

Hartwith Heritage Walk, near Summerbridge



Nidderdale
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Introduction

Hartwith means “stag wood”, and was first recorded in 1457 on a Fountains Abbey document. Hartwith has a long history of human activity and clues to this can be found on the route of this walk. During the last Ice Age the landscape was shaped by ice-sheets which retreated from Nidderdale over 10,000 years ago. A notable feature on this walk, particularly near Brimham, are the outcrops of carboniferous sandstone often called Millstone Grit.

Map

OS Explorer 298:
Nidderdale

Distance/Time

7.5 miles (12km)
3-4 hours

Starting Point

The walk does not have set start and finish points but, if you arrive by bus, Low Laithe is an ideal starting point. There is a Pay & Display car park at Brimham Rocks but note that it gets very busy at weekends in summer.

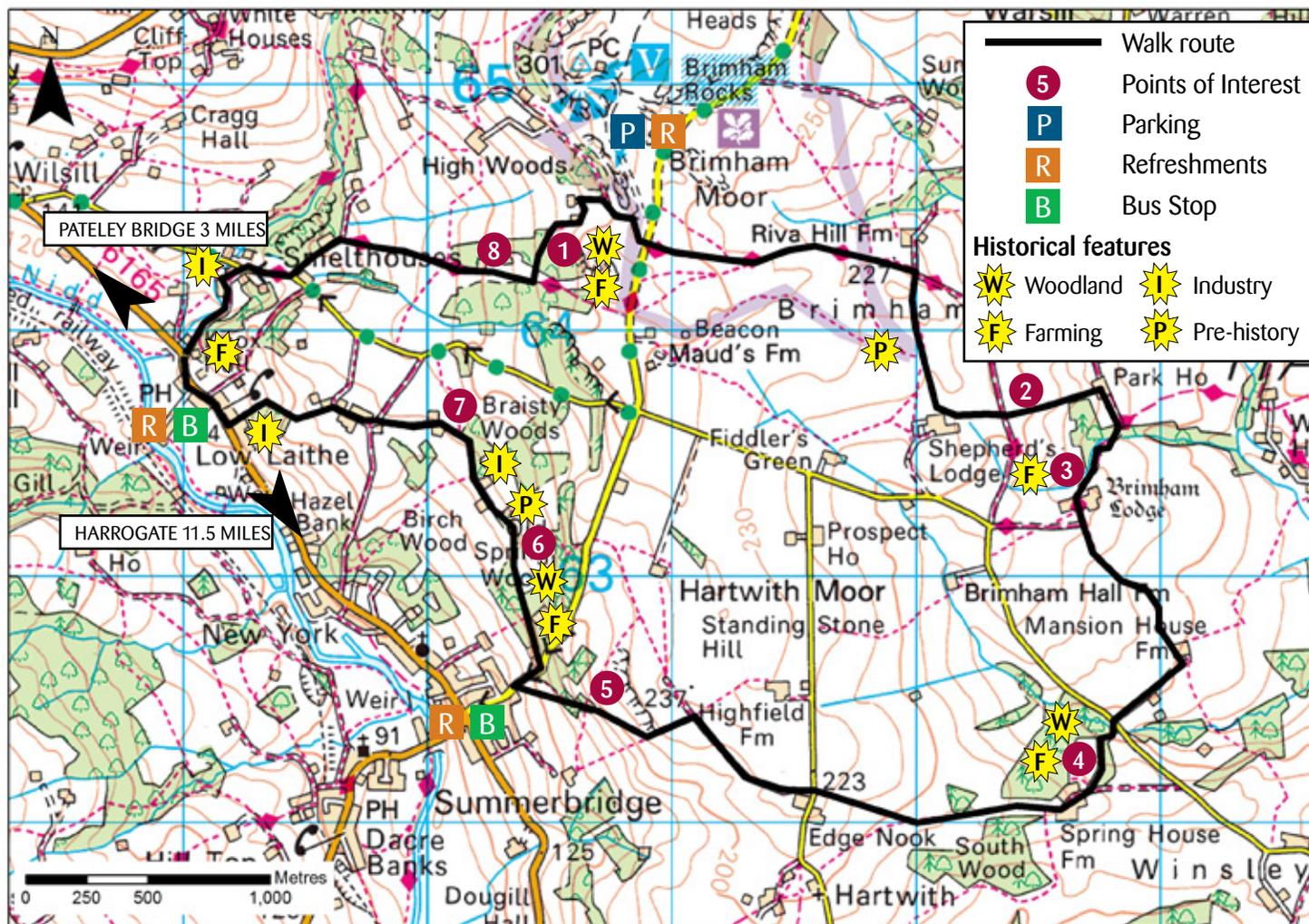
Terrain

A moderate walk through ancient semi-natural woodland, heather-clad moorland and agricultural pasture-land.

