

## Smardale Walk A

*A circular walk from the car park via the viaducts and back over Smardale Fell.*

**Start:** Smardale Nature Reserve

**Grid Ref:** NY 742 083

**Nearest postcode:** CA17 4HG

**Distance:** 5 miles / 8km

**Terrain:** Tarmac, hard track, open fell

**Ascent:** Approx. 100 metres

**Difficulty:** This walk starts off on an easy path on the flat, becoming rougher underfoot on stony tracks and grass until you reach the tarmac road at Smardale. There is quite a steep climb up Smardale Fell. Routefinding is fairly straightforward and there is a visible track the whole way.

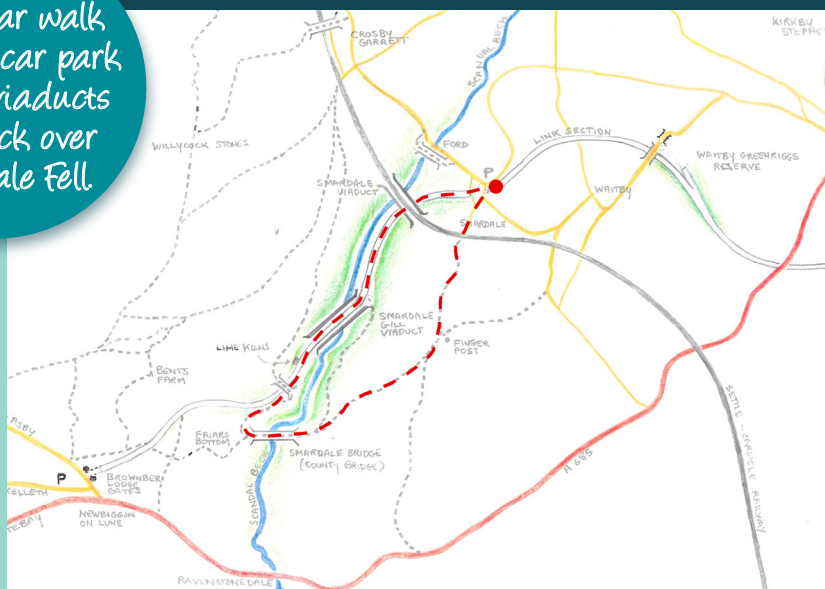
**Parking:** Free parking at the Nature Reserve.

**Public Transport:** A limited bus service runs from Kendal, Sedbergh and Brough to Kirkby Stephen. The Settle–Carlisle railway goes through Kirkby Stephen.

**Directions:** From the A685 between Ravenstonedale and Kirkby Stephen, take the Smardale turning. Turn left at the T-junction, bear right over the disused railway and turn immediately right. The car park is 200 metres on your right.

**Facilities:** No facilities along route.

**OS Map:** OS Explorer map OL19.



Map by Richard Hughes. Smardale landscape by Julia Garner.

## The route

- ❖ Look out for red squirrels feasting on hazelnuts or racing between the trees.
- ❖ Smardale Nature Reserve is one of only two sites in England that are home to the Scotch argus butterfly.
- ❖ The limestone grassland around the quarry is filled with colour and scent in the summertime when the wildflowers come into bloom.

Leave the car park past the cabins and go along the gravelled track onto the wooden walkway, following the signs to the nature reserve. Exit the gate and turn right, then head left (West) off Beck Lane to the start of the Smardale section of the nature reserve.

There is an easy surface and flat walking to start with along the old railway line.

After about 500 metres you pass under Smardale viaduct that carries the Settle–Carlisle Railway. There are splendid displays of primroses here in the spring.

Your next checkpoint is the Smardale Gill viaduct, a further 1.3 km along the track.

Cross over the viaduct and in about 200 metres you arrive at an impressive old quarry and lime kiln. In the summer months this is a good area to spot the rare northern brown argus butterfly.

After another 200 metres an old stone bridge crosses the track. Pass under the bridge and then climb up the embankment to your left to stand on top of the bridge. You will now briefly follow the route of the Coast to Coast long distance footpath. The route contours downhill in a SW direction, heading for a humpbacked bridge that straddles Scandal Beck. (On your OS map this is labelled "Smardale Bridge" but the locals know it as County Bridge – an important stop on an old drove road.)



# Smardale Walk A route – continued

Go over the bridge and climb steeply (East to start with and then NE) between parallel stone walls for a further 1.6 km on a cart track. At a dip in the terrain you will come across a finger post. Your route is left (North) towards Smardale and after a further kilometre you join a tarmac road and pass under the Settle–Carlisle railway to arrive back at your start point.



Coast to Coast way marker

## Before you set off

The weather in Cumbria can change quickly, particularly on the fells, so please be prepared, as changes in weather can alter the difficulty of a route. Appropriate clothing can make all the difference – it is important to be warm, comfortable and dry when out exploring.

An Ordnance Survey map of the area, a compass and the knowledge to use them are invaluable.

Please observe the country code when out walking and, where possible, stick to public footpaths and bridleways. Stock is frequently grazing in these areas so dogs must be kept under control.

## Wildlife Highlights

Visiting this nature reserve allows you to explore an unspoilt corner of Cumbria where stunning scenery and wildlife-spotting opportunities await at any time of the year.

The nature reserve itself offers something for everyone: from the steep woodland and the beck below to the species-rich grasslands, each has its own community of interesting plants and animals.

The red squirrels are an absolute favourite for most visitors. They can be spotted feasting on the feeders or resting in the trees throughout the first section of the walk. Winter is one of the best times to spot them, when the trees are free of leaves – whether it's a flash of that iconic bushy tail or a sustained view, there's something magical about going

home knowing you've met one.

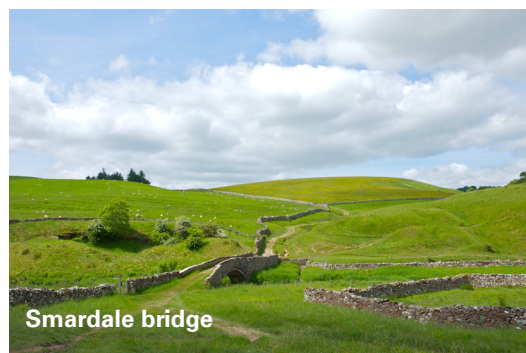
As well as your eyes, keep your ears open too. Familiar birds such as chaffinch, robin and green woodpecker can be heard, and with the warmer weather summer visitors such as the willow warbler arrive.

When you reach the impressive Smardale Gill viaduct the vista opens up. The views towards Newbiggin-on-Lune are wonderful and you can just about imagine a time when steam engines chugged along the route.

Soon you'll reach the limestone grassland around the quarry, which comes into bloom in the summertime. Orchids, such as fragrant and butterfly, are in flower and other plants like bloody crane's-bill, melancholy thistle and great burnet fill the meadow. Bees and butterflies can be seen buzzing and



The wooden walkway



Smardale bridge



Smardale Fell

basking, particularly the Scotch argus butterfly, which is found here at the southernmost edge of its range.

As you head onto Smardale Fell, buzzard and kestrel can be seen overhead, whilst lapwing and skylark nest on the ground below. This is a walk full of opportunities, so remember to bring your binoculars!



Red squirrel



Scotch argus butterfly



Grassland flowers



**Cumbria**  
Wildlife Trust

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