

Walk for November 2017

Kirkham Abbey, Whitwell Hill Top, Derwent Valley

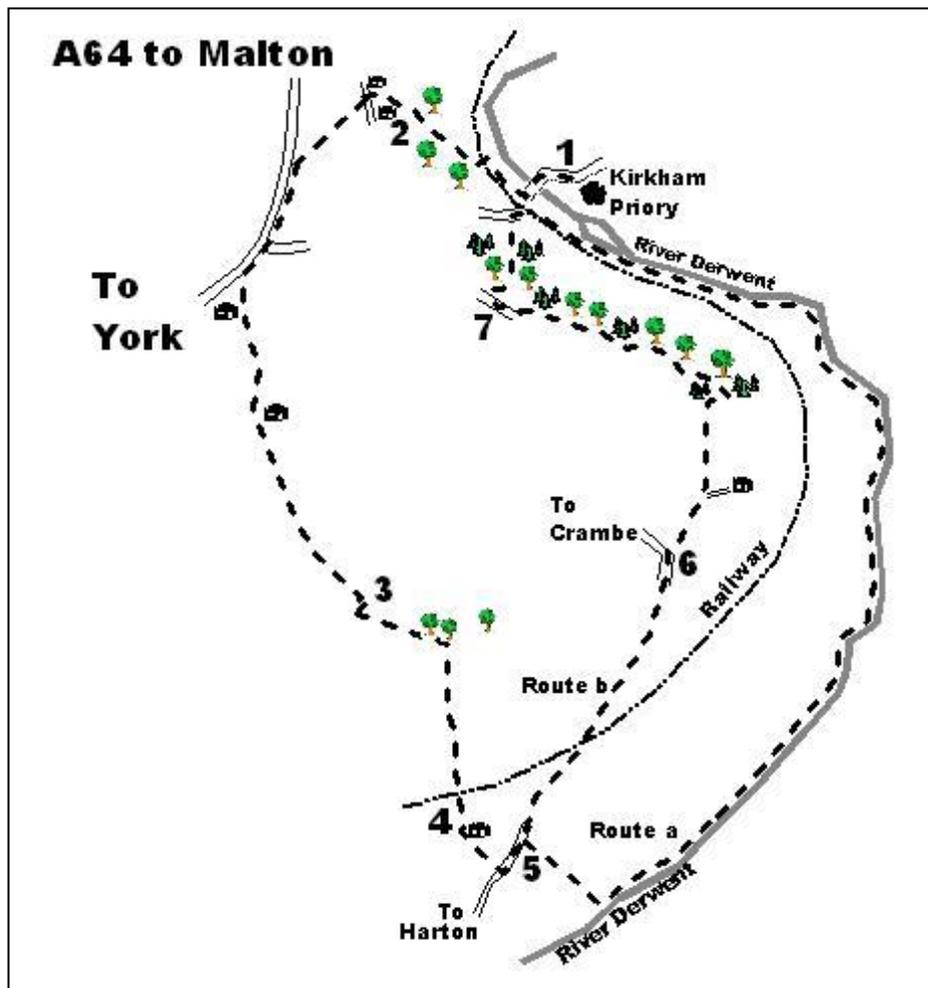
Although it ventures a little further afield from Slingsby, this walk is still in the south easterly corner of the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Apart from a brief encounter with the busy A64, the tranquility is broken only by the occasional hoot of a train passing through the winding Derwent Valley. Despite a couple of moderate climbs you should have enough energy to tour the historic Priory ruins before or after the walk. There is a choice of routes to finish.

The turn off to Kirkham Priory is on the A64 between York and Malton, some 7 miles south west of Malton. The Priory is well signposted and is approached over the railway crossing and the bridge over the river. There is a parking area right in front of the Priory gates.

