

# Walks Blakey Ridge & Farndale

## Walk information

**Distance:** 11.5 km (7.2 miles)

**Time:** 3-4 hours

**Maps:** OS Explorer Sheet OL26 'North York Moors Western Area'

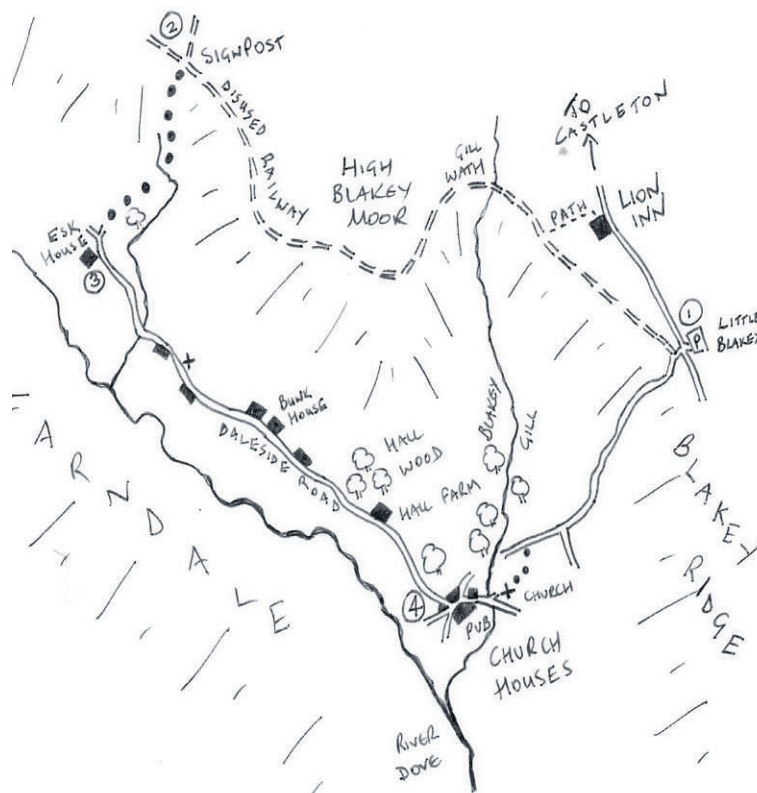
**Start/Parking:** Little Blakey parking area – beside the road turning to Farndale & Church Houses, just to the south of the Lion Inn at Blakey. Grid Ref: SE 683 990

**Refreshments:** The Feversham Arms at Church Houses and, nearby, the Lion Inn at Blakey Ridge.

**How to get there:** Blakey Ridge lies on the moorland road between Castleton and Hutton-le-Hole in the heart of the North York Moors.

**Terrain:** Tracks and paths across heather moorland (rough and boggy terrain in one or two places). Quiet country roads, with a long steep climb back up to Blakey Ridge.

**Caution:** This walk heads across moorland with rough, boggy ground in places. This moorland is exposed to the elements. Take care walking along the roads.



## Points of interest

Blakey Ridge is a broad ridge of heather-clad moor that divides the valleys of Farndale to the west and Rosedale to the east. This moorland ridge provides one of the few north-to-south routes through the heart of the moors; indeed, the road across it has been in constant use for centuries and may even date back to prehistoric times as many Bronze and Iron Age relics can still be found on the surrounding moors. In medieval times monks travelled this way and later the road was used by drovers, packhorses and as a coach road; it was metalled in 1932 and still provides an exhilarating high-level motor road over the moors. High on the moors stands the famous Lion Inn, the highest pub on the North York Moors.

The first part of our walk follows the old cinder track-bed of the Rosedale Ironstone Railway. During the 19th century this whole area was a hive of industrial activity with numerous ironstone and coal mines. The Rosedale Ironstone

Railway was built in 1861 to transport ironstone from Rosedale to Teesside, a feat of engineering that followed the contours of the hills perfectly for 11 miles from Rosedale, around the head of Farndale to Incline Top above Ingleby Greenhow from where loaded goods wagons were lowered down a 1-in-5 incline to join the main line at Battersby Junction. The economic turmoil of the 1920s caused the closure of these mines and the last steam engine was lowered down the Incline in 1929 and the tracks torn up. The cinder track-bed of this old railway today provides a wonderful walking route, with fine views across Farndale. We follow this cinder track-bed high above Farndale to the watershed with Westerdale. An old track, sunken in its lower reaches, then turns down into Farndale. This is an old packhorse and traders route, hence the reason why it has been eroded into what is known as a 'hollow-way'; the farm where this

old track starts climbing out of Farndale is called Esk House as this route heads over the watershed into Westerdale, which is how the upper reaches of Eskdale are known, and then on down through this valley to Whitby.

The upper reaches of Farndale are supremely beautiful, an unspoilt oasis of green fields and stone-built farms. Unbelievably, in the 1930s plans were put forward to flood the upper reaches of the valley above Church Houses as part of a huge reservoir scheme to provide Hull with drinking water. Thankfully, the plan was thrown out by a Select Committee of the House of Commons after a fierce battle. Church Houses is a tiny hamlet consisting of one or two cottages, a farm, village hall, church and one of the most remote pubs in the North York Moors. Just outside the hamlet hidden amongst trees is the Church of St Mary, which dates from 1831 when a chapel was built to serve the valley.

