



THE PACKHORSE TRAIL

Route length: 4.5 miles/7.2 km.

Time: 2 to 3 hrs. Difficulty rating: medium.

A circular route taking in Darley and Thornthwaite, through beautiful wild flower meadows and ancient woodland, with some unusual historical features.

Parking options: Main Street, Darley, which is a relatively quiet, wide street with plenty of parking. There is also a lay-by at the Darley Mill site.

Local facilities: The Wellington Inn, community shop and café and a children's playground at Darley.

Public transport options: Bus service.

Useful information: Some of the paths can get muddy and sturdy footwear is essential. Some stiles are a little tricky to use.

1 From Darley Main Street the route heads west to Darley Head. Cross the main road to reach the footpath signposted to Dairy Lane where the route begins. Be careful, as the crossing immediately opposite the footpath is quite blind. It is best crossed near to Main Street, near to The Wellington Inn, or down towards the old Darley Mill building.

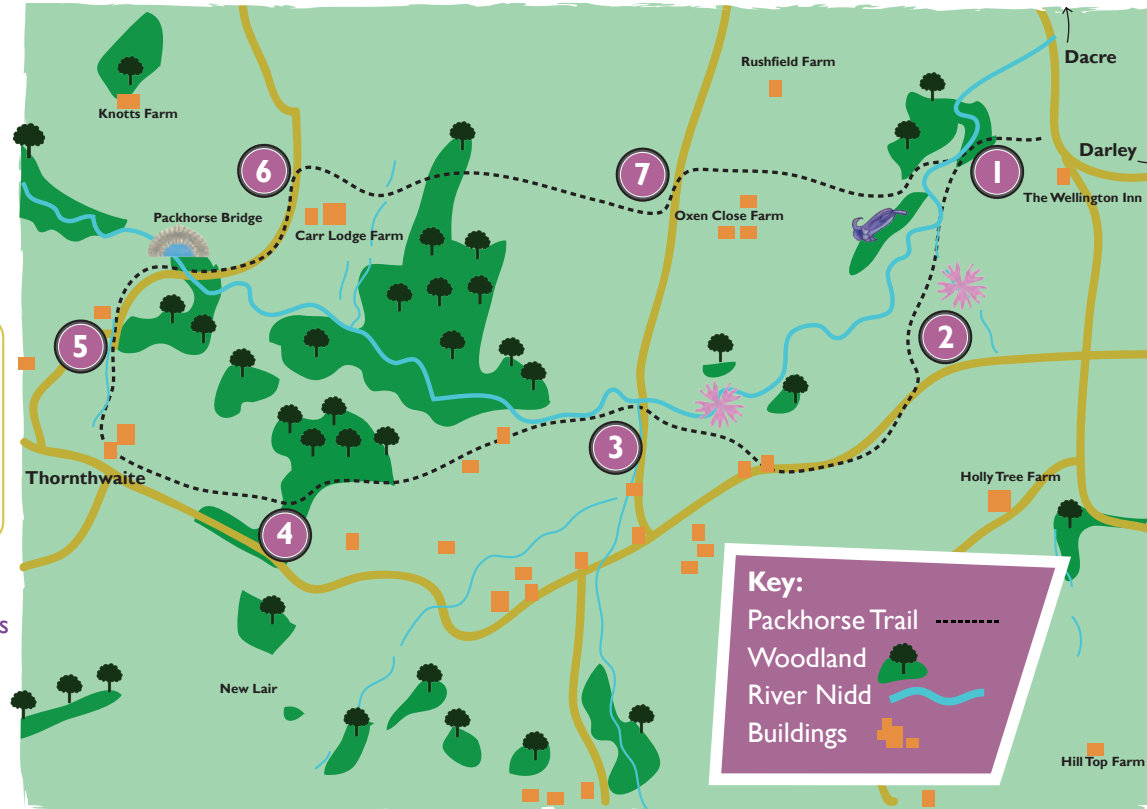


Flower watch:

You will walk through wildflower meadows from here to Folly Gill Bridge. Keep an eye out for the fine display of ragged robin during spring and summer.

2 The footpath sets off across meadows alongside Darley Beck. When the path starts heading towards the stream, bear left to a stone stile in the corner of the field. After the stile, go gently uphill and diagonally across fields aiming to the right of an oak tree to find a partly hidden gateway. Carry on up to Low Lane, a minor road, and turn right. Follow this for a few hundred metres before taking the second footpath on the right (the first footpath is obstructed).

