

WW1 Heritage Trail, Colsterdale, near Masham



Introduction

This quiet dale to the north east of Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has been the focus of a three year First World War Centenary project: Nidderdale AONB and the First World War: Leeds Pals, POWs and the Home Front. The project has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is supported by the Friends of Nidderdale AONB and has benefitted from the hard work of many project partners, not least volunteers from the AONB and Leeds and archaeologists from the University of York. This heritage trail is the result of their collective research. It will tell the story of Colsterdale in the First World War long after the project has finished.

Map

OS Explorer 302:
Northallerton and Thirsk

Distance/Time

3.3 miles (5.3km)
1-2 hours

Starting Point

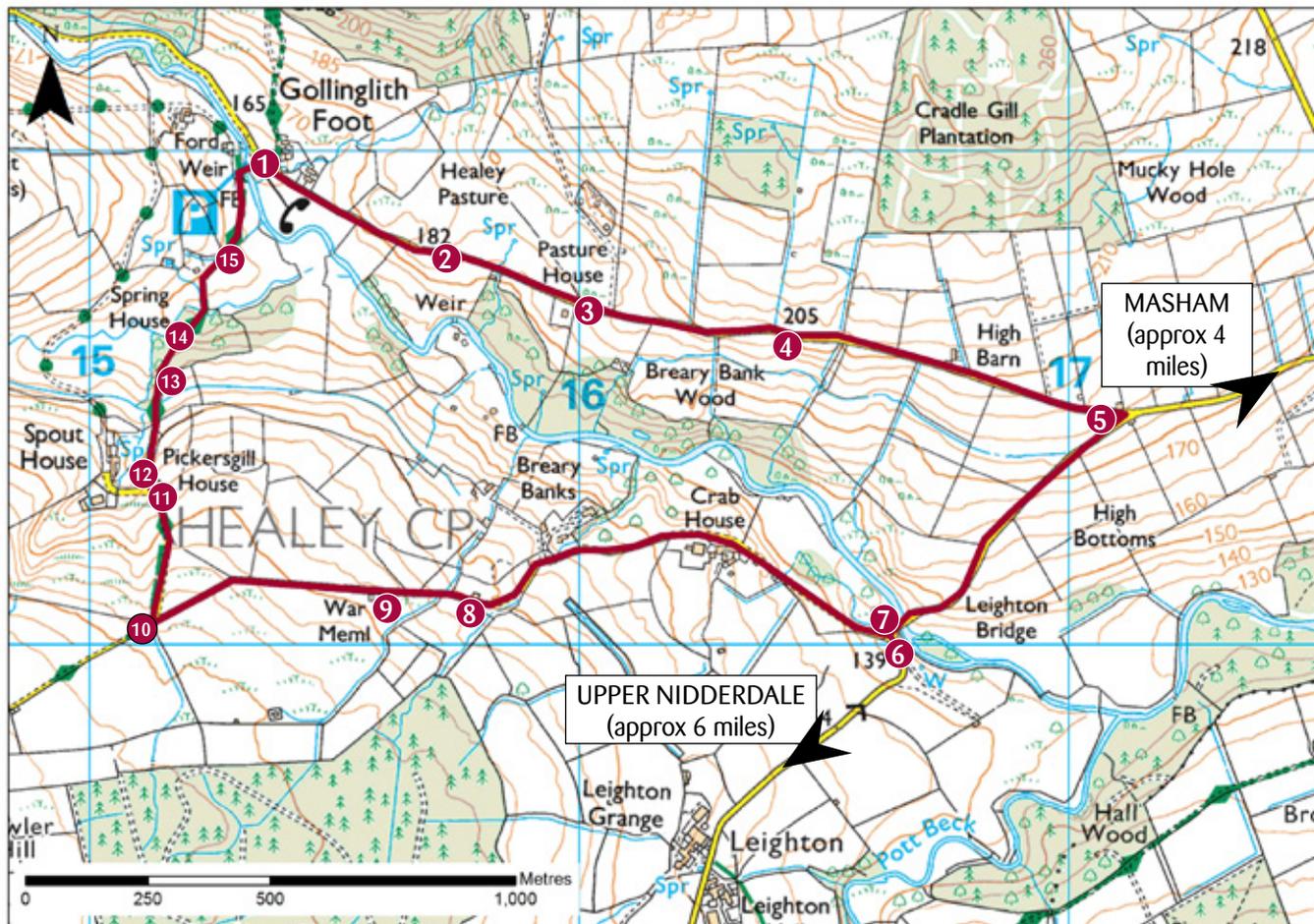
Gollinglith Foot (SE 153809).

