

Walks Goathland and the Rail Trail

Walk Information

Distance: 5.5 km (3.5 miles)
Time: 2 – 3 hours
Maps: OS Explorer OL27
Start/Parking: There are pay & display car parks at Grosmont and Goathland – this linear walk can be started from either village.
Refreshments: Pubs at Goathland, Beck Hole and Grosmont.
Terrain: Woodland and riverside tracks and paths all the way; an ideal family walk.
Linear walk: This is a linear walk between Goathland to Grosmont, utilising the steam-hauled North Yorkshire Moors Railway to get back. Always check train times before you set out on your walk.

Points of interest

THE North Yorkshire Moors Railway offers a glimpse of the golden age of steam with beautifully preserved stations, signal boxes, carriages and locomotives. This historic line runs for 18 miles from Grosmont to Pickering through the heart of the North York Moors. The railway was completed in 1836 and originally connected Pickering with Whitby to provide a stimulus for its flagging whaling and shipbuilding industries. Designed by George Stephenson, the “Father of the Railways”, this was one of the first passenger railways in the world, although the carriages were initially horse-drawn – you can walk through the world’s oldest passenger railway tunnel at Grosmont, which was built for this horse-drawn railway. The obstacle of the steep incline at Beck Hole, which featured a gradient of 1-in-10, was overcome by a complex system of ropes, pulleys and water-tanks that hauled the carriages up the slope. George Hudson, the “Railway King” bought the line in 1845 and set about upgrading it for locomotive use. He built new bridges, tunnels, stations and connected the railway with the main Scarborough to York line. However, the famous Beck Hole incline was only bypassed in 1865 when the five-mile Deviation Route was blasted out between Grosmont and Goathland reducing the incline to a gradient of 1-in-49, an amazing feat of Victorian engineering that took four years to complete; the original railway from Whitby to Pickering

had only taken three years to build in its entirety. The route of Stephenson’s original railway through the Murk Esk valley between Grosmont and Goathland, including the infamous Incline, is now a popular walking route known as the Rail Trail, which is the route for this walk. Following the Beeching Report, the section between Grosmont and Pickering was controversially closed in 1965, although the Esk Valley line from Middlesbrough to Whitby remained open thanks to concerted local campaigning. The North Yorkshire Moors Railway Preservation Society was formed in 1967 and subsequently bought back the line from British Railways, reopening it fully to the public in 1973 as a preserved steam railway.

The Murk Esk Valley is an absolute delight with ancient woodland and tumbling streams. Hidden away in this valley is the idyllic hamlet of Beck Hole that lies in a deep hollow near the confluence of Eller Beck and West Beck. The arrival of the railway in the 1830s brought great change to this village and it soon became a hive of industrial activity with ironstone and whinstone mines opening nearby. The population burgeoned to five times its present size with two inns to help slake the thirst of the miners. This boom was short-lived, lasting less than a decade – only spoil heaps and one or two miners’ cottages remain, however the Birch Hall Inn is still going strong. This inn became a full-time pub and village shop during the 1860s, a tradition still continued to this day. The present proprietors have been at the pub for 32 years; they bought it back in 1981 from Edith Schofield who had decided to retire after 53 years. The Birch Hall Inn is one of England’s classic pubs, and by far my favourite – and I’ve been to a lot of country pubs.

