



Set fair for Fairburn

A walk around the Fairburn Ings RSPB reserve and the historic village of Ledsham Words and photographs by Paul Heaton (Fotocraft Images)

Variety is the spice of life seems an appropriate expression to summarise a five mile walk which includes two historic villages, an RSPB reserve of national importance, attractive field and woodland paths.

The walk starts in Fairburn, a village mentioned in the Domesday Book. This village grew up on the Great North Road and was a centre of both agriculture and industry, including limestone quarrying and coal mines.

The mines inadvertently gave rise to the second main attraction on this walk, the Fairburn Ings RSPB reserve. The area around the River Aire at

Fairburn was originally marsh. Coal mining subsidence created the lakes we see today. The reserve was established in 1968, and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). A wide range of habitats provides homes for many different types of bird, and it is claimed that, at 274, it has the highest number of bird species recorded at any inland site in the UK. The reserve has five hides, a viewing platform, two pond dipping platforms and boardwalks giving access over reed beds and marsh areas.

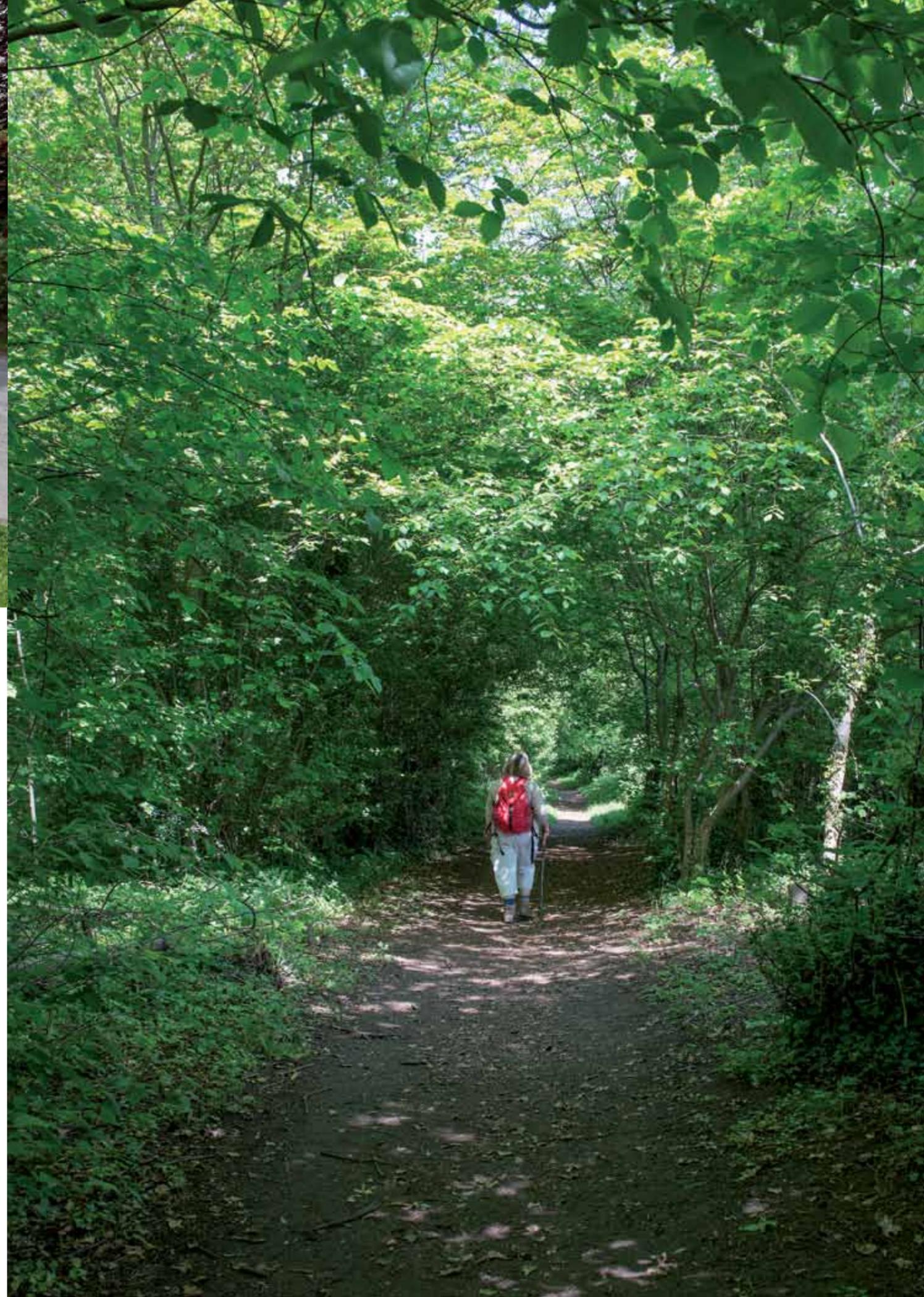
After a stroll through attractive woods and meadows, the next focal point is Ledsham. Also mentioned in the Domesday Book, Ledsham is even older, with part of the church building dated to 670AD. It is a pleasant village, with a mixture of old and newer houses, a historic church and pub. The return path climbs gently up onto a broad limestone ridge which provides views over the town of Castleford to the Pennine hills.

The starting point for the walk is the small car park at the top of Cut

Lane, about 100 yards from the Three Hoseshoes pub in Fairburn. Walk down Cut Lane, initially a metalled road, then a rough track. Pass through a gate and follow the track with the water of the Fairburn Ings lakes initially on the left, then on both sides. The route passes Charlie's Hide, one of several substantial bird watching hides built by the RSPB, on the left hand side. Carry on along the path to meet the River Aire. Turn right here through a metal gate, then climb up a bank to meet a wide gravel path which winds among trees with the Aire on the left, and the main lake of Fairburn Ings on the right.

