

Ravenstonedale and Smardale

We start in the village of Ravenstonedale – there is ample roadside parking in the village. We started from the road at the side of the King’s Head pub, but anywhere in the village would work equally well. For those using Satnav to get to the start, the postcode for the pub is CA17 4NH, whilst paper map users need the grid reference NY72120428. If you prefer What-3-Words, then the tag is **cadet.stated.fury**

We head off down the hill toward the beck at the front of the Kings Head pub – this is the oddly named Scandal Beck – the name is derived from the Old English for “Short Valley”. From there we turn right at the road and head up toward the main road (A685). Before we get to the main road though, we see a footpath sign on the left (signed “Smardale Bridge”) which takes us across a field, via a stone slab footbridge, and on to a stile onto the verge of the A685 – the verge is wide and safe. We cross the road and find a set of steps up to another stile, from where we can see a metal gate ahead, where the path continues.

The path is not particularly clear, but the general direction is North, keeping the drystone wall on your right, heading toward the left hand edge of the stand of trees that lie ahead. As we crest the hill, we see the gate in the corner of the field next to the trees, and from here we continue in much the same direction contouring around the hill.

From the next metal gate, we head downhill and North to meet the beck – the path goes through a disused quarry adjacent to the river, and then to a track which comes up from the lovely 18th century packhorse bridge.

We now head uphill, between two drystone walls on a clear track signposted as a public bridleway to Kirkby Stephen. We press on uphill for a while now, losing sight of the viaduct as we head up onto Smardale Fell, keeping the wall on our left within sight.

We head down to a gate onto a road at the edge of Smardale. The final part of this is quite steep, so take care if the ground is wet. Through the gate, we are onto a flat lane with Smardale Hall ahead us beyond the railway bridge.

We follow the lane past Smardale Hall, and on to a road junction – this is School Lane, and to our left we see the station master’s house. We head out to the left on Beck Lane and look for the start of the Smardale National Nature Reserve – this is on our left just off the track to the rear of Smardale Hall, and it follows the old railway line along the track bed for several miles.

We head down the track for a while now passing under the Settle to Carlisle line with its own splendid viaduct visible on the right and continue until we arrive at the north end of the Smardale Gill viaduct. On the way it’s worth keeping an eye open for red squirrels, lizards, and the many species of butterfly that thrive here, including the rare Scotch Argus.

We carry on across the viaduct – be prepared for this to be windswept. At the end of the viaduct the track bed continues as a path for several miles. Our first landmark is a huge limekiln - this was not built to help in the construction of the viaduct, it came later as the presence of the railway created a commercial opportunity.

We press on past a pair of abandoned railway cottages, and under an access bridge until we find ourselves on an open stretch of the line with excellent views back to Ravenstonedale and of the

packhorse bridge. There are a number of paths which leave the railway track in this section, but we press on for now until the line curves round to the right and we see a way marker on the left at a kissing gate. From the gate we head slightly left to cross a small beck (at Several Gill) before heading over the hill to find a track which leads down to the packhorse bridge, via a metal gate.

As the track approaches the bridge, we see a stile on the right. This is our route back to Ravenstonedale, so if you are taking a moment to visit the bridge, remember to come back to this stile. Directly ahead, we see a stand of trees, and we need to head just to the left of the tree line to find a metal gate that accesses a path running below the woodland.

This gradually becomes a track which ends at a further gate which takes us into a wide field with views over a farm and on to Ravenstonedale. We are heading for the track clearly visible at the farm, but don't be tempted to go in a direct line as this will bring you to a very steep descent. Instead go slightly right first and aim for a pink marker post which soon becomes visible.

From here you will see a gate in the bottom corner of the field next to a stream crossed by a wooden plank bridge. Cross the bridge and pick up the track, following it round to the left until you see a gate in the drystone wall below.

From here the path goes behind the barn and along the side of Scandal Beck and back into the village, via an underpass at the A685. As you arrive at Ravenstonedale, you will see the Kings Head just to the left – an excellent place to end a walk.

- **Total distance 12.6 km (7.8 miles)**
- **Total ascent 328 m**
- **Moderate walk**