This site may have been used for worship since the Middle Ages as a community of Friars, known as the Little Brothers of The Trinity, established a house in Farndale in the 14th century.

## The walk

**1** From the Little Blakey parking area (just opposite the 'Farndale, Church Houses, Feversham Arms' road turning to the south of the Lion Inn at Blakey Ridge), walk across the road and take the road turning opposite (sign 'Farndale, Church Houses, Feversham Arms') then, after a short distance (road warning sign '20% hill'), turn right along the old cinder track-bed of the Rosedale Railway, marked by a signpost 'bridleway' (just after the old stone railway bridge). Follow this track-bed straight on for 1.5 km then follow it as it sweeps round to the left around the craggy side-valley of Blakey Gill (superb views down Farndale). The track-bed then gently curves round to the right and passes through a low cutting before heading straight on (with the upper reaches of Farndale down to your left) gently meandering in sinuous curves across the moorland high above the valley to reach another cutting. After this cutting, continue straight on along the track-bed then follow the track as it curves round to the left along an embankment across the watershed between Farndale (left) and Westerdale (right). Midway across the embankment you reach a crossroads of tracks, marked by a four-finger signpost where you turn left along a grassy track, signpost 'bridleway', heading down towards Farndale (this turning is 4.5 km from Little Blakey - Grid Ref: NZ 654 007).

**2** Follow this grassy track heading down the moorland for 500 metres to reach a gate in a fence, after which continue down the hillside alongside a small stream on your right (caution: boggy ground) to reach a gate set in a wall. After this gate (stream now on your left), carry straight on along the track (fence and stream on your left) for 60 metres then the

track opens out onto a field (fence and stream bend away to your left) – carry straight on along the old sunken track curving slightly right heading across the top of the field and through a gateway in a wall. After this gateway, follow the sunken grassy track straight on heading down the hillside (ignore the gate in the wall corner towards the bottom of the field) to reach a gate that leads onto the road, with Esk House in front of you.

**3** Turn left along the road (take care) and follow this road (Daleside Road) for 3.3 km, passing several farms, a chapel, bunk house and Hall Wood (National Trust) along the way, to eventually reach Church Houses, opposite the Feversham Arms pub.

**4** As you enter Church Houses, follow the road to the left towards 'Hutton-le-Hole, Castleton' then, at the road junction on the edge of the village, bear right towards 'Hutton-le-Hole, Gillamoor' and follow this road for 200 metres then, where the road bends right, branch left through a gate and on to reach the church. Walk along the gravel path to reach the entrance to the church, then continue straight on along the grassy path skirting to the left around the back of the church to reach a small gate in the far corner of the churchyard that leads out onto a field. Immediately after the small gate, turn right alongside the stream to quickly reach a small gate in the field corner. Do NOT head through this gate but turn left immediately before it, and walk across the field alongside the fence/wall on your right and follow this all the way to join a road. Turn right up along the road (take care) and follow it on to reach a road junction where you carry straight on heading steeply up back to reach the parking area at Little Blakey.

Mark Reid

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## Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

**I**T'S amazing how a sudden change in wind can almost instantly produce impressive arrivals of late autumn migrants, particularly northern thrushes. After five days of westerlies blocking movement across the North Sea from Scandinavia, the floodgates opened from Monday when the wind swung around into the south east.

Redwings, fieldfares and lesser numbers of blackbirds which had been held up in southern Norway took advantage to make the hazardous crossing. The result was the arrival of flocks of thrushes along our coast, a wonderfully exciting spectacle for those lucky enough to be present. Parties of our

familiar chaffinches, were also involved. There was also a scattering of black redstarts and, among rarities, a Pallas's warbler at Filey, the second there within a fortnight, and two Richard's pipits at Burniston.

Many redwings and fieldfares seemed fit and strong after being on the wing for up to 18 hours and most continued south-westwards without delay. I did watch one small party of fieldfares spiral down from great height to drop into the bare top branches of a clump of coastal sycamores. Fieldfares always seem to me the classic late migrants in their suitable autumnal shades of grey, rich brown and orange.

They perched tall and bold for only a couple of minutes before rising again. They climbed steeply at around 45 degrees until they were about 300 feet up before continuing inland. That steep climb, as if to gain cruising height, is something I've seen on many occasions with fieldfares and blackbirds.

The party I watched were obviously still strong after their 600-mile flight and needed only a brief stop to get their bearings. It isn't always like that and often migrating thrushes can drop exhausted into any available coastal cover. Many must perish at sea or make easy meals for big gulls, always on the lookout for tired migrants.

Once while out with friends, we watched anxiously as one exhausted fieldfare dropped into the sea about 100 yards offshore. It floated gull-like for a moment and then pattered a few feet across the surface before dropping again. After a brief rest it made a supreme effort and managed to fly again across the rocks and into cover and, hopefully, safety in the dunes. Needless to say, it got a spontaneous cheer.

Many thousands of thrushes will remain for winter in large and noisy feeding flocks. First, they will concentrate on a rich sugary diet of berries, particularly hawthorn, elder and cotoneaster. Once these are exhausted, they'll switch to seeking out worms and other invertebrates.

Despite the unfavourable weather conditions until Monday, there was a scattering of other rare migrants. These may have arrived earlier further northwards and have simply been drifting southwards down the coast. They included another Richard's pipit at Horden, which then flew southwards over Castle Eden Dene, and a woodlark at Scorton, which was the first for north Yorkshire since October 2013.

