



Dacre Walls Walk, Dacre/Darley



Nidderdale
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Introduction

Our agricultural history - “written in stone”: The dry stone walls in Dacre Parish have a very long history, and the features described in this walk provide a glimpse of the land’s past use and management.

Refreshments are available at the Wellington Inn or Darley Mill Centre, both at the beginning/end of the walk.

Map

OS Explorer 298:
Nidderdale

Distance/Time

5.5 miles (9km)
3-4 hours

Starting Point

The Darley Mill Centre, Darley (SE 194598).

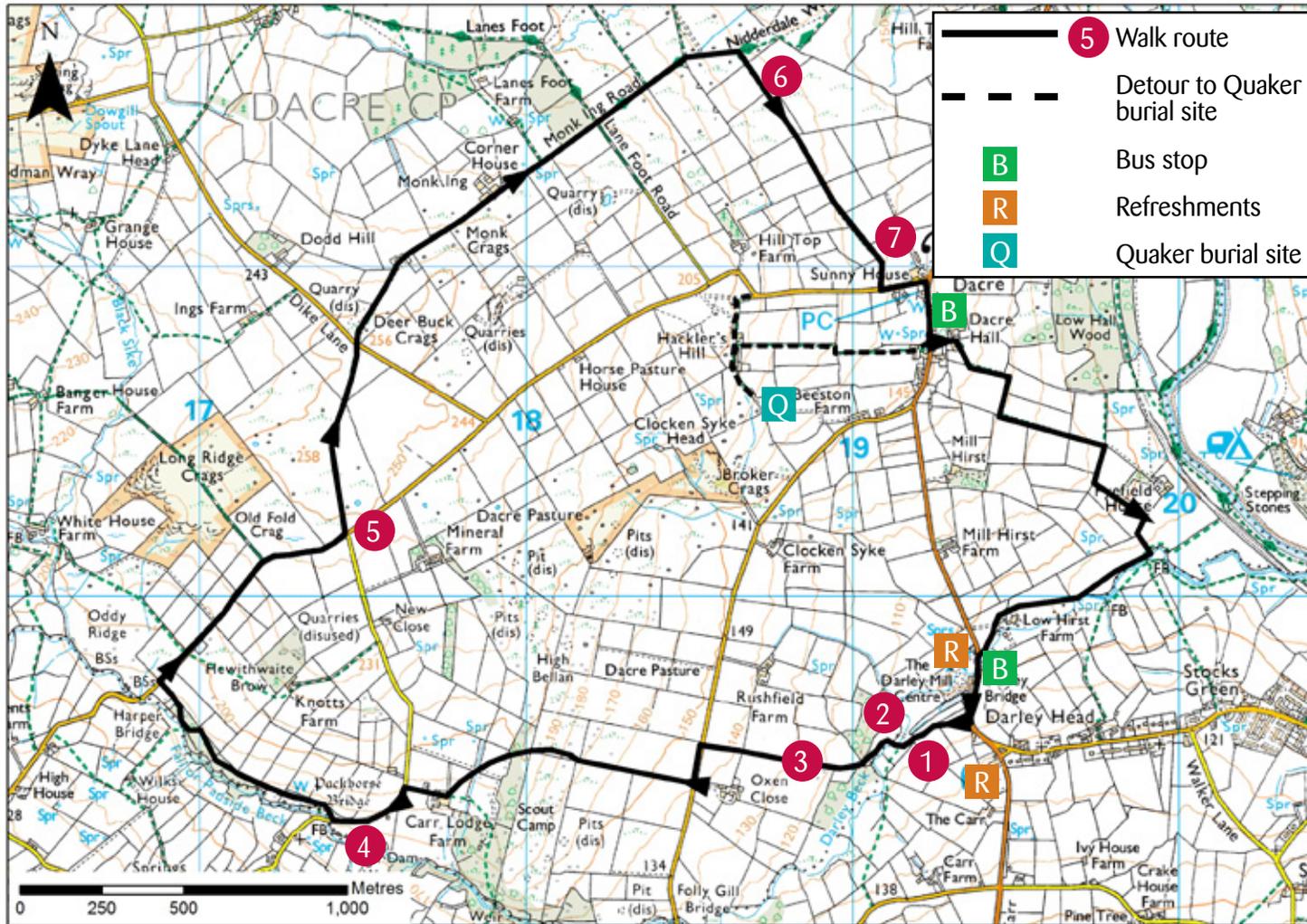
Terrain

This is a moderate route through fields with some tarmac roads and tracks. Walking boots are advisable as some parts of the trail can be wet, muddy and rough underfoot.

Useful Information

Off road car parking is available in Dacre village and you might find some roadside parking in Darley, but please park with care.

There is a regular bus service from Harrogate (Transdev Harrogate & District No.24) with stops on the route.



The Route

Starting at the Darley Mill Centre, walk up the hill for 100m then take the footpath on the right signposted for Dairy Lane. Follow the path to the bottom of the fields.

1. As you pass between these fields notice the stepped stiles and a Stang stoop. Stone stiles constructed within the line of the wall have proved a simple and durable way to allow people, but not livestock, access between fields. The Stang stoop was an early way to hold a simple gate in a stone gatepost, or stoop. Timber rails would be slotted into notches carved in the stoops forming a retractable wooden barrier. Whilst the rails have gone, the carved notches can still be seen.

