

# Bus Gargrave to Skipton, walk back along the canal

## Introduction



In an inspired piece of themed programming, our last five walks have all shared a common feature – significant sections walking alongside water. This week we make that a run of six using the Leeds and Liverpool Canal as our waterway.

Canal walking is always interesting, with plenty of industrial heritage to see, and as a bonus, they tend to be gentle walks with no navigational challenge, making them an ideal easy stroll requiring little preparation. The potential downside is that they often involve turning round and re-walking the same route to get back to the start, but we have a solution to that: We park in Gargrave, then take a bus to Skipton and walk back making this a linear walk. Both Skipton and

Gargrave are interesting places to visit with opportunities for shopping, eating and drinking, so this is a walk that could easily be incorporated into a longer day out.

- **Total distance 8.5 km (5.3 miles)**
- **Total ascent 10 m**
- **Easy walk**

## The Walk

We describe the walk here starting from Gargrave and then taking a bus to Skipton. It would of course be possible to travel in the opposite direction, and as both towns have a railway station, it would be possible to use the train instead of a bus. Having said all that, the arrangements we outline here worked excellently for us, and were very convenient.

Parking in Gargrave is free, and can be found at North Street, opposite the Village Hall. If you are using Satnav to get there try BD23 3RD as a postcode, or if your device accepts What-3-Words tags use **skewing.joggers.spirits** as a location. This corresponds to the OS grid reference SD93205432.

From the car park head back to the A65 along Pennine Way at the front of the Village Hall, to find the bus stop in front of the Dalesman Café.

There are a number of bus services that we could use to make this journey. We used the 580, departing at 09:55, but for alternatives visit <https://northyorkstravel.info/place/?place=gargrave>



Worth noting in Gargrave before we set off are the public toilets - opposite the bus stop, the river Aire - across the A65, St Andrew's church rebuilt in a Victorian Perpendicular style by Rohde Hawkins (Paley and Austin were presumably too busy) and a number of local shops.

Whilst we wait for the bus we might ponder where the name Gargrave comes from. In practice, this is unknown, but competing theories are:

- A combination of Old English gāra meaning "spear" combined with graf meaning wood or woods, giving a combined meaning "the wood(s) from which spear-shafts were cut".
- Old English gāra may also have had the sense "triangular piece of land" to which was added the Old Norse family name Gierir, making a combined meaning of "the triangular piece of land belonging to Gierir".
- Alternatively, the Norse Gierir could have been combined with the Old English termination græf, "grave, trench", meaning "grave of the Norse Gierir".
- Finally, William Wheater thought Gargrave to be derived the Celtic caer and the Saxon gerefa, meaning "the camp or city of the reeve/governor"



The bus journey to Skipton takes just 15 minutes, and we alight at the Bus station which rather conveniently is right next to the canal. We start out by crossing the pedestrian bridge from the bus station to the canal tow path, noting a plaque stating that the name for this is Gallows Footbridge. Every medieval town had its gallows, usually at the edge of town where there would be space for a crowd to watch a hanging, and this area of Skipton was historically called Gallowgatte, meaning the street to the gallows. The exact site of the gallows is uncertain but is probably in the area redeveloped for either the railway station or the more modern superstores.

Interestingly, gallows in small towns like Skipton were abandoned long before capital punishment was abolished, as hangings were switched to larger centres such as York.

Once at the tow path we head left and into the town centre – navigation for the entirety of this route is simple – the canal is just to your right, and beyond that all you need to remember is keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Almost immediately we arrive at the bridge where the A6069 crosses over the canal, and in front of us we have the old warehouses and loading areas from when the Leeds Liverpool canal was in its heyday. Opposite us we have a junction in the canal, where a short section of canal known locally as the Springs Branch connects to the main line.



Also known as the Thanet Canal, it runs up the side of Skipton Castle, to loading wharves where limestone from quarries owned by Lord

Thanet was tipped into boats. The only flaw in this design is that the quarry tramways were a lot higher than the canal, so long chutes were used to load the limestone into boats. This caused recurring damage to the boats and more significantly the noise disturbed the occupants of the



castle, so a second steeper tramway was constructed, alleviating these issues. One of the shorter metal chutes is still visible on the canal bank, below the castle walls.

Our route stays with the main line of the canal and heads out to the west of the town, passing the back of the many Victorian Mills served by the canal. Most of these have been sandblasted and converted into rather upmarket apartments – the area would have looked much more “gritty” when still industrialised.

If you have time on your side, it might be worth taking a stroll down the various side streets to explore the area.

On the far side of the canal during this early stage of the walk we have Aireville Park created in the 1830s by Henry Allcock as part of the Aireville Estate.

Aireville Park is home of the annual Skipton Triathlon, the largest pool-based triathlon in Yorkshire and Humberside. There is a public footpath along the far side of the canal here so expect to see walkers on both sides.