This path meanders above the lake before eventually reaching Kingfisher Pool on the right, where there is board fence with holes at different heights to look at a quiet pool frequented by kingfishers. Turn right here following a sign to 'Visitor Reception and Car Park'. On reaching a wooden sculpture of a frog

Above: The Chequers inn in Ledsham
Right: Walking through the edge of a wood towards Ledsham





Fairburn Ings RSPB reserve is home to 274 bird species, more than any other inland site in the UK



Top left: All Saints' church in Ledsham
Top right: The route gives views over the River Aire as well as the Ings
Above left: A fine memorial sculpture to Sir John and Lady Lewis in Ledsham church, dates back to 1677
Above right: Frog sculpture next to the path
Left: Fairburn's historic jail

turn right again along a boardwalk over reed filled pools and marshy ground. Turn right at the end of the boardwalk to reach the RSPB reserve visitor reception, which gives information on the RSPB and the Fairburn Ings reserve, and sells drinks and snacks.

Leave the reserve through the main car park and turn right along a lane, left after 100 yards along another lane then, after a further 100 yards, right along a footpath which climbs gently just inside the edge of a wood. After about half a mile, the path forks, with a fainter left

fork continuing in the wood, and the right fork heading across fields. Take the right fork. This starts as a path next to a hedge, broadens into a vehicle track, and then becomes a metalled road on entering the village of Ledsham. Turn right at a 'T' junction, which emerges opposite Ledsham church.

The walk continues by turning right at this point. However, it is well worth spending some time exploring Ledsham, its interesting church and the historic Chequers Inn. The road bends to the right after the church. Carry on for about 300 yards. Continue straight on along a track and over a stile where the road bends round to the left. The footpath passes through fields then along the edge of a wood before emerging into a meadow. The path forks in this meadow. Take the lower right hand path. This



Above, centre: View from one of the bird watching hides around Fairburn Ings
Above: Pleasant walk through field back to Fairburn from Ledsham



passes over stiles through a narrow neck of woodland into a meadow. Head to the right of some trees in this meadow, up a slope to join a hedge. Follow the hedge, with extensive views to the right as far as the Pennine hills on a clear day. The path leads through gates and then becomes a track. It passes through the first houses of Fairburn and descends to a 'T' junction. Turn left to return to the start point. If you have energy remaining, there is an interesting town trail around the village of Fairburn. One of the points of interest, the well trough and village pump, is in front of the car park, a second, the old jail, just round the corner on the right. ■

All Saints' Church, Ledsham

All Saints church is a fascinating building. It is the oldest building in West Yorkshire, dating back as far as 670AD. The tower has a door on its south side with carved decorations dating back to the 8th century. Inside, evidence of many changes through the years are visible, and there are magnificent marble monuments from the 17th century.



Top: Visitor reception centre at Fairburn Ings **Above:** Approach to Charlie's hide, one of the three hides around Fairburn Ings

The Chequers Inn, Ledsham

This inn dates back to 1540. Now open every day it was, until recently one of very few pubs in England with a six day licence, and closed on Sundays. This tradition began some 180 years ago, when the Lady of the Manor was insulted by patrons on her return from Sunday service, and decreed that the pub should be closed on Sunday to prevent recurrence of the problem.

Fact file

Walk length: 5 miles

Maps: OS Explorer 289 (Leeds), OS Landranger 105 (York and surrounding area)

Going: Good paths, but there may be some mud after rain. No significant hills

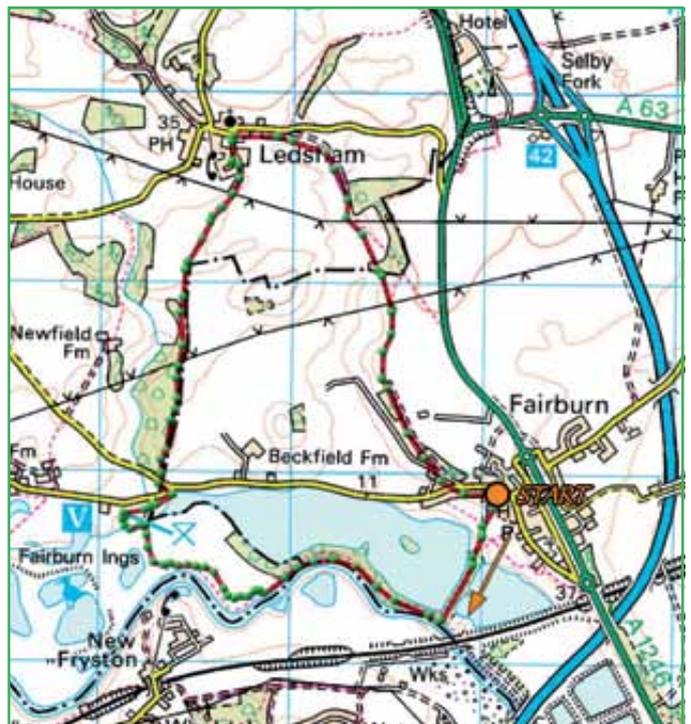
Start and finish: The top of Cut Road in Fairburn (there is parking for about 6 cars at this spot)

Refreshments: Refreshments are available at the RSPB visitors centre, the Chequers Inn in Ledsham and the Three Horseshoes in Fairburn

Toilets: RSPB visitors centre

Public transport: 422, 491, 492 and 493 provide services to Fairburn from York, Tadcaster, Castleford and Pontefract

GPX file: If you would like a free gpx file of the route for this walk, for your walking GPS unit, e-mail paul@fotocraftimages.co.uk



Right: Map with the route in red
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