

Fell walk 22 Nov 2023 - Report by Judith Coleman



After gathering at the scout hut in Richmond, twelve of us set off to walk a nine-and-a-half-mile circuit in the countryside west of Richmond and north of the River Swale. The route took us up to and along the limestone cliff known as Whitcliffe Scar as far as Willance's Leap (more of that later), round by Clapgate and, joining the Coast to Coast path near Applegarth, returned through Billy Bank Wood. The Swale was in view for most of the walk, from above on the way out and from its wooded banks as we returned. Much of the walking was on grassy paths and easy tracks, though the slippery, muddy paths along parts of the Whitcliffe Scar led to much merriment and talk of toboggans and skis! Actually, the weather was fine all day - no snow in sight, mainly cloudy and, despite the whole walk being, literally, a bit of a breeze, surprisingly mild.

I promised you more about Willance's Leap. Did you know that you cannot save an injured leg from going gangrenous by tucking it into a dead horse's belly, but by doing so you can slow down the process and so save your life? I didn't! But, according to legend, this is what Robert Wiillance found out way back in 1606 when his horse bolted over the edge of Whitcliffe Scar in the mist and he knew he would have a long wait before anyone could rescue him.

Animals featured again later along the walk. Through autumn and winter Highland cattle graze and trample the rough grassland along the river on the way to Billy Bank Wood and in the process maintain and improve what has been categorised as a Priority Habitat, encouraging increased numbers of invertebrates, insects and wildflowers.

The observant among you may have noticed that the walk was 'only' nine-and-a-half miles long – but this is the fell group and the walks are normally ten to twelve miles. Don't be fooled – we were not let off lightly. When we returned to Richmond we were led, not to the cars but, oh so unwillingly, up the steep slopes of the town all the way to The Little Drummer Boy Tearoom, where the staff did a wonderful job of keeping the rabble under control and serving exactly what was ordered in record time.

This detour was bound to be at least half a mile!

Many thanks to Gordon for stepping in (sorry!) at relatively short notice and leading a most enjoyable walk.