Terrain

A moderate walk along quiet roads and public rights of way.

Useful Information

- We recommend you use this booklet in conjunction with OS Explorer Map 302 (Northallerton and Thirsk). However, if you are joining the route from the south you will also need OS Explorer map 298.
- Car parking is available at Gollinglith Foot and at the Memorial Cairn to the Leeds Pals at Breary Banks itself. This trail has been written based on a starting point at Gollinglith Foot.
- There are no public transport connections to the start of the walk. However, Masham is accessible by bus from Ripon and Harrogate and it is possible to take a taxi from Masham up to the Memorial Cairn or walk starting point at Gollinglith Foot.



© Crown copyright and database rights 2016 Ordnance Survey 100019628

Easy access alternative

A shorter, easy-access version of the route can be undertaken based on a starting point at the Leeds Pals Memorial Cairn at Breary Banks, near Healey (postcode for sat nav: HG4 4LW). The Memorial Cairn can be found by road by following the brown sign posts from Masham.

There is limited car parking at the Memorial Cairn and level access along the quiet road through the centre of the former training and POW camp. There is ramped access up to the memorial cairn enclosure itself. Information boards also provide further information.

Walk points 8 to 10 can be followed using this booklet for the Breary Banks section of the route.

Other information

Why not also experience a visit to Breary Banks using an audio trail created by students from the University of York. The trail can be downloaded from the internet at <https://hiddendale.wordpress.com/breary-banks-audio-guide/>

It is also possible to download the guide whilst on site at Breary Banks.

The Six Dales Trail follows part of the First World War route. The trail is 38 miles long and goes from Otley to Middleham.

It is also possible to join the First World War route from Bivouac in the Swinton Estate and the nearby Druid's Temple. Follow the Ripon Rowel walk west to the hamlet of Leighton joining the road from Masham to Lofthouse. Turn right along the road for 400m to Leighton Bridge, where you can turn left to join the First World War trail at point 6.

The route

1. The route starts at the small car park by the River Burn in Gollinglith Foot (grid ref SE153809).

The hamlet of Gollinglith Foot sits in Colsterdale valley bottom, on the river Burn. Colsterdale was named for the coal mining that took place at the head of the valley from the Middle Ages. Leeds Corporation, (as the municipal authority for Leeds was then known), had for many years hoped to build a reservoir here, by damming the river Burn and its tributaries. Work began in 1904 but landslips in the valley and further investigations led to the project being abandoned in 1906.

From here the route travels eastwards along the single track entry road towards the villages of Healey/ Fearby. *Walking along, the road climbs gradually and offers the walker increasingly extended views to your right - south across the dale towards the site of Breary Banks. Breary Banks was once a bustling reservoir workers' village and First World War army camp.*

2. *Look across the valley to your right from this point for the distinctive Memorial Cairn to the Leeds Pals, which stands near the centre of the former settlement. The camp was situated below the conifer plantation (Ox Close plantation) you can see on the horizon. Can you make out the terraces that once supported buildings in the field surrounding the cairn?*

Continue along the road to the next roundel, passing a white house called Pasture House.

3. Stop on the verge just after Pasture House looking right into the the valley of Colsterdale.

Pasture House was originally known as 'The White House' and was built early on in the Colsterdale reservoir development phase for the future keeper of the planned Colsterdale Reservoir: 'the reservoir that never was'. It was occupied by Mr Arnold, the Leeds Corporation's contractor for Leighton Reservoir.

Just beyond, looking southward across the valley, you can see an impressive black and white building known as Pinewood Manor. This was the Leeds Corporation's 'Bungalow' - an elegant multi-storey building designed to accommodate and impress visiting engineers and guests, including members of the Leeds Waterworks Committee. As the camp was occupied by the army in the autumn of 1914, at the onset of War, the 'Bungalow' was destined to become the Officers' Mess: comfortable accommodation for the officers of the 15th Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment (Leeds Pals).

4. *Here at the highest point along this part of the route (grid ref SE164804) look back across the valley towards Pinewood Manor and Breary Banks, the memorial cairn to the Leeds Pals and the surrounding terracing. The archaeological footprint of the former settlement clearly stands out, particularly in relief at low light. One hundred years ago Colsterdale Camp, as it was known during the War, would have been visible as a bustling village of huts on the*

hillside, with outlying parade ground, rifle ranges and camp infrastructure. Historical and archaeological research into the site of Breary Banks has included an examination of aerial photography, which, alongside various survey techniques, has helped provide further evidence as to the form and extent of the former camp, as well as outlying sites connected to the camp within the wider landscape.

Continue to a junction in the road.

