

# Skelsmergh Walks

## No. 3 Skelsmergh East

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



Distance: 4.4 miles

*Laverock Bridge - Little Mire - Goodham Scales -  
Edge Bank - Otterbank - Tarn Bank -  
Skelsmergh Hall - Dodding Green*

**P** Usually possible in the lay-by near the bridge



Laverock Bridge

Laverock Bridge was once a narrow packhorse bridge. In the early 19th century a parallel structure was bolted to the original and parapets added. The join is still visible underneath.

Take the road north – 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. The Victorian terrace on your left was built for mill workers. Scarfoot Mill was in the group of buildings over the field to your right. There were logwood mills here between 1743 and 1920. They were mainly used to grind imported dyewoods for the textile industry but many other products were also processed, including indigo, cochineal, turmeric and pepper.

Take the kissing gate opposite Laverock Hill. The valley side on your right here was once wooded – occasional trees, stumps and some ‘woodland indicator’ plants such as bluebell and pignut persist.

The next field is known to some as the ‘Valley of the Rocks’. The stones include a number of pink granite erratics – large stones transported by glaciers from Shap Fell and often built into the bases of drystone walls in this area.

Just before the stile, note the magnificent and hollow ash pollard of 6m girth. Ash usually live for less than 200 years but this could be much older; pollarding – cutting off the upper branches periodically – prolongs the life of a tree.



Little Mire

Head for the ruins of Little Mire, a house that was abandoned in the 1940s. It was once a small farm and the foundations of a barn can be identified beyond the house.

Turn right and go uphill to follow the sunken access track above the house. At the road, turn left and then take the path through the double gates on the right. Note the concrete stirrup-shaped stile in the wall to your right and the padlocked metal gate to the left. They are clues to the presence of the Haweswater Aqueduct that takes water to Manchester. It was built in the 1950s and the tunnel beneath you is over 8 feet (2.4m) across.

Ahead is a small fenced quarry and immediately above it a depression marks the site of an earlier pit. These 19th-century ‘borrow pits’ were probably used to extract walling stone.

If it is clear, the knoll to the left of the path is a good viewpoint. Ahead is the Whinell Ridge and to the right the Howgill Fells. Behind and to the south are Benson’s Knott and to the south-west, Morecambe Bay. To the west the panorama of fells includes Coniston Old Man, Wetherlam, Crinkle Crag and Scafell Pike. North-west you can see through the jaws of Longsleddale valley with High Street behind and the cone shapes of Ill Bell and Froswick above Kentmere.

Take the stile across the wall to your right and follow the wall past the piles of stones that are all that remains of a farm once known as the Back of Patton. Skirt to the right of the pond below and cross two ladder stiles before gaining the track ahead. You are now on the Dales Way, a long distance footpath that links Bowness-on-Windermere with Ilkley in West Yorkshire.

Turn left and pass Goodham Scales – a name that can be identified in the 13th-century boundaries of Skelsmergh as ‘Skallere-goodwine’ (Godwin’s farm). Stay on the Dales Way through the gate. The higher ground here was once unenclosed land that narrows into a funnel for concentrating stock at Garnett Folds.

Turn right to Edge Bank and go through the gate to the left of this former farm. In 1670 it belonged to Thomas Sandes, who donated it to support the school and almshouses he founded in Kendal known as Sandes Hospital. The tenants no longer have to deliver eight horse-loads of wood to this institution every Christmas but ‘respectable’ Skelsmergh widows are still eligible for the almshouses.

At the far end of the field the path goes through several small gates and contours above Otter Bank. Its earlier name was ‘Utter’ or ‘Outer Bank’. As at Edge Bank you are on the boundary



that once existed between the common land above and the enclosed cultivated land.

Turn into the yard at Otter Bank and over a stile and gate to head south. The path skirts to the right of the willow carr (wet woodland) that was once Braban Tarn. The larger Skelsmergh Tarn ahead is a marl tarn – so-called because of the high concentration of calcium carbonate in the water. It is designated as a site of Special Scientific Interest because it is an unusual habitat and supports varied fen vegetation and invertebrate species. It is now a fishery, as in earlier times, when it probably served as the fishpond for Skelsmergh Hall.

Just past the tarn, cross a small bridge to your left and continue to the road. Take the footpath through the gate next to the converted barns at Tarn Bank and bear slightly left down a shallow valley to Skelsmergh Hall. This was the manor house for the Leyburne family who from the mid 13th century owned most of Skelsmergh. The tower was probably built in the 15th century. In later years this Catholic family lived mainly on their

estates at Cunswick and Witherslack but they kept the hall and farm here until 1715, when they were confiscated because John Leyburne took part in the Jacobite Rebellion.

Beyond the houses, take the stile over the wall to your left and go up the track that brings you round the side of a hill to Dodding Green. It is named after the 14th-century Kendal wool merchant William Dodding who lived here. Later it belonged to Robert Stephenson, a local Catholic landowner, who died in 1723, leaving all his property to Catholic charities that still survive. The chapel was built in 1791 and priests lived here from 1715 until 1995. Before this there was a secret chapel in the attic. Some of the hiding places used to conceal priests in earlier times still remain.

The path goes through the wall gate then below the house and along the drive. The barn and gardens have been recently restored by the members of the Catholic Cenacolo Community – a residential rehabilitation charity.

