

# Walks Ravensworth, Gilling West and Kirby Hill

## Walk information

**Distance:** 13.2 km / 8.2 miles

**Time:** 4 hours

**Maps:** OS Explorer Sheet 304 Darlington & Richmond

**Parking:** On-street parking throughout Ravensworth  
**Refreshments:** Pubs at Ravensworth, Gilling West, Whashton and Kirby Hill

**Terrain:** Field, woodland and riverside paths, farm tracks and country lanes. Many paths are muddy underfoot or overgrown and there are crops in some fields. Several stiles to cross.

**How to get there:** Ravensworth lies along a minor road just to the south of the A66 4.5 miles west of Scotch Corner.

**Caution:** There is a small ford to cross over Smelt Mill Beck, which may be difficult after heavy rain; never cross a stream that is in spate. There are a couple of steep banks. There are livestock in some of the fields.

## Points of interest

RAVENSWORTH is a beautiful village with a large village green overlooked by old cottages, a Methodist Chapel and a lovely country pub. At the top end of the village are the gaunt ruins of Ravensworth Castle. From Ravensworth field, riverside and woodland paths and tracks lead to the hamlet of Hartforth and then into Gilling West. Remarkably, Gilling West was a very important place in Anglo-Saxon times. From Gilling West, old paths and tracks lead up onto a low ridge of land with fine views across the broad vale of Holme Beck. Smelt Mill Beck and Hartforth Wood are past before reaching Whashton from where a lane leads into the historic Kirby Hill.

## The walk

**1** With your back to the Bay Horse Inn at Ravensworth, follow the main road (left-hand fork) across the village green and passing the castle ruins on your right. Continue along this road out of Ravensworth

for 200 metres then, just after the road bends sharply round to the right, take the track to the left through a gate (signpost). Walk straight on across the field and over a stile across a small section of wall to join a track. Head straight on along the track down through a gate and continue on along the grassy track to a second gate, after which turn sharp right alongside the fence to reach a stile beside a gate in the corner of the field. After this stile, turn left alongside the fence on your left then, where the fence bends away to the left, continue straight on across the field passing a solitary tree to reach a stile over a stone wall. Walk straight on across the next field to join the wooded banks of Holme Beck on your left. Head straight on alongside the stream on your left down to reach the road beside Whashton Bridge.

**2** At the road take the path opposite to the left (just before the bridge) through a wall-gate and follow the clear meandering riverside path on to reach a bend in the stream with a large stone house on the opposite bank. Do not cross the bridge towards the house, but head up along the clear path into woodland (still with the stream on your left) and follow this on to reach a footbridge across the stream just after the house. Cross this footbridge then head to the right to join a lane which you follow for a short distance then, where the lane bends to the left, head off the lane to the right alongside the riverside path. Follow this path down to reach a track and ford across the stream – head across the footbridge beside the ford and walk straight on along the riverside path, passing Hartforth Hall across to your left, for 300 metres to reach a stile beside an old stone bridge. Cross the stile and turn left over the old stone bridge then follow the lane up into Hartforth.

**3** As you emerge onto the large village green at the centre of Hartforth turn immediately right along the lane across the top of the village green then, where this lane turns to the left towards the large house, head straight on through a

gate onto fields. A clear path leads straight on for 1 km meandering across several fields and over a succession of stiles towards Gilling West. As you approach the village (after crossing a rough track across your path) head on alongside the hedge/fence on your left into Gilling West, where you turn right along the road, over a road bridge across Gilling Beck and continue on for 200 metres to reach the gated driveway on your right that leads to St Agatha's Church (opposite the village hall).

**4** Follow this driveway down to reach St Agatha's Church. Walk through the churchyard passing to the left of the church to reach a wooden kissing-gate at the top end of the churchyard. Head through this gate then bear left across the field, over a stile in a hedge and up to quickly reach a road (Waters Lane) at a junction. At this junction head straight on up the road (Old Hall Lane) towards 'Gillingwood Hall' and follow the lane as it climbs up, then levels out before climbing gently up again and round to the right to reach the farm buildings at Gillingwood Hall.

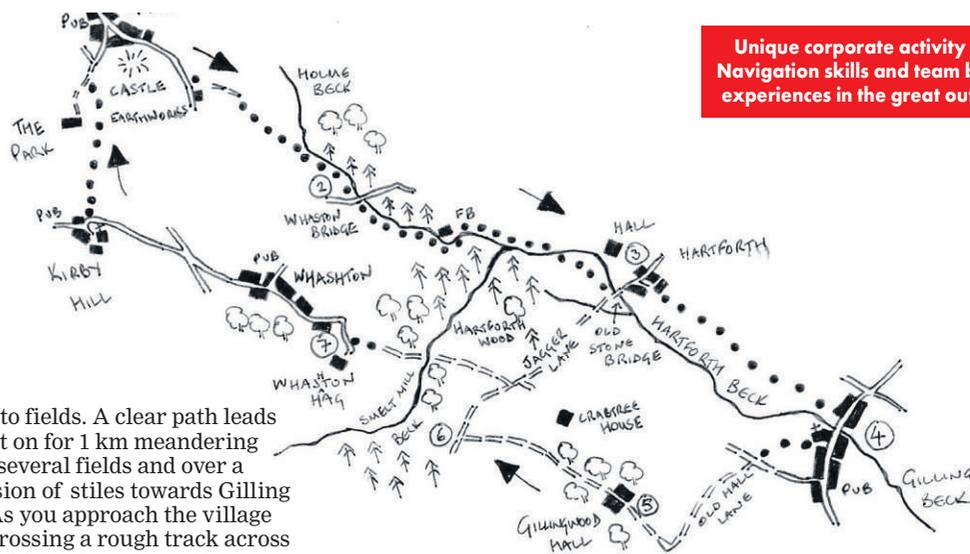
**5** Follow the lane passing in front of the farmhouse and on through the double gates into the farmyard. Head through the farmyard then bear to the right before the large barn ahead of you through a gate (beside a low barn) onto a grassy track. Follow this track up through another gate at the end of the farm buildings then continue on alongside the wall/woods on your