5. This marker at the junction of the Masham to Lofthouse road (grid ref SE171804) denotes the point at which the walker should turn southwest along this road, downhill to Leighton Bridge, situated at the bottom of the hill. Care is needed here as this road can be busy.

It is worth noting that this was the route that the Leeds Pals would have marched along when they first came to Colsterdale in September 1914, still dressed in civilian clothing and excited, yet naïve about the prospect of going to War. The Leeds Pals were over 1,000 army volunteers mainly from Leeds. They enlisted early on in the War, as a wave of patriotic fervour swept across the country. The business and clerical classes were specifically targeted to form a new 'City Battalion' as Leeds had been less successful at recruiting from this group. The Pals were given a huge send off from crowds of thousands at Leeds Railway Station, before travelling by train to Masham. A blue plaque at Masham Old Station, now a caravan and camping park, records their arrival.

Note also the distinctive 'sighting tower'

The route continued

further to the south, on the horizon beyond Leighton Reservoir (the reservoir itself is not visible from here). This distinctively shaped tower is one of a set of four 'Colsterdale towers' which were intended to help engineers conduct surveys to enable the reservoir work to take place.

Continue across Leighton Bridge to a field gate on your left about 20m beyond the bridge.

6. At the field gate on your left look south into the field.

This was the site the narrow gauge railway junction for rail routes up to Leighton reservoir, Roundhill reservoir and Colsterdale. During the early years of the 20th century this would have been a busy railway junction, including worker's accommodation, and engine sheds, serving the waterworks of both Leeds (Leighton and Colsterdale) and Harrogate (Roundhill) Corporations.

These narrow gauge railway routes were vital to the waterworks engineering projects and indeed for supplying the army camp at Breary Banks. They were built to carry goods rather than transporting people. A narrow gauge railway line once travelled up the valley of Colsterdale, traversing obstacles in the valley via wooden trestle bridges. A branchline travelled up to the camp, supplying necessities such as coal, food supplies and the all-important camp mail.

Walk back down to the Leighton Bridge junction with Breary Banks road to waypoint 7.

7. The marker at Leighton Bridge marks the point at which the trail turns to the west along a single track road and up the south side of the dale, following the brown signpost to the Leeds Pals Memorial.

8. Walk along the narrow lane past Crab House farm on your left and The Lodge on your right. Soon after, a now derelict Methodist Chapel is on your right.

This marker identifies the old Methodist Chapel which is one of the only surviving buildings from the time of the former village of Breary Banks. It would have been located just on the edge of the settlement itself, which was further along the road. Built in 1911, it remained in use until the 1930s and would have served the wider rural community as well as the inhabitants of the temporary village of Breary Banks.

Prior to the building of this Chapel, navy workers from Breary Banks would have been able to use the village's Mission Room hut, or walk to the nearest Church at Healey. The Chapel would have been used throughout the First World War.

Continue along the lane climbing steadily uphill.

9. Stop at the prominent stone cairn located in a fenced enclosure on your left.

Here, at the memorial cairn to the Leeds Pals, it is possible to envisage the scale and position of the First World War military camp. The road you

have walked along continues through what was once the centre of the former settlement. The majority of the original navy settlement, built for the reservoir workers and their families, is on the southern (Memorial) side of the road. New huts and facilities were added for the Leeds Pals in the field on the opposite (northern) side of the road, in order to accommodate this sudden influx of men and provide for the necessities of army training. For a time, whilst changes were being made to camp, hundreds of the new recruits were accommodated in bell tents in the fields around you.

Both 'halves' of the camp (i.e. both sides of the road) were adapted to become a Prison Camp for German Officers during the later years of the War (1916-19).

This cairn was erected by the Leeds Pals Association, including veterans, friends and family of the Pals, in 1933. The Association made regular visits to Colsterdale to commemorate the First World War and the site remains a place of remembrance today, long after the last huts were removed from Breary Banks.

If you look north, back across the valley of Colsterdale, you can see Pasture House. The planned (but never executed) site of the reservoir in Colsterdale was further west along the valley.

Just beyond the memorial cairn, two interpretation panels, one either side of the road, provide further information about the camp.

Continue along the lane through the former settlement. As you walk, note the terraces to your left in the hillside. You may also be able to discern humps, bumps and concrete features in the field

to your right, which once held army huts erected in the first instance for the Leeds Pals Battalion.

10. This is the highest point on the walk (grid ref SE151800) just before the route turns north and down the hill, through the gate, towards Pickersgill House.

One of the Leeds Pals described this area as being 'the roof of Yorkshire', with some justification!