The walk

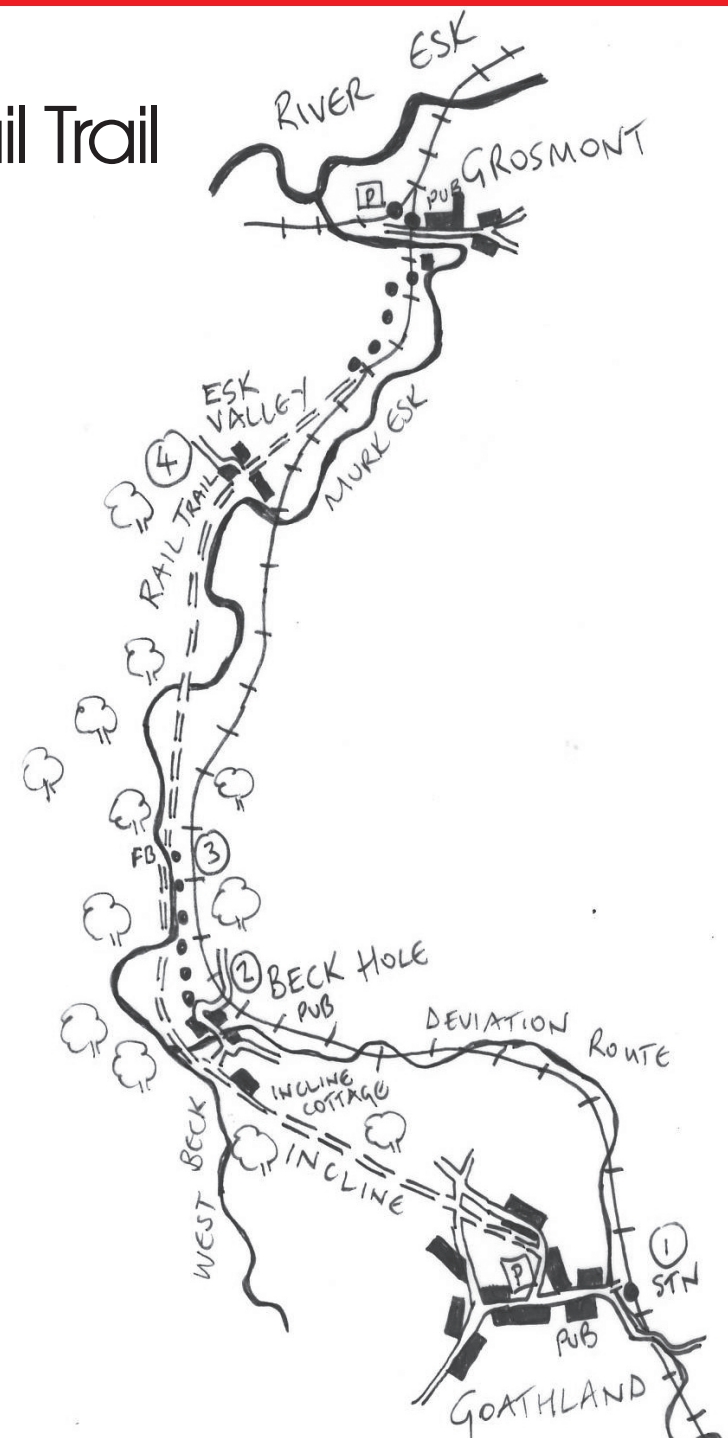
Either park at Grosmont and catch the train to Goathland then walk back to Grosmont, or park at Goathland and walk to Grosmont and catch the train back at the end of the walk. Either way, check train times carefully.

1 From Goathland train station, walk away from the station

along the access road, over the bridge across Eller Beck (waterfalls) and up to quickly reach a road junction, where you head right along the main road up into Goathland. Just after the Goathland Hotel and Scripp’s Aidsensfield garage take the road turning to the right towards Darnholm and Beck Hole (along Beckhole Road). Follow this road straight on passing the car park, just after which take the track to the left through a gate (signpost Grosmont Rail Trail) onto a clear, wide track. Follow this straight on downhill out of Goathland to reach a road across your path after 350 metres, where you cross over and continue straight on along the clear track down through woodland (the Incline of Stephenson’s original railway) for 1 km to reach Incline Cottage at the bottom of the hill. Walk along the track passing the cottage on your right, 125 metres beyond which follow the track to the right through a gate (signpost Beck Hole). Follow the enclosed track straight on to soon reach a road almost opposite the Birch Hall Inn at Beck Hole.

2 Turn left along the road passing the pub on your right and over a bridge across Eller Beck, then walk along the road through the village (village green on your right) then, after the last house on your left (Lord Nelson) where the road bends sharply up to the right (25 per cent road sign) take the path to the left through a gate (sign Egton, Egton Bridge). Follow this enclosed path straight on into woodland for 250 metres to reach a path junction, where you carry straight on through woodland (sign Grosmont Rail Trail), with the Murk Esk river on your left, for a further 300 metres to reach a footbridge across the Murk Esk.

