In the monks’ footsteps - Brimham Rocks to Fountains Abbey

Brimham Rocks, Summerbridge, Harrogate, HG3 4DW

Overview: Walk in the monks’ footsteps from Brimham Rocks to Fountains Abbey, following the ancient trail. There are excellent views from Riva Hill to Brimham Rocks.

Grade: Moderate. Easy-going mainly with but with one short steep ascent via steps and a path. The trail can get muddy after heavy rain. Dogs welcome but must be kept on lead as the walk passes through grazing areas for cattle and sheep.

Distance: 7.6 miles (12.3 km) / Time: 3 hrs - 3.5 hrs / OS Map: Explorer 298 / Geology: Carboniferous (~ 315 mya) sandstone and some Cayton Gill Shell Bed Limestone.

Options for returning to Brimham Rocks: Retrace your steps / Phone a friend for a lift / On summer Sundays and bank holidays the Nidderdale Rambler 825 bus service connects Fountains Abbey and Brimham Rocks. Check the timetable first at https://www.dalesbus.org/brimhamexplorer.html
**Distance measurements:** Metres (abbreviated as m) are used in this guide, but in the main distances mentioned are short and approximate enough that metres and yards can be regarded as more or less equivalent. For longer distances, take 1 km as about 0.6 of a mile.

**Geo-coordinates:** For those who might like to use them, Ordnance Survey map grid references and geo-coordinates (longitude and latitude) are given at the start of each section. The geocoordinates are linked to Google Maps, and so you can tap them and see the location on the map - satellite view is best.

#### Historical interest on the walk

**Butterton Bridge**
Butterton Bridge, a medieval pack horse bridge, was built in the 13th century by the monks from Fountains Abbey on the route from the Abbey to Grassington via Brimham Rocks.

The bridge is a listed monument, No. 1004202, click [here for details](#).

**Lacon Cross**
Wayside crosses are one of several types of Christian cross erected during the medieval period, mostly from the 9th to the 15th centuries.

In addition to serving the function of reiterating and reinforcing the Christian faith amongst those who passed the cross and of reassuring the traveller, wayside crosses often fulfilled a role as way markers, especially in difficult and otherwise unmarked terrain.

Lacon cross was probably built for the monks of Fountains Abbey. It used to act as a route marker for travellers crossing Butterton Bridge from Warsill and the south to reach Fountains Abbey.

This site is now in the care of English Heritage.

**Warren House & Rabbit Hill Farm**
The monks bred rabbits in large enclosed fields called Warrens because they were valuable for their meat and soft fur.

Rabbit hills or ‘pillow mounds’ of earth were made for the animals to burrow into, usually enclosed with high stone walls to keep foxes and poachers out - as well as to keep the rabbits in!

**Brimham Lodge - Grade I listed**
Brimham Lodge is in the parish of Hartwith cum Winsley and was Grade I listed in 1987.

In the Middle Ages, Hartwith cum Winsley (then known as Brimham) formed part of the lands of Fountains Abbey.

The house was built in 1661 for Thomas Braithwaite, using finely coursed squared gritstone with a blue slate roof.

**River Skell and Fountains Abbey**
The River Skell is a 12-mile-long (19 km) tributary of the River Ure, which enters Studley Royal Park and flows past Fountains Hall and Fountains Abbey.

Below the abbey the river was dammed in the 18th century to form an ornamental lake and water garden.

The river and sheltered valley must have been major contributory factors in choosing to build the abbey here.
Section 1 (SE 2085 6458 / 54.07660, -1.68270)

Brimham Rocks to Riva Hill (1.7 km / 1.1 miles)

From the Brimham Rocks car park, go down the road you came in on, but before reaching the public road turn right down the track marked Private Road to Druids Cave farm.

After about 75 m - and just before the track passes between a gap in a wall with a National Trust boundary marker - there's a footpath to your left. Take this path and then immediately the left fork to continue to the road.

