



Skipwith Common NNR

Waymarked Trails

Skipwith Explorer

A half day circular walk which takes you around most of the path network on the site and through the historic village of Skipwith, whilst avoiding the dangerous boggy sections of the common. Much of this route is on unmade paths, and much of it has uneven surfaces. There are also some stiles when returning to the common from the village. The route follows the yellow waymarkers and is 5 miles (7.7 km), taking 2 1/2 hours, including the Danes Hills loop, it becomes nearly 6 miles (9.3 km).

Following the yellow markers, this route can be started from the car parks at Sandy Lane or King Rudding Lane. It is important to note which of these car parks you start from in order to avoid confusion! In the following description we have started at King Rudding Lane car park and travelled anticlockwise. You can find benches and resting points along the old runways and on the bomb bay loops.

From the car park, head left along the road and over the cattle grid and along the lane, pausing at a

viewing platform before reaching a point known as Five Lane Ends. Please be aware this is also used by vehicles and has deep pot holes in places.

Go through the kissing gate and wander around the Bomb Bays Loop in either direction. The Bomb Bays Loop is, as the name suggests, where bombs would have been stored. The red route has more information about this area.

This route encircles an area of heathland with many rare plants, including the unusual sundew, which is only found in acid peat bogs or damp moorland. This plant supplements missing nutrients in the soil by trapping small insects on its sticky red-tinged leaves. When mixed with a variety of spices, peculiar liquor was made which was thought to be a source of youthful looks, strength, virility and longevity. The heathland itself is one of the last remaining areas of lowland heath in England, containing two specialist heathers: Cross-leaved Heath in wet areas and Ling in dry areas, creating a really important habitat for insects and birds such as Nightjar, which have bred in this area in previous years.



Around the loop, accessible viewing platforms give views of different sections of the heathland. At the furthest point on the loop a raised boardwalk diverts to an extra viewing point. If you do visit this point remember which way you were heading when you rejoin the loop!

Once you have walked the full circuit of the Bomb Bay Loop, rejoin the main track and follow **yellow** waymarkers right along the lane. Turn right when you arrive at Sandy Lane walking along this, past the Wash Dykes until you reach Sandy Lane car park. The Wash Dykes are so-called because local families used to wash and swim in these ponds. Photographs are in existence of evacuees from Hull during WWII and village children swimming and picnicking on hot days.

Sandy Lane is an ancient trackway across what used to be Skipwith Moor and could well have been one of the muster points on the Pilgrimage of Grace, an uprising against King Henry VIII between October 1536 and January 1537.

Follow the signs to the left along a woodland path which skirts the edge of one of the large heathland areas until you come out at the Line Ponds which are marked on old Ordnance Survey maps. Linen is made from the stem fibres of flax plants which have been 'retted' or steeped in ponds like these. These flax fibres were stored in bundles in warehouses in Selby before transporting it to the mills in the West Riding of Yorkshire. In 1835 there were 37 flax mills in Leeds alone, employing 9,500 people. By 1914 the production of flax had almost ceased in the area due to foreign competition.

From here, turn right and follow Common Road towards Skipwith Village as far as the duck pond, then turn left into Main Street until you reach a footpath close to Skipwith Church on the other side of the road. The historic church of St. Helen dates back to approximately 960AD. The church features an Anglo-Saxon tower with a Norman nave, with later additions of side aisles and a Victorian porch. It also has significant Roman features including Roman stonework which must have previously come from a local villa. Opposite the church, evidence of a moated manorial site still remains. You may want to investigate the church, or head

straight back on the public footpath around the edge of three fields, then back onto the common.

The path then keeps you to the woodland edges of the common all the way to the top of the old runway. (The **blue** route has more information about this section). Foxgloves do well in these areas, pushing up through the bracken at the end of spring. During the Second World War, foxglove leaves were collected in large quantities by County Herb Committees.

You can either head straight back to the King Ridding Lane car park here, or divert around the area of the site known as the Danes Hills following the boundary fence, before crossing diagonally to return to the car park. The area (mis)named the Danes Hills contains many Bronze age burial mounds, but antiquarians wrongly believed them to be the graves of Viking warriors, fresh from losing to King Harold at Stafford Bridge.

It is of note that while there are no toilets on the Common, the Drovers Arms in Skipwith village provides a welcome break for the weary! The nearest accessible toilets for those with a RADAR key can be found at the National Nature Reserve Office, Church Lane, Wheldrake.

Contact

National Nature Reserve Office, Bank Island, Carr Lane, Wheldrake, York YO19 6AS

Skipwith Common is owned by Escrick Park Estate and is managed in partnership with Natural England.

For more information about the history, wildlife and events on the site, please contact the Friends of Skipwith Common via <http://friendsofskipwithcommon.org.uk> or visit www.naturalengland.org.uk or by calling 0300 060 4348.