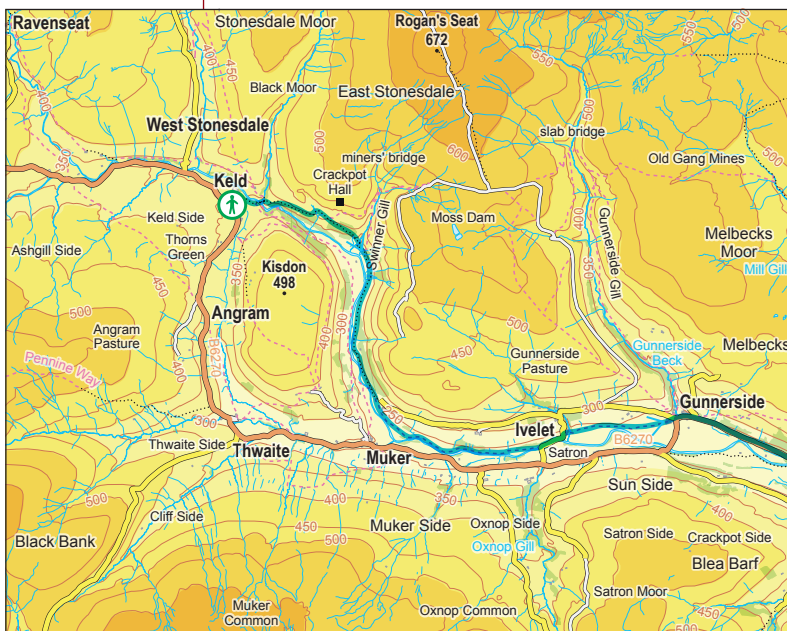
Cross the bridge at Ravenseat and immediately go right, crossing a stream to a gate. Pass through the gate, and shortly turn right again through a gated stile setting the route off along the eastern bank of Whitsundale Beck.

The onward route is never in doubt. Pleasant walking now ensues, the beck never far distant and providing

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Approaching Ramps Holme Bridge the path forks (SD 910 986), one branch ascending left, the other continuing ahead to the bridge. Take the path towards the bridge but, unless bound for **Muker**, keep on past it to another fork (both directions being signposted 'Gunnernside', though that to the left makes use of a minor roadway, and avoids the walk along the river). Take the right branch and continue to the first of many – very many – gated (and ungated) squeeze-stiles, to the right of a barn.

And on it goes – meadows, walls, barns, squeeze-stiles, buttercups and daisies in a seemingly endless succession until, at the end of one pasture, the path having re-joined the Swale, it leads on to a broad farm track, with a narrow riverside path dropping to the right. Take the riverside path, through the inevitable squeeze-stile, until the river and a wall on the left, close the meadow



Press on past the ruins along a narrow trod through undergrowth, and then by an improving path climb an easy brow before aiming across the next field to a stile in the far corner. Descend along a field boundary (left), and in the next field aim a quarter right on a narrow path to reach a concealed stile on the edge of more woodland. In company with a small stream, continue to a driveway leading into, and through, the hamlet of **Colburn**, crossing a bridge and passing a pub before coming to a lane end.

As the lane bends right, go forward on the village lane, and continue to a signpost (on the right) indicating a turning (left) at The Barn. Keep ahead to a field gate. Go along the edge of a pasture but leave it before a fence at the end of the second pasture by bearing left and shortly right towards St Giles Farm.

Nearby is the site of **St Giles Hospital**, one of many run under monastic orders, although there is little to see on the ground from the route. The site was excavated as recently as 1990, and revealed a large number of skeletons that were all removed to York for further research.

Do not enter St Giles Farm, but go left on a path to meet its access track at a stile. Bear left, and only a short while later go left over a step-stile and forward along a field boundary, crossing the boundary fence at another step-stile tucked in a corner about halfway down the field edge. Now a path continues along the top of a bank above the Swale, later merging with a broad track that leads on to Thornbrough Farm.