Useful Information

To help you stay on the right track the Hartwith Heritage Walk has its very own way marker signs. Keep a lookout for them along the route.

This route was researched and written by Ann Stark of Hartwith cum Winsley, with help and information from Kevin Cale, archaeologist.



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Points of Interest

1. Adams Ale

Entering this magical oak wood from the south, notice the carved gatepost known as a “stang stoop”, used locally since the 17th century. Throstle Nest is the small walled clearing in the wood, probably dating from the Medieval Period. Can you spot “Adams Ale” carved on a large boulder where a spring of clear water emerges from the rocks?

2. Monk Wall

Between Shepherd’s Lodge and Park House you will cross the Monk Wall. This is noticeably wider than normal field boundaries and has large boulders, known as orthostats, in its base. It was the Park boundary in the days when the Abbot of Fountains Abbey had his own private hunting park. However, the monks of Fountains Abbey ran their estates very shrewdly and probably had as much interest in making a good income from the woodland as they had in hunting deer.

3. Brimham Lodge

The Lodge you see today was built in 1661 by Thomas Braithwaite from Ambleside Hall in the Lake District. Can you spot what may be the earlier “Lodge of the Abbot of Fountains”? All that remains is a small section, incorporated into a field boundary wall, adjacent to the footpath between

Brimham Lodge and Mansion House farm.

4. Spring House Wood

Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century, it was common practice in Hartwith for the local landowners to encroach into the former monastic woodlands, clearing and enclosing small areas for pasture. These were known as “assarts”.

5. Pack-Horse Route

There are spring-fed troughs along these early tracks especially where there are steep slopes. They were used to water pack-animals or herded livestock. There’s one on the old “pack-horse route” above Summerbridge. Indeed, the name “Summerbridge” is derived from “somer” the Anglo-Norman word for a pack-horse.

6. Old Spring Wood

As you walk into Old Spring Wood you will sense that it is a place of great history. We know it dates back at least to prehistoric times. Since then, the woodland has been managed in many different ways. The remains of stone enclosure walls suggests that one of its earliest uses was for grazing stock but, with changing ownership, the woodland became part of an important hunting ground known as the Chase of Nidderdale.

7. Braisty Woods Farm

This is now a sizeable farmstead with outbuildings and holiday cottages but 150 years ago it was a settlement with 125 people living there. Of the buildings remaining, the oldest dates from the early 17th century. There was a Tannery and a Malt Kiln here then.

8. Monk’s Route

Monk’s Route - part of the walk is on old routes used for hundreds of years. These connected the earliest farmsteads and were further developed by the Monasteries to access their estates and commercial interests. The route between Smelthouses and Brimham is one example. See where the path goes along in a depression. This is called a “hollow-way”.

A bit of history

Prehistory

This carved stone, thought to date from the Bronze Age (1,700-600 BC) is close to the path between Riva Hill and Shepherd’s Lodge. Its purpose is unknown.

Remains of a very early settlement can be seen in Old Spring Wood. It is believed that they date from Iron Age times, 600BC-70AD. Quernstones of a beehive shape formed from the local sandstone have also been found in the area.

Farming

The earliest farming to have left any traces is found in Old Spring Wood and is believed to date from the Iron Age. Large stones have been placed to form circles and small enclosures. The farmers of this period grew primitive forms of oats and barley and kept sheep, goats and cattle.

Clearings and farmsteads are known to have existed in the Anglo-Scandinavian period, after the Roman occupation, and “Birnebeha”, now Brimham is recorded in the Domesday Book. In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest the North of England was laid waste and Hartwith came under the control of a Norman Lord, Roger de Mowbray, based at Kirkby Malzeard.

