WEST BURTON and THE TEMPLARS’ CHAPEL

FROM AYSGARTH 6¾ MILES (10.8KM)

This scenic walk begins with a visit to the famous Aysgarth Falls and continues into the beautiful side valley of Bishopdale. The views are fabulous and apart from one steep climb the walking is easy.

Aysgarth is probably most famous for its waterfalls, which are seen at their best after heavy rain. In less than a mile the river Ure plunges 200 feet (60m) over three spectacular falls. The upper fall was featured in the film Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves starring Kevin Costner as Robin. He was seen fighting against Little John as he tried to ford the river.

Our route from the car park leads across the river to Yore Mill, a large four-storey building which has seen a variety of uses over the years. It was built in 1784 as a cotton mill. After a fire in 1852 it was rebuilt and changed to wool spinning. The mill supplied the material that was used to make the ‘red shirts’ for Garibaldi’s revolutionary army in Italy. It operated as a flour mill from 1912 to 1958 and became home to the Yorkshire Carriage Museum in 1969, housing one of Britain’s largest collections of carriages and horse-drawn vehicles. Sadly, the museum closed down in 2001 and all of the carriages were auctioned off. However, Yore Mill is still open to the public and remains worthy of a visit.

From the mill a flight of steps leads to the imposing St Andrew’s Church. In the twelfth century, Aysgarth was England’s largest parish with more than 81,000 acres (32,800ha) and covered all of Upper Wensleydale. Most of the present church was rebuilt in 1866, but the bell tower dates from the fourteenth century and has a peal of six bells. The finely carved rood screen and the abbot’s stall were rescued from Jervaulx Abbey after the dissolution of the monasteries.

After leaving the churchyard we follow a meadow path to Eshington Bridge and then continue along the fertile valley floor of Bishopdale to West Burton. Bishopdale is the largest of the many tributaries draining into Wensleydale. It has a deep U-shape which indicates that it was formed by glacial action.

West Burton is an enchanting, old-fashioned village, standing at the junction of Bishopdale and Walden. It has a large sloping green, market cross and stocks. At the lower end of the green a path leads to an ancient packhorse bridge which crosses Walden Beck. Cauldron Falls can be seen further upstream. It is possible to get quite close to the falls which plunge into a shallow pool shaded by trees.

From the bridge our path leads uphill through Barrack Wood to Hudson Lane, where a wonderful panorama unfolds. Walden, Bishopdale and Wensleydale are seen in a single sweep. Buckden Pike rises behind Walden Moor, the craggy outcrops of Kidstones Scar stand out at the head of Bishopdale and looking across the main Wensleydale valley the villages of Aysgarth, Carperby, Castle Bolton and Redmire are clearly visible.

We continue along the slopes of Penhill to join High Lane, once a busy drove road linking Bishopdale to Middleham. Cattle and sheep were herded along this track in their thousands. From High Lane our route leads to the Templars’ Chapel.

The Order of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon, better known as the Knights Templars or The Temple, was founded early in the twelfth century and introduced to Britain in 1146. Its purpose was to protect pilgrims travelling to and from Jerusalem. The order acquired land on Penhill to build a chapel and dedicated it to ‘God, the Virgin and St Catherine.’ St Catherine, the patron saint of linen weavers, was important to the Templars because their outer garments were made of white linen on which was sewn a blood red cross, their symbol of martyrdom.

The order acquired immense wealth and political power and it was this which caused their downfall. Kings and Popes alike grew jealous of their influence, and they were subjected to much persecution. Pope Clement V abolished the order in 1312, Edward II having seized all the property of the English Templars in 1308. Many of the Templars were imprisoned and some were tortured and executed.

