

Skelsmergh Walks

No. 1 Skelsmergh Circuit

Grant aided by Cumbria County Council and Skelsmergh & Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council



Distance: 8.4 miles

*Mint Bridge - Must Hill - Gurnal Bridge - Garth Row -
Watchgate Waterworks - Back Lane - Goodham Scales
- Little Mire - Laverock Bridge - Beck Mills - Mint Bridge*

P In the lay-by south of Mint Bridge

The area north of Mint Bridge is now in Kendal but until 1935 it marked the southern edge of Skelsmergh so this is a walk around the borders of the township as it was for most of the last millennium.

Mint House, on the corner, was built in 1783 by a prosperous local farmer. There was a dairy and coach house on either side that can still be recognised in spite of later adaptations. Go down Gilthwaiterigg Lane. Mint Cottage over the wall on the left was built a little later by the same family. Once through the industrial estate and past the large Lakeland premises you pass Gilthwaiterigg, the much altered 15th-century house on your right that was the birthplace of James Duckett, a bookseller who was executed at Tyburn in 1602 for selling Catholic literature.

Take the left turn to Must Hill, go through the yard of this working farm and take the left hand gate beyond the 18th-century farmhouse. The ruined barn that soon appears to your left is all that remains of a former farm, the Redman Tenement. Turn right at the field next to Sprint Bridge, cross the road and take the track towards Sprint Mill.



Track to Sprint Mill

Turn right just before the river. Sprint Mill opposite and Oak Bank Mill higher up the river are the last surviving buildings of a series of mills that occupied both banks of the Sprint here for centuries. There were two fulling (woollen) mills on the Skelsmergh bank in 1557.

The siphon pipes over the river are part of the Thirlmere Aqueduct. This 7-foot-wide tunnel was completed in 1894 to take water to Manchester.



Cataracts on the River Sprint

Note the rounded piers of the former wood storage sheds for Oak Bank Bobbin Mill on your right. In the 1840s Robert Seed constructed the mill, coppice sheds and the large house nearby which was both family home and workers' accommodation. The wooded area beside the cataract has acquired the name of 'Paradise' in recent years and is at its most attractive when spring flowers give it the character of a woodland garden. The path follows the riverbank through the field below Catholme Wood. The remains of the Oak Bank millstream can be seen here and at the far end of the field some of the weir machinery.

Take the track to the right of Holme House. At the top of the hill above here you meet the river again at a point where erosion has cut away the original footpath. From Gurnal Bridge follow the lane past the former Hollin Root farm and left at the Garth Row crossroads. The hill here was once known as Joiners Lane because several carpenters and wheelwrights worked here. The Parish Woodland on your right includes a convenient bench.

Cross the main road with care and ascend Skelsmergh Fell via two stiles. You reach the old north road below Watchgate Waterworks. It was constructed in 1972 to treat water from Haweswater but also controls the Thirlmere Aqueduct and extraction from other lakes.

Take the footpath on the far side of the waterworks and turn right. Follow the road past Poppy Farm and turn right at the crossroads. The route takes Back Lane to Goodham Scales



Aqueduct stirrup stile



Winter Whinfell Ridge panorama

(‘Godwin’s farm’ in the 13th century) and then a left turn to briefly follow the Dales Way. Turn right before New House, climbing past a small pond and stone piles near the wall that are all that remains of the farm called Back of Patton. At the top of the hill, there is a small borrow pit, probably once used to extract stone for the walls. Just before you reach the road look out for the metal gate and concrete stirrup stile that reveals you are crossing another of the huge tunnels that pass underneath Skelsmergh. This is the 8-foot-wide Haweswater Aqueduct.

Across the road take the track down to the ruined farm of Little Mire that was abandoned in the 1940s. Bear left to a stile near a magnificent and partly hollow ash pollard of 6m girth. Go down the valley into a hollow where there are a number of good examples of erratics – stones transported by glaciers, such as the pink Shap granite that is often found in local walls.

Turn right at the road. It is believed to follow the line of the Roman road that linked the fort at Watercrock, south of Kendal, with Low Borrowbridge fort near Tebay.

On your left a road leads to the river and the site of Scarfoot Mill. There were logwood mills here for nearly 300 years. They were mainly used to grind imported dyewoods for the textile industry. At the end of the Victorian terrace built for mill workers at Scar Foot and Mealbank, a footpath takes you to Dodding Green.

The site was named after the 14th-century Kendal wool merchant, William Dodding. Later it came into the hands of Robert Stephenson, a Catholic landowner who died in 1723, leaving all his property to Catholic charities that still survive.

The chapel on the end was built in 1791 and there were resident priests from 1715–1995. There was an earlier secret chapel in the attic and hiding places for priests. In recent years the site has been transformed by the Cenacolo Community – a rehabilitation charity.

Turn right at the road and take the footpath on your left round the bend here. It meets the river again beside the camping site at Millcrest. The aqueduct bridge here is on a much larger scale than the one at Sprint Mill. It is sited just below the dilapidated weir built for the mills lower down the River Mint. Continue on this side of the river until you reach Beck Mills. The first building was once the corn mill and you then go through the side garden of the lower mill which is now residential but was used for a variety of manufacturing purposes. The whole site was owned by the leper hospital of St Leonard’s or Spital in 1537 and at that time included three mills. Combinations of corn, woollen, spinning and other mills worked here until the 1940s.

Follow the river to return to Mint Bridge.



Dodding Green