3 Do NOT cross this footbridge, but carry straight on along the clear path/track through woodland (Rail Trail) alongside the Murk Esk river on your left for 300 metres to reach a gate at the end of the woodland. Head through this gate and follow the clear Rail Trail track straight on heading down through the Murk Esk valley for 1.25 km to reach a junction of roads/tracks beside the row of cottages at Esk Valley.



4 Continue straight on along the track ahead (Rail Trail) and follow this for 700 metres to reach a gate across the track (sidings and loco sheds ahead), where you take the footpath to the left that then heads alongside the left-hand side of the track (sign Grosmont Rail Trail). Follow this enclosed path as it climbs quite steeply up to reach a T-junction with another path (bench and view across Grosmont), where you turn right down to soon reach a gate (8,000 gallon water tank). Just beyond this gate, take

the path to the left (Rail Trail), and follow this down passing the church on your left into Grosmont.

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Country diary

FLOWERING orchids herald the beginning of the transition from spring into summer. Nearly 30 species – many of them rare and at least two now extinct – have been found in County Durham since botanists began studying our local flora.

Part of the magic of orchids is that some appear in unexpected places, thanks to their dust-like seeds that are produced in vast numbers and are carried on the wind. Their growth after germination depends on them finding a compatible fungus in the soil that will sustain them until they develop leaves, so their survival is a chancy business but several species are still quite common, especially in the limestone areas of east Durham.

The early purple orchid is the first to appear, blooming in spring alongside primroses and cowslips, and is one of only two that have a distinctive scent, which in its case is an unpleasant aroma of tom cats. In contrast, the fragrant orchid is delightfully scented and attracts butterflies with long nectar spurs that

provide its visiting pollinators with a sweet reward. The blooming periods of the pink-flowered spotted orchid and the magenta-flowered northern marsh orchid overlap and where they are found together they form very vigorous hybrids with dense, spectacular spikes of flowers. They sometimes occur in great abundance on roadside verges and in areas of scrub on the edge of woodland. Two other common species, both with greenish flowers, favour woodland edge habitats. Twayblade orchids produce a tall spike of small greenish-yellow flowers, that arise from a single pair of large leaves, while the flowers of broad-leaved helleborine are larger and are usually green, pink and white. In recent years the charismatic bee orchid, whose flowers look like bumblebees, has steadily colonised our region and has even appeared in garden lawns.



Phil Gates

Birdwatch

STRIKINGLY attractive rarities from opposite ends of Europe have been among the late migrants to grace the scene in recent days. Few species are gaudier than the hoopoe with plumage of buff yellow, barred black and white wings and tail, a crest and butterfly-like flight. One which flew over Marsden Quarry last Saturday provided a touch of the Mediterranean and was the first sighting for County Durham for three years.

Another exotic migrant which was well off-course, a male golden oriole, appeared briefly at Low Newton, on the Northumberland coast, before flying off inland. The bird was in first-summer greenish plumage rather than the brilliant canary yellow of an adult, always eagerly sought by birders visiting southern and Eastern Europe.

From the far north, a red-necked phalarope was a superb find at Scaling Dam Reservoir. These exquisite little birds with their unique habit of spinning on the water to stir up minute insects and larvae on which they feed, appear occasionally on

migration. This diminutive vagrant was probably en route to a breeding area in Iceland, northern Scandinavia or Arctic Russia from wintering quarters off west Africa or in the Indian Ocean.

Red-backed shrikes continued their best late spring showing for many years with sightings from Filey, the South Gare, Hartlepool Headland and Cowpen Bewley where last week’s nightingale continued to sing. Shrikes also appeared at three coastal localities in Northumberland.

One of the two pairs of osprey nesting at Kielder hatched young this week. Many of the region’s red kites now have large young and this Sunday a special Kite Watch is to be staged from 10am until 2pm at the Derwent Walk County Park. The venue will be signposted from the car park at Winlaton Mill. Experts will be on hand to help visitors view these big, beautiful and extremely graceful raptors. Similar watches are planned for June, 23 and July, 6.

Ian Kerr