3 The route then drops down again to the side of Darley Beck where it crosses a road and picks up a bridleway at Folly Gill Bridge towards Folly Hall, running adjacent to the stream. Keep on the bridleway uphill, passing a few houses. As the track bends to the left, take the path on the right, uphill through the field and into Folly Wood.



Key:

Packhorse Trail -----
Woodland
River Nidd
Buildings

4 Follow the path straight through Folly Wood, through a couple of fields until you pop out onto a driveway. Turn left and quickly right to pick up the footpath on the other side of the drive.



Wood watch: If it is springtime, don't forget to look out for bluebells or wild garlic in Low Wood, which is ancient woodland. This means there has been woodland here since at least AD 1600.



History watch:

The Packhorse Bridge is thought to date from as early as the 15th century, part of an old packhorse route between Bolton Abbey and Fountains Abbey. A finely built bridge, possibly constructed by the abbey, it is one of only sixteen English bridges that remain unaltered today.

5 On reaching Thornthwaite, walk down a driveway towards houses, and just before the left-hand house gateway, cross the wall to the left and follow the edge of the field along to the right to a stone stile. Cross the stile and keep to the right-hand edge of the field until you reach an old paved path alongside the stream. Then head northwards out of Thornthwaite along the road, passing St Saviour's Church. There has been a church here since AD 1409, standing above the Packhorse Bridge (which you see from the road, but do not cross).

6 Follow the sweep of the road round to the left then go up the hill, after Carr Lodge Farm turn right to Thornthwaite Scout camp. As you walk along the track towards the Scout camp, look out on the left for a metal gate with footpath signs. Go through the gate and diagonally uphill to a stile, which takes you into the woods.

7 Emerging from the woods on the way back to Darley you will see the most beautiful view across Nidderdale towards Brimham Rocks. Follow the long straight path towards Dairy Lane and turn left onto Dairy Lane, picking up the footpath on the right, after Oxen Close Farm. Follow this back to the footbridge you passed at the start of the walk over Darley Beck. Cross the bridge and turn left, retracing the footpath through three fields to bring you back to the start point.

HOW MANY OF OUR WILD WONDERS CAN YOU SPOT ALONG THE ROUTE?

1. Curlew – if you are lucky you might see these distinctive wading birds. Their long legs and downward curved bill are instantly recognisable.



2. Grey wagtail – a striking slate grey bird, with a long tail that is yellow underneath.

3. Kingfisher – a small but unmistakable bright blue and orange bird that flies low over water – look out for a flash of blue darting along a river or listen for their loud, shrill, whistle-like call. They often hunt fish from riverside perches.



4. Dipper – short-tailed, plump songbird, with a brown body and white chest, which can swim and dive under water to feed. Keep an eye over fast-flowing water and rocky patches.

5. Ragged robin – it has deeply divided deep pink petals and these give the flowers an attractive ragged appearance.



6. St Saviour's Church

7. Packhorse Bridge



8. Silver birch – this striking tree is a wildlife hero, providing food and habitat for hole-nesting birds, such as woodpeckers, and more than 300 insect species. A symbol of renewal in Celtic mythology, gardeners still use the birch broom to 'purify' gardens and drive out the spirits of yesteryear.

9. Yew tree – with reddish brown bark, needle-like leaves and red berries (these are poisonous), this amazing tree can live for 100s if not 1000s of years and was used as a symbol of immortality. Associated with churchyards, it's thought they were planted on graves to protect the dead. For centuries it was custom to carry yew branches at funerals.



10. Oak tree – with its distinctive lobed leaves and its acorns loved by squirrels, the oak is perhaps one of Britain's most beloved trees. A noble symbol of strength, its wood was central to the British economy from the days of Magna Carta. This most reliable tree supports more wildlife than any other native tree. Held in the highest regard, it has long been associated with royalty.



11. Garden bumblebee - it has three yellow bands on its body, with a clean white tail. It is common throughout the UK, often frequenting gardens. Look out for them near plants such as foxgloves, cowslips and red clover.

12. Green hairstreak butterfly – this stunner is the only green butterfly in the UK. Green hairstreak caterpillars like feeding on plants such as bird's-foot trefoil, gorse and bramble.



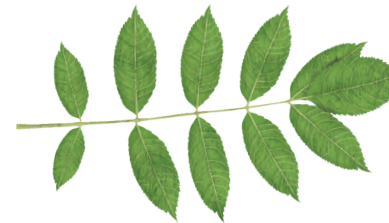
Fill in the missing letters of the leaves you might find around the countryside!

Yew

Alder

Silver Birch

Oak



A _ _ _ R



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S _ _ V _ _ B _ _ _ H