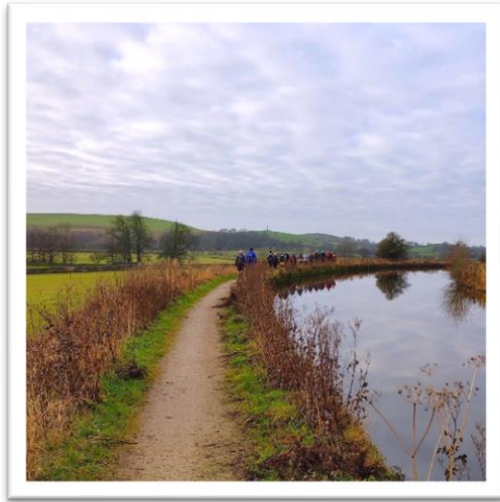
We soon arrive at a large road bridge which soars over the canal. This is the A629, which most of us will have driven over many times.

We follow the tow path round to a swing bridge known as the Niffany Bridge, and then take a narrow path at the side of the busy A6069 for about 100m until the towpath diverges from the road and enters a more tranquil rural stretch. At this point in the walk, we have Gawber Hill over to our right, and then the canal, the railway line to Gargrave, the A6069, and the River Aire all running parallel in close proximity. Don't forget to look back along this stretch as the views over the roofs of Skipton toward Skipton Moor (373m) are very atmospheric, particularly if the morning mist is still lingering.



We pass under the A59, and then the canal starts to turn right as it contours around Hooper Hill: Following the contours in this way was a feature of early canals, as it reduced the need for complex locks, albeit with a price to be paid in the sense of longer, more convoluted routes. As canal building expertise advanced, locks became a more attractive option, and straighter canals were preferred.

Both approaches can be seen on the Leeds Liverpool Canal, as this huge project took many years to complete.



It is often assumed that construction started at one end and then progressed in a linear fashion – this is not the case, and numerous sections were contracted to a myriad of local builders along the route. In fact, the route itself was uncertain when building started as competing factions argued about which towns should benefit from (and help finance) the project.

A commencement ceremony held at Halsall, near Southport on 5 November 1770 saw the start of digging, yet the final phase of the main line was not completed until 1816. During this time, expertise developed rapidly so the early sections like the one we are walking now were contour canals, whilst later sections (like Bingley and the famous five rise locks)

showcased the more advanced use of locks.

Our next landmark is a swing bridge bringing farm access over from the A65 to farm buildings at Thorlby, then we have an uninterrupted stroll for more than a mile until we get to the next swing bridge at Highgate, and as we look left, we now have Gargrave in sight.

The most prominent visual feature is the factory belonging to Scapa Healthcare, where the focus is on new product development and manufacturing of advanced wound care, consumer wellness products and wearable fixation devices. Although Scapa and the products it now develops at Gargrave are perhaps seen as a recent development, the site here dates back a good way, and is perhaps better known by established locals as “Johnson and Johnson”. The central mill building (Airebank Mills) dates back to 1780 and was used for cotton production until the 1930s. The mill found a new lease of life when it was bought by American-based Johnson & Johnson to make bandages and surgical dressings. It was J & J’s first full-scale manufacturing plant in the UK.

It subsequently pioneered and produced many items for which the company became known – ranging from baby products to industrial tape – and created the firm’s first ethical pharmaceutical goods. The site was a successful part of the J & J structure, and in 1973 the firm announced a major expansion programme costing £1.85 million. The scheme included new microbiological laboratories, new production areas and an 83,000 square foot warehouse. Further expansion took place in 1992, with the opening of a new steriliser unit and in 2007 with the opening of a new technology centre.

A new chapter in the firm’s history was written in 2008 when Johnson & Johnson’s professional wound care business was the subject of a management buyout. The new business Systagenix kept the company’s operations, research and development headquarters in Gargrave and was itself acquired by Scapa in 2018.



We continue along the towpath and soon approach the A65 where we find the first lock of the day – Holme Bridge lock – this is the first lock for 17 miles for boaters arriving from the south.



Just 50m later the canal is carried over a minor stream at an aqueduct, and to our left we see an interesting, ruined building which although now abandoned was clearly once important enough to boast an impressive chimney (suggesting one or more fireplaces) along with substantial window openings. This was clearly more than an agricultural shed.

Our path continues to Ray Bridge – which we met previously on our Gargrave and Eshton walk. From here we follow the canal under a further bridge – where we see an interesting

canal side warehouse now housing an architectural practice, and then just 200m later we arrive at our penultimate bridge of the day – Eshton Road bridge Number 171 where we also see Eshton Road Lock.

Just 200m later we arrive at bridge number 170, also known as Higherland Bridge where we leave the canal and head left downhill for just 50m to find the car park where our day started.

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