Leaving the chapel we descend to the main road which is followed to Hestholme Bridge. Here a meadow path entices us away and delivers us to the banks of the river Ure where we continue upstream returning to the churchyard at Aysgarth.

| Start/Parking: | Car park at Aysgarth Falls National Park Visitor Centre. |
| Location: | Aysgarth Falls is situated 8 miles (12.8km) west of Leyburn on the A684 Northallerton to Sedbergh road. |
| Grid Ref: | SE 011 887. |
| Distance: | 6¾ miles (10.8km) circular. Allow 3½ hrs walking time. |
| Total Ascent: | 1152 feet (351m) Maximum Elevation: 1148 feet (349m). |
| OS Map: | Explorer OL30 (1:25,000) or Landranger 98 (1:50,000). |
| Refreshments: | The National Park Visitor Centre, the Palmer Flatts Hotel, the George and Dragon Inn, Mill Race Tea Shop and Kitty’s Tea Rooms at Aysgarth. |
| Public Toilets: | The Fox and Hounds at West Burton. |
| Other: | National Park Visitor Centre. |
| | Post Office, telephone, bus service, Edwardian Rock Garden. |
AYSGARTH FALLS
To visit the middle and lower falls first, follow the track from the car park entrance. The route is well signposted and the track is good. After viewing the falls return to the car park and follow the route as described.

1. (GR 011 887) Leave the car park at the opposite end to the entrance (SP Upper Falls) follow the path down to the road and continue across the bridge.
2. (GR 011 886) Leave the road (Sign St Andrew’s Church). Climb some steps, go through a gate and follow the path to the front of the church. With your back to the church door follow a path leading directly away from the church. Leave the churchyard via a gate and follow a tarmac lane to the main A684 road.
3. (GR 013 883) Cross the road and go through the gap-stile opposite (SP Eshington Bridge). Cross the field and go through another gap-stile. Descend to a wooden step-stile in the valley bottom (Thieves Gill), then follow the fence up and go through a gated stile. Bear right slightly and descend through a gate at the bottom of the field.
4. (GR 014 889) Continue downhill and go through a stile in the bottom right corner of the field. After about 15 yards (13m) go through a stile on the left and then head down to a stile leading onto the road.
5. (GR 015 878) Turn right and follow the road. After crossing Eshington Bridge leave the road via a gap-stile on the right (SP West Burton). Cross the field and go over a wooden step-stile. Follow the right wall to its end. Bear left to go through two stiles by the side of Bishopdale Beck. Continue on a clear path through two fields to reach the road.
6. (GR 016 869) Cross the road and climb the steps opposite (SP West Burton 7Syds). Follow an enclosed track to a gap-stile leading onto the road. Turn right and follow the road to the village centre passing the Fox and Hounds. At the road junction turn left and follow the road past the village cross and stocks to the bottom of the green.
7. (GR 018 876) Turn right onto a rough track (SP Morpeth Gate and Cote Bridge). Cross a stone packhorse bridge. After a few yards turn left and follow a stepped path up to a stile. Go through the stile, turn right and continue uphill. Go through a stile by a barn, bear half left and climb towards Barrack Wood.
8. (GR 022 868) Enter the wood over a wooden step-stile, turn right (SP Hudson Quarry Lane) and continue on a clear path through two stiles to leave the wood. Climb steeply through two pastures, then bear half right climbing steadily up to a wall.
9. (GR 027 865) Turn left (SP Morpeth Scar) onto Hudson Lane following the shoulder of Penhill. At a junction (near Morpeth Scar) turn right and continue along a rough stone track (High Lane). Follow the track to a T-Junction.
10. (GR 038 881) Go through the gate on the left and follow an enclosed track. The track soon opens out and becomes a concrete surface as it begins to descend.
11. (GR 039 887) On the second part of a double bend, turn left and leave the track. Descend between two woods, go through a gate and then bear right descending towards a fenced enclosure (The Templars’ Chapel).
12. (GR 035 888) Go through a gap-stile (SP Temple Farm). Turn right and descend a stony track. At the bottom go through a gate, turn right and follow the wall past Temple Farm. Bear left and go through a gap-stile onto the main A684 road.
13. (GR 032 890) Turn left and follow the road. After crossing Hestholme Bridge, go through a gate at the entrance to Hestholme Farm. Head diagonally across the field to reach the riverside. Continue through three fields following the river upstream.
14. (GR 021 888) Leave the riverbank and follow an obvious track climbing alongside a wood. Go through a stile and gate combination and continue close to the wood. When the boundaries of the field become clear, bear left towards a small wood.
15. (GR 014 886) Cross a wooden step-stile and continue on a clear path through the wood. Leave the wood via another wooden step-stile, (Aysgarth Church comes into view) cross the field to a gated stile leading into the churchyard. Continue to the church entrance and follow the outward route back to the car park.