On approaching the farm, pass through a gate and go forward past farm buildings onto a gravel track. As this swings to the right, leave it and descend very steeply, left, beside a fence to the banks of the Swale. Pass beneath the A1(M), and from a kissing-gate on the other side go forward towards a defunct railway bridge. Pass beneath this too, and on the other side circle right at the edge of the racecourse overflow parking area and use steps to climb

up to the railway trackbed. Cross the bridge, and then descend steps to gain a surfaced track that leads forward to the A6055, joining it at Catterick Bridge.

Pass under the A1 and press on, keeping straight ahead, to pass beneath a defunct metal railway bridge, shortly beyond which the route bears to the right towards Catterick racecourse, crossing the end of an overflow car park to reach the **A6136** (the old A1), with Catterick Bridge on the left.

**Catterick Bridge**, more or less as we now see it, was commissioned by seven local gentries in 1422, and built by three stonemasons, each of whom put their mason's mark on the stones of the old bridge. The bridge took three years to build, at a total cost of £173 6s 8d.

Beside the bridge, the **Bridge House Hotel** (closed when visited in 2019), was also built in more spacious days, and had a style and charm often lacking in these days of mechanisation and standardisation – its atmosphere and tradition dated back to the old coaching days. In 1442, the hotel was known as the George and Dragon, and an important halt between London and Scotland. Until 1950 the present hotel was owned by the Lawsons of Brough Hall, Catterick.

The area around the hotel has great historical interest, dating to the time when Catterick Bridge was a Brigantian city, then known as '**Cherदारich**', meaning 'the camp by the water'. When the Romans arrived they extended the city into a great military centre, and Dere Street, the main Roman road to the north, forded the river at Catterick Bridge. The Romans renamed the area '**Cataractonium**', though this is an ancient British word, borrowed by the Romans.

Cross the road with care to a gated squeeze stile giving access to a meadow. Follow the Swale until after passing through an elongated pasture the route is diverted

deal with a couple of stiles either side of a sleeper bridge just before Moor House Farm. Head for a stile just before a gate. Go through the gate and around the farm perimeter to reach another gate. Through this, go left to a track junction, and left again past **Red House Farm**, and walk out along a broad track to reach the **B6271**.

Without touching upon the B-road, turn immediately right onto a signposted path that follows a field edge, and maintains much the same direction across lovely countryside to walk up to the ruins of **Stanhowe Cottages**. Keep on past the cottages, always at the field edge (either right or left), eventually to reach a field corner where an old gate gap gives onto an enclosed path that leads up to cottages at Ladybank House. Go past the cottages, and keep on to reach the B6271 once more.

Now follow the B-road, right, for a little over half a mile (1km), on the way passing Kiplin Hall. Just before **Ellerton Bridge**, a signposted bridleway on the right takes you through a gate, a hedge gap, and up a field edge to reach houses and cottages at Ellerton Hill. Keep forward past these to reach a T-junction at a lane. Turn left.

Walk down the lane until, just before a brick bridge, you can leave it by crossing a stile on the right. Follow the course of Bolton Beck on the left (all the way, in fact, to Bolton-on-Swale), initially round a field edge to an access track serving Layland's Farm. Cross this, and keep forward alongside the beck to a dilapidated bridge. Cross the bridge and turn right, still following the beck and a field-edge path across fields and stiles, until eventually the path runs into a field corner at the edge of **Bolton-on-Swale**. Turn left towards the **church**.

Opposite St Mary's Church, take the side road leading up to the B6271, near the village pump, and head right along the road for a short distance to a broad track, Flat Lane, on the left. Follow this through its various twists and turns until it almost emerges onto the B-road once more. Just before reaching the road, turn left along a wide field-edge path, and shortly keep onward beside a fence through the site of former gravel works to a gate giving into the end of a long pasture. Go forward along the left-hand edge, almost immediately encountering the **River Swale**, the first close encounter with the river that is to be followed almost to its very source.

Now follow the course of the river all the way to Catterick Bridge, where a gated squeeze-stile gives onto the A6055. Cross the road with care, going through a gate and then ahead on a surfaced track to steps leading up

onto a defunct railway trackbed and bridge. Cross the bridge, and descend steps on the other side, circling left at the edge of the overflow car park for the racecourse, to pass through a metal gate and beneath the A1(M).

