

Walk 2

High Austby and Calvary



Distance: 3½ miles (5.5km)

Time: 2 to 3 hours

Terrain: Mainly riverside and woodland paths and tracks, but some steep and muddy sections, plus some steps may be slippery in wet weather.

Parking: Good public car parks in Ilkley town centre.

Public Transport: Metro Wharfedale line from Leeds, Bradford, X84 bus from Leeds and Otley

Start: Ilkley Manor House

Please abide by all Government guidance with regard to Covid-19.

This easy walk along the northern hillsides immediately above Ilkley, takes in the gentler, more densely wooded side of the valley whilst enjoying panoramic views back across the grey stone town in its magnificent moorland setting. There's also some interesting history to enjoy.

1. From the Manor House take the path to the immediate left hand side of the building, leading through a gateway, then alongside the fragment of Roman wall to reach the edge of Riverside Gardens park. Either follow the tarmac paths or head over the grass towards the riverside, where you should turn left to pass the Riverside Hotel, heading for Ilkley Old Bridge. (This lovely 17th century packhorse bridge, an Ilkley icon, was until the early 20th century, Ilkley's only crossing of the river. It also happens to be the official start point of the 81 mile Dales Way between Ilkley and the Lake District, one of Britain's most popular long distance footpaths.)

2. Cross the old stone bridge with its fine views of the river and surrounding hills then turn sharp left to take the riverside path upstream. This soon curves to join Nesfield Road. Cross, as if to go straight on uphill, turn left into Owler Park Road. Follow the road uphill past some very fine houses, some enjoying panoramic views across the dale. Where the road turns sharply right, look for a well signed footpath in the left hand corner. This leads to a lovely, narrow path through what are delightful bluebell woods in Spring, a woodland known as Owler Park. The path descends into a field. Head towards the narrow, gully in the wood ahead, crossing a tiny stream before ascending over two stiles to enter a field above Low Austby farmhouse. Cross to the fence at the far side of the field, turning sharp right uphill along the fence towards a stile, eventually reaching a gate and small closure below the handsome High Austby Farm.

3. Through here, bearing right through a narrow enclosure to locate a stone gap stile to the right of a gate into the house drive. Continue uphill to the lane. Turn right here, along walk along the lane towards the main junction with Owler Park Road, fine open views back over the dale to your right. When the lane turns right, keep ahead past gate posts along the narrower bridleway directly ahead. Soon you reach a fine residence known as Tivoli. After 250 yards, past fields and woods to left and right, look for a tall wooden gateway on the left, that used to be marked Calvary. This leads through dense rhododendrons into an extraordinary little garden – this is private land but the public have long been welcome. (Calvary is a series of elaborately carved sandstone sculptures of the twelve Stations of the Cross commissioned from an Italian sculptor in the 1850s, whilst he stayed as a guest

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of the local landowner Mr Peter Middleton of nearby Middleton Lodge. The Middletons were major landowners, an old Catholic family in the Ilkley area from Plantagenet times until the 20th century, and this garden celebrated their faith.)

4. Return to the track, but after a few yards go through the pedestrian gate, right, which leads to another permissive path, again through rhododendrons, to a gate above Middleton Lodge, the ancient home of the Middleton family. (The house, now a private residence, was for many years a religious retreat. A large crucifix on the lane above the Lodge which lead to the moors, was known by generation of ramblers as Catholic Gate for this reason.) Turn left at the gate along an enclosed way between fences to reach a lane by a gate. Turn right in front of cottages into what is now a lane, before bearing left above Middleton Grange, a new residential complex opposite the Lodge.

5. At the next junction, after a stone pillar, bear left again, to soon notice a remarkable 17th century carved milestone half hidden in long grass in the edge of the woodland to your left (indicating "Ripon" 15 miles via packhorse way across the moors. If that seems a remarkably short distance this was because these were Yorkshire Miles, somewhat longer than the modern statute mile).

6. Turn right at the next junction into Slates Lane, and after about 80 yards look for a gate on the right which leads into a large field. Cross, bearing left and keeping a straight line down the field to another stile ahead which leads into Middleton Woods. Bear left on the main path, but look for a clearly defined path after 200 yards which branches off right and heads down through the woods over two flights of steps over a stream and small wooden footbridge, eventually bearing right behind gardens to reach a narrow wooded gully to emerge in Curley Hill at a stile. Cross, then turn left and on your right after some 20 yards a path between the trees leads past Ilkley's Lido and Swimming Pool. Keep directly ahead past the Pool to the Denton Road. Cross continuing past the rugby ground to the riverside, bearing right to Middleton Bridge. It's a short uphill walk to the traffic lights, Brook Street and the town centre.

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