If you retrace your steps 20m back along the road, you may be able to spot the site of the former rifle range constructed for the Leeds Pals. Looking north to Spout House Farm below you, and left along the ridge to the west of the farm, you should see a break in one of the dry stone walls on the hillside, which was made for the rifle range. Rifle ranges are an important archaeological feature of army training. The British Army used Lee Enfield rifles in the First World War infantry. Their effectiveness depended on the skill and training of the operator, so rifle training was an important component of training for Kitchener's 'new army' of volunteers.

Turn right downhill through the gateway along a tarmacked track.

The fields around you contain the remains of training trenches constructed by the Pals and the Battalions that trained here after them. These are easiest to see in aerial photography. The shoulder of land you are walking down would have been useful for tactical training, using the topography to emulate trench warfare conditions. Accounts from the Pals during their months at Colsterdale record the efforts spent digging these trenches by hand, using

The route continued

entrenching tools, and also practicing manoeuvres using the trench system: including assaulting trenches uphill; and defending the trench lines.

Walk down the track to a gateway near a derelict house straight ahead.

11. Pass through the gate in front of Pickersgill House and bear left to find a gate immediately to the west of this old dwelling.

The Leeds Pals had a reputation for their 'sporting' successes, winning trophies particularly for cross country running. Perhaps the 'bracing' training environment provided at Colsterdale assisted their training! The Battalion included several notable sportsmen, including Evelyn Lintott, the footballer, Arthur Dolphin, Major Booth and Roy Kilner (cricketers), Albert Gutteridge and George Colcroft (athletes) and Joseph Jones the wrestler.

12. Go through this gate and proceed north to a small gate at the bottom of this steep field and then bear right to a gate and footbridge across the drain from Spruce Gill Beck. *This catchwater drain was installed by the Leeds Corporation to draw water out of Colsterdale and pipe it south into the new reservoir at Leighton, in lieu of building an actual reservoir here in the valley.*

From here bear slightly right, heading for the old stone gatepost visible in an overgrown hedge further down the slope.

13. From this point bear slightly right in a north-easterly direction to go down the slope to a small gate which opens into woodland by the Spruce Gill Beck.

Various accounts and diaries from German officer Prisoners of War who came to Colsterdale have been found, documenting life in this remote prison camp. These accounts include details of escape attempts, remarks about the 'inhospitable' weather of Colsterdale, the camp food and the prisoner's cravings for word from home, and to hear of news from the War. The prison camp was created out of the former army training camp in 1916 and continued to hold prisoners until 1919, when work on Leighton Reservoir resumed and reservoir workers moved back into the former village. At its peak in 1923, Breary Banks village contained 49 huts and even had its own cinema. In 1926, the camp was dismantled and the huts were sold off by auction. The building footings became overgrown and the fields went back to pasture, which has enabled the archaeology of the camp to survive in excellent condition.

14. Crossing the small beck the route starts to gently rise through the wood to a further gate, which in turn opens out into pasture broken up with trees, many of which are the remains of outgrown hedges. From here bear right of the old barn and make for a gap in the hedge of the opposite field corner and a new marker post.

15. Passing by this post continue in a north-easterly direction, across the pasture and heading down the slope toward a gap in the gorse which is scattered across the lower parts of this field. Passing through this gap, you will pick up an old path which continues north and to a footbridge over the River Burn and back to the car park at the start of our route.

References & acknowledgements

We would like to thank the farmers who manage this land for their support with our project, the Swinton Estate, the Pott and Agill Study Group, the Nidderdale AONB and the First World War project volunteers and University of York Department of Archaeology for all their help in researching Colsterdale's First World War story.

The following research resources have also been of use:

- Milner, L 'Leeds Pals – a history of the 15th (Service) Battalion (1st Leeds) The Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment) 1914-18 (1991)
- Bowtell, H D 'Lesser Railways of the Yorkshire Dales and the Dam Builders in the age of steam' (1991)
- Web article Brooke C (2014) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2885697/How-fed-lobster-game-PoWs-Christmas-Long-lost-diary-reveals-German-officers-held-Yorkshire-Dales-enjoyed-festive-feast-given-presents.html> (site consulted July 2016)
- Leeds Pals volunteer researchers research blog: <https://leedspalsvolunteerresearchers.wordpress.com/> (site consulted July 2016)

A First World War heritage trail around Colsterdale - part of 'Nidderdale AONB: Leeds Pals, POWs and the Home Front': a First World War Centenary project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This walk was prepared by Neal Topham, Friends of Nidderdale AONB Trustee, and the WW1 Project Officer Amanda Walters.

To find out more about Breary Banks, our research in Colsterdale and our First World War Centenary project, please visit www.nidderdaleaonbWW1.org.uk