In 1132 the Cistercians were granted land to build Fountains Abbey a few miles from here and in 1135 Lord Mowbray granted them lands in Nidderdale, including Hartwith. Fountains Estate was initially farmed “in house” by Lay Brothers, and an expansion of husbandry and woodland management was encouraged. Lodges (farms) and Granges (somewhat larger administrative centres with farms) were established. They often specialised in cattle and sheep rearing and even fish farming using water from the Lurk Beck. By the 14th century, much

of the estate had been leased out to tenant farmers, though the woods were retained by the Monks. Brimham Lodge and the Park remained under the control of the Abbot.

Enclosures where walls or hedges are put around areas of land, have been a feature of Hartwith for over 2,000 years. The first main phase of wall building was during the late Medieval and post-Medieval Periods and examples of those can be seen between Braisty Woods and Low Laithe. The boundaries tend to be rather sinuous and the walls less evenly coursed. Assarting is the name given to this process of making small walled fields within what was formerly woodland, owned by the monastic estate. Some of these were legal, others were not.

The most recent phase of land enclosure took place in the 19th century, when Hartwith Moor (largely the area in the centre of our walk, east of the Brimham to Summerbridge road) was changed from being common grazing land with a Race Course into new farms with surrounding fields.

Milk production increased, perhaps due to improved transport in the second half of the 19th century and much land was under the plough, especially during the Napoleonic War and the wars of the 20th century. Cereal crops continued to be grown up until the last 30 years or so.

Currently, grazing for cattle and sheep and silage production are the main agricultural uses of the farmland. Numbers of stock kept have increased dramatically in the last 60 years. For example, the number of milking cows kept on one local farm was 18 in 1944 and is 120 today.

Woodland

This is now mainly confined to the steepest slopes of the area, where the soil is rather thin. The main species of trees are Birch, Oak and Holly. Much of the woodland can be classed as ancient semi-natural woodland, as it has never been completely cleared, but has been managed and used by successive generations.

Hartwith was part of the Hunting Chase of Nidderdale from the 11th century. Much of it was later acquired by the monks of Fountains Abbey who kept strict control of wood cutting. The local population was permitted to collect “browsings” (thin branches, for fodder and firewood). The rest of the woodland was coppiced on a regular 25 year cycle. There are many old coppiced oak trees in Old Spring Wood. The name originates from “Sprynge” which means coppiced woodland.

The coppiced wood was a very important and valuable commodity. It was used for building and also, very importantly, for the production of charcoal and white coal. These

were required for metal smelting, an important industry in medieval Nidderdale. The charcoal was manufactured in “clamp kilns” within the woodland and sites have been identified where this took place in Old Spring Wood.

Holly was harvested as a fodder crop and stored to feed animals during the winter. Oak bark was used in tanning hides and there was a tannery at Braisty Woods Farm. After the Dissolution of Fountains Abbey more of the woodland was cleared to create fields for agriculture.

Industry

From the Iron Age onwards Quernstones, used to grind grain, are believed to have been quarried near Braisty Woods farm. There is a record from 1629, showing that “fourre paire” of millstones were purchased from Braistie Woods for the manorial cornmill of the Slingsby family of Knaresborough for the sum of £16.

The earliest traces of quarrying activity are the little “scoops”, now showing as small hollows alongside the path in the wood to the west of Low Laithe. These date from Medieval times onwards and were frequently used as a source of walling stone.

More recently there were several small quarries on the hillside above Summerbridge, the stone most likely

used to build new enclosures in the second half of the 19th century.

The last phase of quarrying visible on our walk is the Ganister Quarry, which was operational until the 1960s in Granny’s Wood at Low Laithe. The stone from here went to the manufacture of refractory bricks, used to line furnaces. You can still see the platforms used for the cranes.

There were also coal pits near Low Wood, though there does not seem to be much record of when they were in use, and it is likely that the coal was of very poor quality.

In 1795 a flax mill was built beside the Fell Beck at Smelthouses. The site of this is in front of Glen House. This was the first spinning mill for flax in Nidderdale. It was burned down in 1890 and not rebuilt. Later there was a Bobbin Mill farther down the beck, known as Little Mill, now a private house.

Towards the bottom of the Lane, you can see the goit built to divert water to Knox Mill and down below the wall, by the side of the stream, there are the remains of former water control systems. Knox Mill, now converted into houses, started as a flax mill in the early 19th century, with a water-powered, external wheel. It later became a twine mill and in the 1920s was used as a sawmill.