

Christmas Walk 2024

We start at the Punch Bowl at Low Bentham. The pub is obviously familiar to anyone from Bentham and environs, but if you are a visitor downloading the walk from the website and need guidance, the address is Eskew Lane, Low Bentham, LA2 7DD. If you prefer a paper map then the OS grid reference is SD64616931, and the corresponding what-3-words tag is **learns.zoos.qualified**.

We used the pub car park, but alternate parking is available at the roadside in Low Bentham, or in the public car park just past the Victoria Institute as you continue toward High Bentham – just make your way back to the Punch Bowl to pick up the directions.

Whilst at the car park, you might notice a sign near the junction with the B6480, describing a sculpture known as The Queen's Bloomers – the sculpture is no longer present, something of a shame, as this was an interesting reference to local history.

Low Bentham was home to the Ford Ayrton silk mill until its closure in 1969, and one of the claims to fame for the mill was its production of the fine silk used in the manufacture of Queen Victoria's underwear. The style of underwear usually assumed to be favoured by Her Majesty is the "bloomer", itself a term requiring some explanation . . .

Bloomers, also called the Turkish dress, the American dress, or simply reform dress, are women's garments for the lower body. They were developed in the 19th century as a comfortable alternative to the heavy, constricting dresses worn by women. They take their name from their best-known advocate, the American women's rights activist, and keen cyclist, Amelia Bloomer. The name "bloomers" was used in a derogatory manner however and was never used by the women who wore them, who referred to their clothes as the "Reform Costume" or the "American Dress".

Put together the history of silk manufacture for the royal household and a tenuous link to cycling, and we have an excellent opportunity to mark Low Bentham's place on the Way of the Roses cycle route (Morecambe to Bridlington) with a humorous stainless steel statue.

Once our new boots and Christmas hats were fully adjusted, we set off up Eskew Lane following the course of the Wenning. We are on the road for just 100m and soon see a path on the left which takes us over fields to Clouds Bank on Mill Lane – the name referencing the silk mills which were further down to our left.

Once at Mill Lane we turn right and head uphill for 250m until we see a track to Kirkbeck on the right. This takes us up toward a farm, which we need to walk around. Peering at the OS map suggests that the path is through the centre of the farmyard – but in practice when you get there the well-trodden path is to the right of the farm around the outside. This is easier for the walker, and no doubt preferable for the farmer.

We follow round the edge of the farm buildings and head down to a small wooden footbridge over a beck. This is referred to as County Beck because it marks the boundary between Lancashire and Yorkshire: Feel free to add your own Wallace and Gromit reference.

Once over the bridge – somewhat slippery when wet, we head up the bank to pick up the path that follows the course of the beck up to Mewith Lane – 200m ahead.

Once at the road we turn left and cross County Bridge to head up Mewith Lane for a while. We pass Oak Tree House on the left and then arrive at Low Oakhead where our landmark is a cottage with an attractive weathervane with a fish motif. We find a signposted footpath on the left and follow the fence line across the fields as we head north through a series of fields back toward Mill Lane.

This section of the walk crosses a number of fields, the route is generally clear, but you may need to improvise from time to time after heavy rain as drainage is poor here.

We eventually arrive at an area with visible industrial scarring - this is a lost remnant of coal mining in this area – for more about that try our Two Counties walk.

We follow the path round to a wooden footbridge (again slippery) and then head across the field (usually with horses present) toward a stable block where we find a metalled road – this is Mill Lane again.

If time is pressing, head left here to take the shortcut to Low Bentham. But for the full experience, head right here and walk uphill to a sharp right hand bend, then just beyond that take a lane on the left which goes down a pleasant tree lined lane to Low Bottom. Here we take the path between houses and then round to the left toward the caravan park at High Bentham.

As we approach the edge of the caravan park, we meet a path that runs along the Wenning, and we go left here to cross a stone stile and broad field, and then a second stone stile to bring us to the waterfalls where the Wenning Oak stands.

The next section of the walk is along the bank of the Wenning as we head back down to Low Bentham. One of the key landmarks along this section is the memorial bench to Dorothy Stubbs – we visited here on our Bentham to Low Bentham circular walk to remember Dorothy.

Pressing on, we cross another stone stile, a concrete slab bridge, and then a final stone stile to arrive at the weir adjacent to the currently unused fish farm. Much of the infrastructure to manage water flow here was originally built to supply water to the silk mills but repurposed in later years to supply the trout farm. Flow is split between the main line of the Wenning and a series of ponds by opening and closing sluice gates – meanwhile salmon heading upstream in the autumn can use the fish pass built into the weir to make progress.

The path follows the riverbank until we divert up to Mill Lane, where we find ourselves in front of Clouds Bank again. We could retrace our route from earlier in the day, but instead go right and follow Mill Lane down to the site of the old Silk Mills – now a housing complex.

Mill Lane soon arrives at the B6480, and we go left to walk on the pavement for 200m back to the Punch Bowl, where we enjoyed a convivial lunch. We present this walk as our Christmas walk, but it is of course a pleasant and easy local walk that works well at any time of the year.

- **Total distance 6.7 km (4.2 miles)**
- **Total Ascent 123 m**
- **Easy walk**