

Smardale Walk B

Start: Smardale Nature Reserve

Grid Ref: NY 742 083

Nearest postcode: CA17 4HG

Distance: 10 miles / 16 km

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.

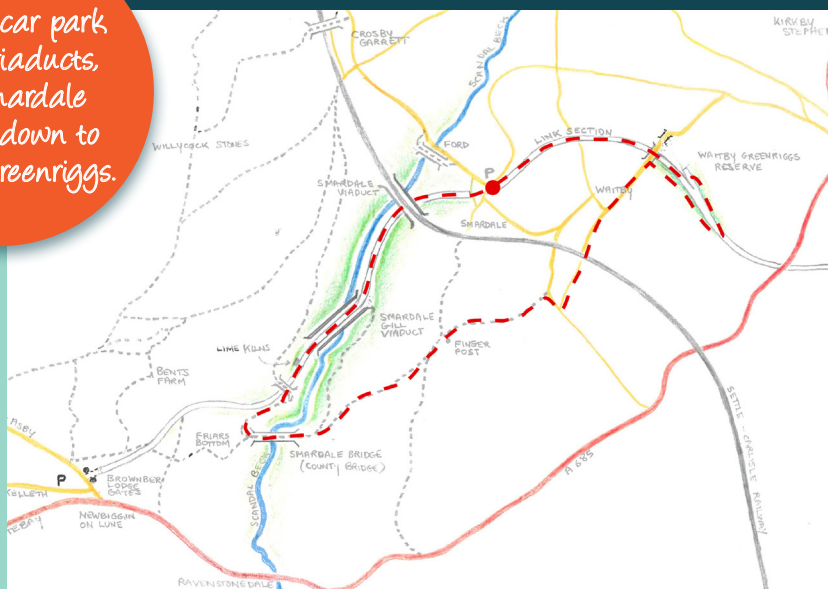
Public Transport: A limited bus service runs from Kendal, Sedbergh and Brough to Kirkby Stephen. The Settle–Carlisle railway goes through Kirkby Stephen.

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.

A circular walk from the car park via the viaducts, over Smardale Fell and down to Waitby Greenriggs.



Map by Richard Hughes. Waitby Greenriggs by Andrew Walter.

The route

- ❖ **The section of old railway line that links Waitby Greenriggs to Smardale exposes the underlying rocks and will be of great interest to geologists.**
- ❖ **Smardale Nature Reserve is one of only two sites in England that are home to the Scotch argus butterfly.**
- ❖ **The grassland at Waitby Greenriggs is filled with beautiful orchids in the summertime.**

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 B 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. Carry on NE and then East along the route of the Coast to Coast, climbing first up and then down to a gate after another 1.3 km, to a tarmac road. Turn right and go 100 metres and then left downhill, again on tarmac. Do not follow the finger post for the Coast to Coast, which we are now leaving. Descend on tarmac for 1 km to a road junction at which you turn right in the direction of Kirkby Stephen.

In another 700 metres the road goes over an old railway bridge where there is a stile on the right giving access to the orchid-rich part of the nature reserve known as Waitby Greenriggs.

This is an out-and-back section and you will have to retrace your steps eventually but it is well worth walking the 1 km to the end of the nature reserve and back again. Having regained the bridge, cross the road to the other side and carry on along the old railway line in a westerly direction (mostly). There are a couple of places where bridges are missing and you will need to descend and re-ascend to keep to the embankment. Just before you get back to the car park there is a wonderfully atmospheric section through a stone cutting, known as the Waitby Link, where interesting geology is revealed.

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 busy 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.

In the summertime, plants like bloody crane's-bill, devil's-bit scabious and salad burnet come into bloom in the limestone grassland around the quarry. Bees and butterflies can be seen buzzing and basking, including the northern brown argus butterfly.

The flower display continues on arrival at Waitby Greenriggs where the orchids steal the show. Look out for common

spotted, fragrant, fly, frog, northern marsh and marsh helleborines in the cutting and along the track bed.

For geology enthusiasts, the final section linking Waitby Greenriggs to Smardale is a fascinating geological time tunnel where different rock types can be seen.



Looking over to the quarry



Orchids at Waitby Greenriggs



The section known as the Waitby Link



Red squirrel



Northern brown argus butterfly



Marsh helleborine

Please note: Smardale Gill viaduct is owned and managed by the Northern Viaduct Trust, www.nvt.org.uk



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust

Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Plumgarths, Crook Road, Kendal, Cumbria LA8 8LX
Telephone: 01539 816300
Email: mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

Registered in England as Cumbria Wildlife Trust Limited, a Company Limited by Guarantee No. 00724133. Registered Charity No. 218711.