Start — Kirkham Priory

Distance - finish (a) 5¼ miles **Duration** – 2 ½ -3 hours

Distance - finish (b) 4½ miles **Duration** – 2-2 ½ hours



1. From the car park walk back to, and across, the bridge over the river then 20 yards on turn right along a waymarked path signed 'Whitwell ½'. Take care crossing the railway then over a stile into a field. Don't take the path directly right, but climb the hill at 1 o'clock and over the first brow you will see the gate and stile ahead by which to exit the field.
2. With the farm buildings in sight to the left, the right of way has been moved. Head for the centre of the farm building complex and, via a stile, passes through the buildings and reaches a road. Briefly left then right along the waymarked path along the fieldside with the hedge on your left. At the end of the field pass through the hedge at the side of the fence, then walk about 50 yards along the side of the field with the hedge and road on your right. A gap in the hedge then allows access to the path adjoining the A64. Turn left and stay on the path as it passes the turn off to Crambe, Westow and Kirkham Priory, then as the main road dips over the hill, turn left along a waymarked bridleway signed 'Crambe, Barton'. Stay on the track as it runs along the ridge, bending steadily left, and providing excellent views of the Vale of York over to the right.
3. The track eventually bends sharply to the right by the storm damaged tree then 40 yards along take the waymarked path to the left signed 'R. Derwent 1 mile'. The path passes through one field, through a gate and along the top of the next field. Before reaching the end of the field, almost at the end of the trees on the left, turn sharp right and head downhill. At the crest of the hill you will see the handgate at the bottom of the field. Go through the gate and straight along the field side with the hedge on your right.
4. Cross the railway line, go straight ahead and through the farm to emerge on a drive leading away from the farm that meets a lane after 150 yards, with Howsham Hall visible ahead. Turn left along the lane.
5. About 150 yards along there is a choice of directions to finish the walk.
 - a) Turn right along the waymarked footpath across the field to reach the banks of the river Derwent. Turn left and stay on the path that hugs the river bank all the way back to Kirkham Priory. Emerge on to the road, turn right across the bridge and back to the car park.
 - b) Carry on along the lane. It really is a classic country lane being narrow, meandering, with no real traffic, wildlife in abundance and truly peaceful.
6. After about ¾ mile, as the lane bends quite sharply left take the stony track to the right over the cattle grid and up the hill. As the track then bends right towards the farm buildings, leave it and carry straight on uphill with the fence on your left. Pass to the left of the tree stump and follow the right of way around the edge of the field, now with the wood on your left towards the gate in the corner. Go left through the gate to join a path through the wood. After about ½ mile the path emerges into a field. Walk on with the wood on your right. At the end of the hedge, the path that bears right and crosses the field to later conveniently join your route in the far corner is not a public right of way, so go straight on, with the large barn at Whitwell Farm visible in front,

until you reach the road. Turn right, 100 yards and turn right at the waymark signed 'Kirkham ¼'.

7. 15 yards into the field a gap in the hedge on the left gives access to a forest path. Walk along this as it descends a wet, slippery, and sometimes steep course to finally emerge at a road. Turn right, over the level crossing and bridge, and back to your vehicle.

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Kirkham Priory

Kirkham Priory was built as one of 3 monasteries established by Walter L'Espece, Lord of Kirkham, (the others being at Rievaulx near Helmsley and Warden in Bedfordshire) soon after the Norman Conquest to commemorate the death of his son in a riding accident. It was completed around 1121. The monks were of the Augustinian Order, which had been introduced into England a few years previously.

The priory fell in the wreck of the greater monasteries around 1539. One of the seven bells serving the priory at the time, bearing the date 1400, is in the church at Terrington. The ruins are not extensive but the gateway that still remains suggests it was an impressive structure.

Near the gateway is the fragment of a cross, raised on a base with three steps, and said by tradition to mark the spot where young L'Espece lost his life.

It is rumoured that sections of the priory were pulled down for material to build Howsham Hall, seen across the river between points 4 and 5 in this walk.