Cross the road and take the footpath signposted Nidderdale Way. Follow this path for about 1 km to a stile at the boundary of Brimham Rocks. Over the stile and continue straight on, then through a gate passing the track to Riva Hill Farm on the left.

Straight on for about 250 m to a junction where the paved track turns left and another track forks to the right.

Section 2 (SE 2222 6411 / 54.07240, -1.66190)

Riva Hill to South Lane Warsill

Short route to section 3 (0.6 km / 0.4 miles) Take the paved track to the left for 600 m to Warsill Parish Hall, then on a further 50 m to South Lane on your left. (Go to Section 3)

Full route to section 3 (3.0 km / 1.9 miles) Fork right through the gate and follow the track alongside the course of the medieval Monks’ Wall for 1 km until you reach a road. Turn left at the road then immediately left again on to the farm track signposted Public Bridleway / Nidderdale Way / Shaw Mills.

Follow the track through Brimham Lodge Farm, then through a wooded area and continuing straight on uphill signposted Park House / Warsill. After passing Park House Farm continue up the slope and just before the brow of the hill take the footpath on the right through a gate.

Follow the footpath, passing first some small lakes on your right and then a couple of hundred metres or so further on past houses on your left.

After another 100 m and immediately after a landscaped lake on your left, take the left fork Public Bridleway between some houses up to the road, and turn right past Warsill Parish Hall to South Lane 50 m on your left.
Section 3  (SE 2269 6449 / 54.07580, -1.65470)
South Lane Warsill to Jeffrey Well (1.7 km / 1.1 miles)
Head up South Lane for 800 m to the T junction and turn right past the Equestrian Centre. Follow the road for about 400 m through two left curves to the boundary of Warren Forest Park with its holiday homes, and take the acute right hand of the two drives on your right. Follow the drive between the buildings and up the grassy slope to reach a gate into a pasture. Through the next two pastures staying beside the trees on the left, then over the stile to the road and turn right. Look for a footpath on the left in about 120 m.

Section 4  (SE 2322 6550/ 54.08480, -1.64650)
Jeffrey Well to Butterton Bridge (1.3 km / 0.8 miles)
Take the footpath and follow the line of trees straight on to a gate into the next field. Continue straight staying close to the wall on the left. At Warsill Hill Farm, turn left on the public bridleway, then after 50 m climb over the wall stile on the right. Follow the path which goes diagonally through the next pasture and take the lower of the two gates. Continue down the hill keeping the wall on your right, through the next pasture heading straight on towards a gate into the woods. Follow the path through the woods to the right to the bottom of the valley and cross Picking Gill on Butterton Bridge. (See page 2 for historic details of the bridge)
Section 5  (SE 2387 6646 / 54.09350, -1.63650)

**Butterton Bridge to Sawley Arms (2.2 km / 1.4 miles)**

Just over the bridge and opposite to where you meet a track you’ll see steps straight ahead up into the wood. Take the steps and then the path through the wood to a track at the top and bear right, then after 50 m take the gate on the left into a pasture.

Cross the pasture diagonally to the far right hand corner, through a gate to a farm track then 50 m further on take the path to the left into the pasture in which you’ll see Lacon Cross.

Head for the far left hand corner of the pasture, through a stone stile and down the hill heading for Lacon Hall. Follow the path around the left side of Lacon Hall to a paved drive, then along the drive for 450 m to the road. Turn left at the road and continue for 550 m to the Sawley Arms.

Section 6  (SE 2487 6775 / 54.10510, -1.62100)

**Sawley Arms to Fountains Abbey (2.4 km / 1.5 miles)**

Turn right on to Low Gate Lane and follow the road for about 1.25 km, to a stile on the left just after a right hand bend heading downhill.

Over the stile and follow the footpath down the valley and cross the River Skell by the footbridge and on to a track. Turn right and follow the track until you reach the road.

Turn right on the road and head down the hill to the Fountains Abbey West Gate.

Make your way up to the visitor centre for refreshments, the car park and bus stops.

Guide and Photographs by Malcolm Secrett