

Walks Brusselton Wood & Dere Street

Walk information

Distance: 4.5 km (2.8 miles)

Time: 1 - 2 hours

Maps: OS Explorer 305

Parking: Limited roadside parking in small lay-bys around Brusselton Hill transmitter mast; please park considerately and safely.

Refreshments: None en route.

Terrain: Woodland paths and tracks, field paths and farm tracks. Muddy in places, with a long downhill and uphill section.

How to get there: From the A68 at Royal Oak (to the south-east of West Auckland), take the turning towards Shildon and follow this to reach the sharp right-angle bend beside the large transmitter mast on Brusselton Hill, where you will find some roadside lay-bys. Alternative parking can be found at Royal Oak, but this will then mean a fairly long road walk to reach the start of the walk.

Caution: Some of the paths are muddy underfoot. I encountered cows and horses along this walk; not recommended for dogs.

Street, protected by a string of forts, with a river crossing a fort at Piercebridge, and forts further north at Binchester and Corbridge. Hags Lane leads down through Brusselton Wood, an ancient woodland of oak, birch, hawthorn and blackthorn; this is a beautiful swathe of woodland, particularly in autumn. The views from the foot of the woodland across the Gaunless Valley towards Bishop Auckland are superb.

Bellow Brusselton Wood, our route follows an old track known as Burnhouse Lane, which crosses the line of an old railway beside the entrance to Bankfoot Farm. This long disused railway formed part of the original Darlington and Stockton Railway, along which ran the world's first passenger train in 1825. Wagons of coal were hauled from Witton Park Colliery to Shildon using stationary engines, horses and gravity, from where the wagons were attached to Stephenson's Locomotion, and a number of passengers climbed aboard some empty wagons, and the rest is history.

where you turn left along another track and over a metal barrier (blue cycle sign, and roofless small brick building).

2 Follow this enclosed bridleway (Burnhouse Lane) straight on, hemmed in by hawthorn and blackthorn bushes, for 950 metres (meandering River Gaunless across to your right) until you reach a junction of tracks at the entrance to Bankfoot Farm across to your left (line of old railway across your path). Carry straight on along the gravel track/lane and follow this for 275 metres then turn left through a wooden bridlegate in the hedge/fence on your left (Banksansides Farm with its wind turbine up to your left, some 400 metres away and slightly in front of you).

3 After the bridlegate, walk straight up the field alongside the fence/hedge on your left and through a bridlegate in the corner of the field, after which continue up across the next field and through another bridlegate in the corner of the field (with Banksansides Farm now across to your right). Head through this bridlegate and continue up across the field alongside the fence on your left then, just after you have passed the farm buildings across to your right, follow the fence on your left bending sharp left ('Z' bend in the fence) to quickly reach another bridlegate tucked away in the fence corner that leads out onto a field. Head through this bridlegate and walk straight on skirting to the left of the gorse bushes for 25 metres, then follow the clear path bearing up to the right through undergrowth to quickly reach a metal gate in a fence across your path. Head through this gate and walk straight up the field to reach a field gate at the top of the field (waymarker), after which bear left up across the next field to reach another gate that leads back into Brusselton Wood.

4 After the gate, follow the clear path bearing very slightly to the right through the trees and bracken for around 150 metres then, as you enter more dense oak woodland, the path forks - follow the right-hand grassy path bearing gradually up to the right through the woodland and follow this all the way for 550 metres to reach a pallet 'gate' in a fence, just beyond which you re-join Dere Street (track) which you walked down at the beginning of the walk. Turn

right up this track and re-trace your steps back to the sharp right-hand bend in the road near the transmitter mast.

