

WALKING WITH THE WANDERER



Harrogate, Harlow Carr, and Birk Crag

Time: 2 ¾ hours Distance: 5 ½ miles

Harrogate, Harlow Carr, and Birk Crag

Starting in the town centre, this walk from Harrogate has three distinct sections. The first is an easy stroll, much of it through parkland towards the Royal Horticultural Society's Harlow Carr gardens. The next section traverses woodlands and crags while the shorter final stretch wends its way back into central Harrogate along a green corridor.

Is this walk for me?

The second section of the walk (mainly Direction Points 5 and 6) is surprisingly rugged with uneven, stony paths and lots of ups and downs. It also passes close to exposed drops. This shouldn't be attempted if unconfident on rough ground or in icy conditions. By contrast, the section to Harlow Carr is very easy, if a little bit uphill. This could be done as a 'there and back' route.

Getting there

The recommended start point is Harrogate station. Trains run regularly from York taking just over 30 minutes. If driving, Harrogate is 21 miles via the A59. There are various car parks near the station. An alternative is roadside parking on suburban roads near the walk route.

Refreshments

There are numerous options in Harrogate. Betty's café/restaurant at Harlow Carr is accessible without entering the gardens.

What to see

The route passes some of central Harrogate's main attractions and covers the full length of the Valley Gardens. Harlow Carr garden (fee) is well worth a visit at any time of year. The full walk then traverses atmospheric valley woodland and craggy, moor-like, landscape. Part of the return route is alongside a tranquil wooded stream.

Directions

1. From the front of Harrogate station, cross at the pedestrian crossing and go left through the garden area opposite then right into James Street. Just beyond the war memorial, cross the pedestrian crossing and head downhill to the left of Bettys. Keep on the pavement as it bears right. At the roundabout, take the exit left of The Crown hotel. Pass the Pump Room and cross the road at the zebra to enter Valley Gardens.
2. Take the lower path paralleling the stream. At the domed café, round the grass circle taking the path almost opposite its centre to pass close to the Old Magnesia Well. Keep ahead (wall with Dales Way board) going uphill. After the tarmac way bends slightly left, veer right onto an earth path (signed Harlow Carr). Walk through pine trees to reach a road.
3. Cross straight over and continue on the now tarmacked path opposite, initially through trees. Soon pass a grassy area on the left then a viewpoint on the right. The path then heads downhill to approach a road.
4. To visit Harlow Carr Gardens, turn left just before the road as signed. To continue the walk turn right on the road (if visiting the gardens turn left when exiting to return to the point where the path reaches the road). After about 200 metres turn left onto the tarmac drive of a defunct pub (to become a café). Go towards the left corner of the forecourt to find a footpath right of the metal gates. Keep on this path with a wooded gully to the right until a Harrogate Ringway footpath sign.
5. Here, go right downhill to cross a wooden footbridge. Climb away from the stream going right at a fork to approach a wire-topped wall. Remain close to this, then pass through a wall gap continuing with crags on the left. Keep going to climb the obvious steps on the right. Here, go left as signed (Ringway footpath) passing a house right then crags left. At a path, divide immediately after some steps keep right along the top of the slope. Continue in the same direction over a shallow gully keeping a fence visible on the right until the path trends downhill to reach a road.
6. Cross with care and turn left downhill on pavement for 150 metres to double back right on a roughly surfaced track. Keep ahead where this becomes tarmacked, but at an easily missed footpath sign on the right after no. 72, take the narrow path between gardens. Where this opens out initially keep along the top of the slope but then drop down into the valley bottom. Turn right and continue close to the stream going up and down to eventually arrive at a flatter area. Here, veer right upslope by a handrail to continue with houses to the right.
7. Reaching a road, turn left downhill but in 100 metres go right following the Ringway footpath. In a further 50 metres veer right (not down steps). Arriving at a road, go left passing a barrier then quickly turn right on a roadside cycle track. Cross at a traffic island continuing on the cycle track which soon bends left to reach pedestrian lights.
8. Cross to the right turning almost immediately left and right following the cycle route on Coppice Gate. At a road junction take the tarmac track opposite leading through a grassy area. Remain on the curving main track to a road. Here, turn left uphill.
9. At the crossroads turn right soon passing the Conference Centre. Go left at traffic lights (Cheltenham Crescent), then keep ahead to pass Harrogate Theatre to the right. Remain with the main traffic thoroughfare turning right at Station Parade to walk through the bus stands to the railway station.

