

WANDERER



BARKSTON ASH AND SAXTON

After a rather unpromising start across some stark open fields, this walk improves as it ventures into the undulating hills that fringe the western edge of the Vale of York. The gentle ups and downs that follow provide frequent views, including a glimpse of York Minster. Most of the walk is on good paths that are easy to follow. At one point, the route is obstructed by a newly planted potato field. There's also a short stretch along a lane that carries some traffic, especially motorbikes at weekends.

Directions

1 Starting from the junction of Back Lane and the A162 on the edge of Barkston Ash cross the main road and go up tarmacked Oldgates Lane opposite (if alighting from the bus at the Ash Tree Inn stop, go along the main road for a few metres before crossing and turning up Oldgates Lane). Follow the lane going gradually uphill to a farm on the left where the tarmac ends. Beyond the farm continue ahead on the obvious track between open fields going round a double bend to head downhill then bending left to meet a road.

2 Turn right on the road, **taking care as it can be busy**, to pass houses on the right then come to a sharp right bend with an attractive pond to the left. Cross the pond dam with the road and go left uphill. After about 150 metres, where the road turns sharp left (chevrons) go right on a smaller road (**this stretch of road can be avoided by ascending the bank on the right after a house entrance to walk along the edge of an open field above the road**). In about 70 metres turn left off the smaller road at a damaged bridleway sign heading half left across the field towards a hedge corner near a telegraph pole (this field was ridged for potatoes at the time of writing with an unofficial 'diversion' signed to the right then left. There is no compulsion to follow the diversion which is no easier to traverse than the potato ridges of the official and more direct route). At the hedge corner, continue ahead on the field edge with a hedge to the left. Then follow the obvious track downhill to reach a busy road at the Crooked Billet pub.

3 Cross the road to the track opposite and a bridge over the stream. Just across the bridge, go right through the gate into a grass field and walk up its left edge to the corner (to visit Lead Chapel head half right across the grass. To regain the route on exiting the chapel head half right across the field to the corner). At the field corner, go through the gate and continue on the fenced path uphill which soon becomes a grassy track between fields. Ignore a path to the left (signed Aberford). Over the brow, continue ahead to reach a junction with a crossing track. Go right here between hedges, soon passing buildings on the right. Cross the stream and continue passing more buildings on either side where the track becomes tarmacked before leading to a road.

4 Cross the road with care and go straight ahead along the narrow road opposite (Milner Lane). Continue on this road to a T junction in Saxton village. Turn left - you'll see the church on the right as you arrive at a staggered crossroads.

5 Here, turn right (Main Street). After about 100 metres, just beyond the Greyhound pub set back on the right, take a surfaced track to the left (marked by a footpath sign partly obscured by a shrub). Keep to the left of all the buildings continuing on a field edge footpath with a hedge to the left.

Pass a seat (just beyond which York Minster is visible in good conditions half left) keeping the hedge on the left. Where the hedge ends, keep straight on across the field to walk in the same direction alongside another hedge to the left. Where the hedge veers left, cross the field corner (path is usually obvious) to a gap in the trees almost opposite. Go through this and walk through the small wood to find steps leading down to the main road.

6 **Cross with great care (blind bend and summit to right)** and go left down the pavement on the other side. Continue to the crossroads and turn right (signed Scarthingwell). Go along the quiet road passing the entrance to the golf club on the left.

7 Just after houses, look for a tarmac track on the right with a 'Lakeside' sign. Take this track (ignore the 'no public access sign', it's a public bridleway) going immediately left at the fork. Soon pass fishing ponds on the left then the Catholic church to the right. Keep left at a junction with a wooden fence on the right. Continue on this tarmac track to reach houses on the right after which swing right with the track to reach a road.

8 Turn right going round a left bend to pass the gates of Barkston Towers on the right. Follow the road into Barkston Ash until the main traffic direction swings right (to visit the Boot and Shoe pub go right). Here continue straight ahead down a minor road (signed 'Unsuitable for long

Getting there

The recommended starting point is the junction of London Road (A162) and Back Lane on the edge of Barkston Ash. Barkston Ash is 15 miles from York via the A64 and A162. Ample parking is available on Back Lane, which is a left turn off the A162 at the south (far) end of the village just after the closed Ash Tree pub. Public transport access to the start is difficult. The only feasible route is a Coastliner bus to Tadcaster bus station followed by a meandering trip on the infrequent 492 service (alight Ash Tree stop).

Distance:
6^{1/2}
Miles

Time:
2^{3/4}
Hours

Refreshments

The Crooked Billet pub, known for its giant Yorkshire puddings, amongst other delicacies, is on the route, as is the Greyhound in Saxton. Spikes Bar at Scarthingwell Golf Course near the end of the walk is open to the public and serves light dishes.

What to see

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the walk is the atmospheric Lead Chapel situated in a grassy field and accessible only on foot. Open to visitors but no longer used for regular worship, the chapel dates from the fourteenth century. Saxton has a Grade 1 listed church dating from the eleventh century. In the churchyard are the recently excavated remains of victims of the Battle of Towton, fought just a mile or so to the north of the village and said to be the deadliest battle ever on English soil. Barkston Ash is reputedly named because of a long-gone giant ash tree said to mark the geographical centre of Yorkshire. Sights at Scarthingwell include the nineteenth-century Catholic church, attractive parkland and fishing lakes (fee), all once part of the estate of the now-demolished Scarthingwell Hall.

vehicles'). Continue on this road (Back Lane) following it through sharp right and left bends. After a straight stretch, follow the lane round a further right bend (ignore footpath sign pointing ahead) to arrive back at the starting point where it meets the A162 near the Ash Tree pub on the edge of the village.