Mark Reid
Walking Weekends 2014
Peak District, Yorkshire Dales,
Lake District & Snowdonia
walkingweekenders.co.uk

Unique corporate activity days,
navigation skills and team building
experiences in the great outdoors.
teamwalking.co.uk



Points of interest

JUST to the south of Bishop Auckland lies a remarkable reminder of our Roman history, for here you will find a stretch of ancient Roman Road that is still very much a pedestrian track that gives you a real sense of history as if you are walking in the footsteps of Romans. The short stretch of track that we follow along this walk is known as Hags Lane, and once formed part of the famous Dere Street. Following the invasion of southern Britain in AD43, the victorious Roman Legions pushed northwards from York in around AD80 to capture the lands held by the British tribes. A military road was built from York to the Firth of Forth, known as Dere

The walk

1 From the sharp right-angle bend beside the transmitter mast, take the track off this sharp bend (sign 'Keep Out, Private Property, No Motorcycles or 4x4s' - this sign relates to the adjacent land, not our Right of Way), and follow the narrow track straight on down into woodland (Dere Street, Roman Road). Follow this very clear path/track straight on heading gradually downhill through the ancient woodland of Brusselton Wood for 700 metres all the way to join a farm track (leading from Brusselton Farm), where you also leave the woodland behind. Follow this farm track straight on (Hags Lane) for 800 metres to reach a sharp right turn in the track (and a junction of tracks),

Country diary By Phil Gates

ON Monday morning the long spell of fine autumn weather was broken by rain lashing the window pane. It was enough to make most of us want to curl up and crawl back under a duvet. As the old saying goes, 'nice weather for ducks', but it was even better news for the earthworms, for whom it must have come as welcome relief after the driest September on record.

During dry weather earthworms burrow deep into the hard-baked soil, curl up in a tight ball and remain inactive - a state of suspended animation known as aestivation. When rain returns they can start burrowing and feeding again and these activities are particularly important at this time of year. Earthworms have a habit of dragging decayed autumn leaves down into their tunnels, adding to the humus content, and this is just one of many ways in which they maintain soil fertility. Their tunnels also provide drainage and lessen surface run-off, by allowing heavy rain to drain away and penetrate into the

deeper soil levels, whilst their burrowing and feeding slowly but surely recycles mineral nutrients between the soil layers.

These overlooked animals also play a pivotal role in food chains that support many larger animals. When wet weather brings earthworms to the surface of lawns they often fall prey to blackbirds, leading to the familiar sight of the bird engaged in a desperate tug of war with a worm that's are trying to regain the safety of its burrow. Hedgehogs, now in the final weeks before hibernation, are also partial to them and earthworms also form a major part of a badger's diet. Earthworms are vital for some of the best-loved birds and mammals in our fauna.



Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

ANOTHER exciting arrival of yellow-browed warblers was triggered by Monday's heavy rain and south easterly winds. Locally by Tuesday night two were at Whitburn and one at Seaton Snook. Many more of these tiny Siberian breeders made landfall along the east coast of Scotland and in north Northumberland, giving the prospect of them quickly filtering southwards. Once again, Holy Island was the epicentre of this regional arrival with at least a dozen present, while a couple were also on the Farne Islands. No doubt many more remain to be found.

Our local coast seems to hold a great attraction for Europe's smallest members of the gull family. Flocks of dainty and aptly-named little gulls have appeared offshore over the past few days, with substantial counts from several localities. Small numbers nest in Scandinavia, but the bulk of the population breeds on huge areas of fresh-water marshes east of the Baltic and far into Russia. Some always occur locally

during summer, but the largest numbers are often recorded in early October. Peaks included 360 off Saltburn, similar numbers at Hartlepool Headland, more than 650 at Whitburn and over 300 at Tynemouth.

Most were slowly moving northwards so these counts will undoubtedly have involved many of the same birds. While numbers involved have been substantial they are far below the record period of October of 2003, when in a single day a staggering 3,890 were off Hartlepool. It used to be considered that coastal sewage outfalls and the rich feeding they created were the attraction. Thankfully, most of them have now gone, but the gulls keep appearing so obviously must still find abundant food. Passage of pink-footed geese has gathered pace with large skeins moving towards their main wintering areas in East Anglia. A wonderful thing is that no matter how high geese fly their calls can be clearly heard, often the first indication of their presence.