After entering the third field, turn right over the low stone wall and walk over the footbridge and through the stoop or squeeze stile.

2. The stoop or squeeze stile is a vertical gap in the wall, within which two stone stoops are set approximately 45 cm apart. The distance between these stoops narrows towards the base to prevent the passage of livestock.

Bear left, alongside the stream and up the steps.

3. Notice a series of gates and walls located on the left halfway up this first field. This is thought to have been originally a medieval 'out gang', constructed to direct the sheep as they were brought in from Dacre Pasture to the lower-lying farms. This area would have been open pasture, but was enclosed during the 19th Century, hence its uniformity in appearance.

Continue up the slope, keeping the line of the wall boundary on your left and passing through one gate, and over one stile. Walk straight across this field to another stile, which takes you onto a minor road. Turn left and walk down the lane to the double gates on the right hand side of the road (opposite Oxen Close Farm). Take the right hand gate and walk in a straight line up the hill, over the wooden stile and into the woods.

Follow the path through the wood until you come to a stone stile. Through the stile walk diagonally left across the field looking out for a gate to lead you onto a track. Turn right onto the track and follow until you reach a road. Turn left downhill following the road.

4. As you near the ford at the bottom of the hill, look carefully at the far boundary wall of the field on your left. In front of this wall are four individually carved headstones, forming part of a sequence of similar stones along the northern side of Padside Beck. The adjacent dry stone wall marks the location of each headstone with a vertical joint or wall end. The meaning and age of these stones is a mystery. (Unfortunately they are not accessible from a public path so you will only be able to view them from the road.)

Cross the ford and look for a stile on the right taking you over the Packhorse Bridge. Turn left after the bridge towards a stile on your right. Follow the winding path through the trees and bracken keeping roughly to the line of the upper right hand wall.

The lower left-hand wall above Padside Beck marked the boundary of the Forest of Knaresborough.

You will eventually cross a stile onto another minor road. Turn right and walk up this road for about 10 minutes until you reach Dacre Pasture Lane off to the right, where you should look for a stile on the left.

5. Next to the stile notice the stone gate posts, carefully shaped with a rounded top and dressed to a high quality. These are a legacy of the Inghiby Estate's managed farms of the 19th Century.

The walk next passes through a large field, which often contains cattle including bulls. These will be of breeds allowed to share the field with you and are not likely to have any great interest in your presence. However, if you prefer, you may bypass the field by continuing along the road and turning left down the next road.

Cross the stile and strike out across this large field in the direction of the hill top, then bear slightly right to meet the step stile which exits onto another road. Turn left on the road, then immediately take the track on the right signed for 'Pasture Side.'

At the end of the track follow the way markers around the back of Pasture Side house and over the stile near the right hand corner of the field. Walk through a field of rushes in a straight line, then follow the way markers through Monk Ing Farm to reach a paved road which leads you to a junction with Lanes Foot Road. Here, continue straight on, along the route marked as 'Nidderdale Way'.

At the bottom, where the track bears left, follow the Nidderdale Way into the centre of the field then turn right to the gateway in the middle of the boundary wall and continue across the middle of the next field to a stile in the opposite wall.

6. Once over this stile you will notice a good example of a Cripple Hole in the left boundary wall. These features have been used since medieval times to regulate sheep movement between fields with the opening left unblocked to allow free passage, or barred by placing a large flagstone in front of the opening. 700 years of sheep breeding has resulted in a gradual increase in body size and fleece weight. Hence the size of this cripple hole can be used as a clue to its age.

The footpath next crosses a step stile then gates in four boundaries. Count as you go, then look for a small stile in the left-hand boundary wall, just beyond a gate. Take care as this is easily missed and you will need to pass through it!

7. The wall on the other side of this stile possesses the features of a pre-17th Century wall. The walls of this time tended to be sinuous, squat and broad. Also whilst modern wallers tend to build in clear 'courses', walls of this period have a more random placement of stones.

Orthostats, the large boulders at the base, were incorporated into the walls of this time, as in earlier periods.

Keeping this wall on your right, make your way to the stile at the corner of the field and out onto the road. Turn left and follow the road downhill to Dacre Top. Then turning right at the T-junction walk along the pavement for approximately 250m. Here take the path on the left-hand side of the road signposted for Pyefield Farm. (As a shorter alternative, you may be tempted to follow the road from this point back to the start. Please take great care if you do this - traffic here is fast and there are no pavements.)

Follow the track downhill taking care to look out for the way markers that sign the point where the right of way leaves the track off to the right before Pyefield Farm.

As you follow the way marked route to the beck you may notice that round river stones have been used to make some sections of the walls you pass.

As you approach the beck, turn right through a gate.

The boundary wall and beck will now be on your left hand side, follow the line of this wall towards Low Hirst Farm. When entering the field before the farm head slightly to right heading for a gate. Through the gate turn left heading back towards the beck. Follow the wall side on your left to the step stile in the corner of the field. Cross the road and return to the Darley Mill Centre.

Quaker Burial Ground

A short detour from the route will take you to the Quaker Burial Ground, some 600m west of Dacre, only reached by footpath from the village or Dacre Lane. The site was a former Friends Meeting House dating from the late 17c, and a burial ground which was in use from the late 17c until mid 19c. The Grade II listed site is in a beautiful and tranquil setting with views across lower Nidderdale.

Descendants of many of those mentioned in the burial records still live locally and, although the graves are unmarked, you are asked to show due respect.