From a gate beyond the A1(M), climb steeply left beside a fence to a gravel track leading, right, to Thornborough Farm. Pass the farm buildings to a gate.

Now keep forward beside fences on a broad track. When, later, the track dips to the right, leave it and go left onto a path along the top of a slope above the Swale. Keep on to a step-stile in a corner, and over this follow the right-hand field margin to another stile giving onto the access track to **St Giles Farm**. Head towards the farm, but soon leave it at a stile on the right. The path strikes across a field on the site of St Giles Hospital, to another stile, and then along the top edge of Colburn Beck Wood, shortly going left at a stile and along a field boundary to meet a farm access.

Turn right along the access and keep forward eventually to emerge on the edge of the village of Colburn at The Barn.

Turn right on the village lane, shortly going left to pass the Hildyard Arms, crossing a bridge, and then going ahead onto a quiet driveway leading into woodland and alongside a stream. Follow the accompanying path as it rises from the woodland to cross a field, and then another. At a stile, cross the next field to a slight brow, beyond which the path continues through a seasonally overgrown path to the ruins of Hagg Farm.

The path beyond Hagg Farm re-enters woodland, following a path that finally emerges into daylight at a stile, and not far from sewage works. Follow the boundary fence of the sewage works to meet its access road, and then press on to meet the main road (**A6136**) at a bend. Turn right along the road for about 700m, leaving it at a signposted road on the left, and continuing in front of a row of houses (Priory Villas) to pass between barns. In the field that follows, take a green path ascending slightly to the left until more woodland is entered, running out eventually on the edge of a playing field beneath the ramparts of **Richmond Castle**.

Follow the playing-field boundary ahead to reach the road into **Richmond**, and here turn right, cross Richmond Bridge, and then ascend ahead to the town centre via Bridge Street and New Street, finally to arrive at the market place.

If the stream is in  
spate backtrack to  
the farm bridge and  
locate a path on  
the opposite bank  
that will bring you  
to the same spot.

branch to Falling Foss, a delightful waterfall in a wooded setting – at its best after prolonged rain. Nearby, Midge Hall is then reached by a footbridge. A stone block set in a gate pillar here bears the inscription ‘Sneaton Lordship’.

Continue alongside the stream, with a larger, farm access bridge appearing on the left. Cross the access track and keep ahead to reach the stream at a ford. ◀

The path continues ahead to meet a broader forest trail, at which go right, to cross a stream by a footbridge, continuing ahead on an improving path, passing a pond with bulrushes on the left, and keeping onwards to reach the vicinity of May Beck car park.

On reaching May Beck Bridge, go immediately left on the road, doubling back and following the rising road to, and beyond, a bend at New May Beck farm. As the road straightens, leave it, right, at a broad footpath that heads out onto Sneaton Low Moor. Ignore the prominent path bearing left onto the moor. Instead, from a signpost, head initially half-right through rushes onto a path that leads to a mid-moor signpost, and then on farther to a gate in a wall, close by a scattered stand of pine. Through the gate, turn left for Hawsker (note the interesting milestone nearby, right), and parallel the wall on a path at times board-walked.

At a field corner near the B1416, turn right to a gate giving onto the B-road. Cross the road to a stile opposite.

Now follow a narrow trod through low heather scrub across what is to be the final stretch of moorland. The path, marked by an occasional guidepost, is frequently wet, and passes through a couple of boggy depressions. This short stretch rejoices in the name of **Graystone Hills**, an appellation taking much descriptive licence. With a final boggy flourish, the path arrives at a gate, close by a raised tumulus on the right. Bear left to a stile.

Keep forward in the ensuing pasture before bearing left to arrive at a stile in a fence beyond which lies a broad track between hedges, leading to a surfaced lane and later bearing right into Low Hawsker. Bear right into Back Lane, and shortly cross the A171 to reach **High Hawsker**. Here roadside benches invite a moment's respite.