right to reach another gate in a stone wall. Head through this gate and follow the track down to the right alongside the wall then at the bottom of the small bank head to the left keeping the stone wall on your right (ignore gate in the wall). Head on alongside this wall, through a white gate then on to reach another gate that leads on to a rough grassy and slightly sunken track across your path.

**6** Turn right down along this track to reach a gate and a cattle grid then continue on along the track with the stone wall on your right – where this stone wall ends (at the end of the field after the cattle grid) turn left along a rough track. Follow this track up into Hartforth Wood – the track drops quite steeply down through the woods and crosses Smelt Mill Beck via a ford or some large boulders (stepping stones) then leads steeply up – where the track levels out at the top of this climb, head straight on (ignore the clear track to the right) alongside the wall on your right across wooded pastures down through a gate and on through another gate in the far right-hand corner of the field (to the right of the farm buildings of Whashton Hag) that leads onto a lane.

**7** Turn right up along the lane and follow it up into

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Whashton. Walk through the village passing the pub and follow the lane straight on out of Whashton (take care walking along the road) down to reach a cross-roads – take the road opposite and follow this up to reach Kirby Hill. Where the road turns sharp left immediately after the church (just before the pub) take the footpath to the right (signpost) through a squeeze-stile and follow the path slanting down the hillside to the left to reach a stile in the corner of the field beside a gate. Head through this squeeze-stile and walk on alongside the wall on your left then at the end of the field (with the farm on your left) cross the stile and head across the next field, bearing slightly to the left, passing over earthworks to reach a stile towards the far left-hand corner of the field. Cross over this stile (and stream) to quickly join a track, where you turn right down to join the road on a bend. Head straight on along this road back up into Ravensworth. Mark Reid

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## Country diary By Phil Gates

**T**HE GRASSLAND on the limestone cliffs stretching southwards from Seaham to Hawthorn Dene hosts one of the finest displays of wild flowers in our region, making it an attraction for anyone who loves wild flowers. It will be at its best during the early months of summer.

There are some fine displays of orchids along this coastline. Last week the spring-flowering early purples were still in bloom but they'll soon be followed by spotted, marsh and twayblade orchids. Cranesbills, whose name refers to their birds' beak-shaped fruits, are also one of the highlights and the first to flower is the magenta-coloured bloody cranesbill. In the scrubby vegetation on the edge of the cliffs you can find the cream flowers of the extremely spiny but intensely fragrant burnet rose. In a few places, right on the edge of the cliffs, there are some lovely specimens of sea pink, also known as thrift. Readers of my vintage, who can recall pre-decimal currency, will probably remember that this

featured on the back of the eight-sided brass threepenny pieces.

Common milkwort, which grows amongst the short grasses and bird's-foot trefoil that survive on the dry, thin soil on limestone outcrops, has beautiful sky blue flowers, although pink- and white-flowered forms also sometimes turn up. Yellow-wort, an unusual egg yolk-coloured annual, whose stems grow through middle of its grey-green leaves, also shares this habitat. Here you'll also find carline thistle, with a centre of small honey-coloured flowers that are surrounded by a fringe of papery bracts. It comes into bloom now but its 'everlasting' flowers persist through autumn into winter, only breaking up after the plant has died.



## Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

**T**EN years ago the first young red kites were released with the aim of re-establishing a north east population 170 years after these spectacular birds, with wing spans of over five feet and deeply forked tails, were wiped out by Victorian persecution.

A total of 93 birds from the thriving Chilterns population were freed over a three-year period in the Derwent Valley and quickly established themselves and started to nest. Although most remained around the valley and north Durham, others spread to breed in Teesdale and Northumberland, as was hoped.

If they had expanded in a similar way to kites in other regions we should now have a breeding population of over 50 pairs. Instead, for the past three years the population has flat-lined with about 20 pairs. Breeding soon petered out in Teesdale and elsewhere, with pairs now confined to the valley and adjacent areas of Durham. Sadly, Victorian attitudes

persist and up to a dozen have been victims of illegal poisoning over the past five years. Such offences usually take place on private land so the known cases are probably just the tip of the iceberg.

As scavengers, kites are extremely vulnerable to poisoning, as this spring's appalling incident near Inverness showed. There, 16 kites and seven buzzards were killed. Despite rewards totalling £23,000 no arrests have been made, indicating the difficulties facing police.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the local project, the Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) is carrying out a breeding survey. It is also working on tracking strategies to enable dead kites to be quickly found and to pinpoint exact persecution locations to help police investigations and, hopefully, secure convictions. FoRK is organising a public Kite-Watch event on Sunday, June 8, from 10am-4pm at Derwent Country Park.

It will be signposted from the free Winlaton Mill car park.