



A world class walk

Combining riverside, parkland and a World Heritage Site, this route from Ripon to Studley Park is full of interest
 Words and photographs: Paul Heaton (Fotocraft Images)

The landscaped gardens of Studley Royal are deservedly a World Heritage Site. This walk links these gardens with the nearby city of Ripon. It starts close to the heart of this bustling market town through attractive wooded and agricultural landscapes to the managed parkland and deer park of Studley Royal, visiting the Seven Bridges Valley and lake. The deer park is home to about 500 red, fallow and sika deer which may well be seen along the way.

The return route visits St Mary's church, a late Victorian memorial

church with a poignant story, and continues down the long straight drive of Studley Royal, with its stunning vista along an avenue of trees to Ripon cathedral.

Start at Bondgate Green and, head towards the centre of Ripon. Take a footpath on the right hand side of the road just before the bridge over the River Skell. The path heads underneath the bridge and continues beside the river. Cross the road at Williamson Drive and continue along the riverside. Take a footpath through a gap in the wall on the right shortly before another road crosses the river. Walk under

the road bridge and into a park. The path passes through a play park with paddling pool and reaches a road. Turn right here. The road becomes a track and then a footpath. Carry straight on at a footbridge over the river (this footbridge is crossed on the return route of the walk).

Shortly after the footbridge a set of shallow stone steps, the Fairy Steps, are reached on the right hand side – climb these steps. The Fairy Steps were adapted by the army during the First World War to allow access from High Cleugh to Hell Wath Common, part of the largest military camp in

Europe, by horse drawn field guns (and possibly early tanks). This area is Hell Wath Nature reserve. There are many subsidiary paths in the nature reserve. The main path continues in the same general direction as the steps, crosses a meadow, then passes under more trees. Ignore all the side paths, to emerge at a road with an information board for the Sanctuary Way. Turn left here to reach a track on the right hand side. Take this track, which climbs gently.

Shortly after passing Whitcliffe Hall on the left, turn right through a gate to follow a grassy footpath between wire fences leading to a wooden gate which enters a wood. Follow the path down between the trees. Where the path starts to climb uphill, turn sharp right and continue downhill to return to the banks of the River Skell. The bedrock here is limestone, and the river flows underground in periods of dry weather. ▶

Above left: The lake at Studley Royal
Above right: The long straight drive at Studley Royal, aligned directly towards Ripon cathedral
Right: The Fairy steps in Hell Wath Nature reserve





There are about 500 deer in the deer park and late September and October is the rutting season



Above: Rustic footbridge near the confluence of the Rivers Skell and Laver
Right: The obelisk stands about 80yards west of St. Mary's church



Cross the footbridge and turn left through a pleasant meadow. This area is known as Chinese Wood, and marks the start of the area landscaped as part of the Studley Royal gardens in the 18th century. The whole of the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal area has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The entrance to Studley Royal deer park is marked by a substantial metal gate. The path continues up the River Skell, crossing and re-crossing the river over a series of stone bridges. William Aislabe developed the garden here with seven wood bridges in a Chinese style. These decayed, and have been replaced by five attractive humped stone bridges, although this part of the walk is still known as the Seven Bridges Valley.

and follow a broad grassy track gently uphill. St Mary's Church comes into view along this track.

This church is described by the National Trust as 'an outstanding example of High Victorian Gothic by one of its leading exponents.' The church was completed in 1878 over 100 years after most of the Studley Royal landscape. It commemorates Frederick Vyner who was kidnapped by Greek bandits in 1870. They demanded a ransom of £50,000 for his release, a huge sum at the time. Before the ransom could be delivered, Greek soldiers attempted a rescue. Frederick Vyner was killed in the fire fight. His family contributed the money raised for the ransom to build two churches, including St. Mary's. The church is open from 12-4pm until 29 September.

There are about 500 deer in the deer park – red, fallow and sika deer. Late September and October is the deer rut season, and you may hear the bellow of stags challenging opponents and, if you are extremely lucky, the clash of antlers as two stags fight to determine which is dominant.

The route continues to the right from the original path which leads from the



At the end of the seven bridges valley the lake comes into view, with glimpses into the more formal part of the Studley Royal water gardens across the lake. Follow the path round the lake to the right hand side. The walk can be extended by entering the formal part of the water gardens. This also gives access to Fountains Abbey, Hall and Mill, on payment of an admission fee. The main walk continues taking the right fork up a slope to a car park. Cross the car park

Top: Bridge over the River Skell at Bondgate Green
Left, centre: Grand entrance to the Studley Royal estate
Left: The well maintained path along the seven bridges valley





Above: Broad path through trees in Hell Wath Nature reserve

Fact file

Walk length: 7 miles

Maps: OS Explorer 299 (Ripon and Boroughbridge), OS Landranger 99 (Northallerton, ripon and surrounding area).

Going: The majority of the route is on field or woodland paths which can be muddy after rain. There are some uphill sections, but none are steep. The route has several gates, but no stiles.

Start and finish: Bondgate Green (the B6265 heading from Ripon bypass towards the minster). There is free roadside parking on Bondgate Green.

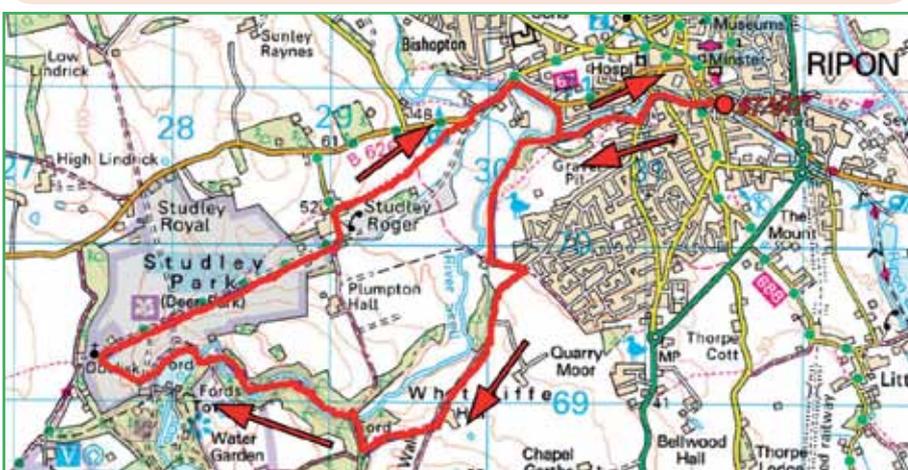
Refreshments: None directly along the route. There are many cafes, pubs and restaurants in Ripon, a short distance from the start of the walk. The National Trust cafe is accessible if you pay for entry to Fountains Abbey.

Toilets: Minster Road, near Ripon Minster

Public transport: The 36 bus service links Ripon, Harrogate and Leeds. The 142/143 service links Ripon with Boroughbridge and York and the 70 service runs between Ripon, Thirsk and Northallerton.

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

car park to the church down the long straight road drive of the Studley Royal estate. There is a magnificent view from this section of the walk between an avenue of trees, past a substantial estate gatehouse to Ripon cathedral. Pass through the gatehouse, continue to a road junction and turn left. Walk into Studley Roger and turn right along a gravelled path where there is a post box built into a house wall. The path passes between hedges and eventually reaches a kissing gate by a road. Cross the road and turn right. Follow the road past a bridge over the River Laver. Cross the road before the roundabout and continue along Mallorie Park Drive. Take a footpath on the right which drops down from the road by a public footpath sign and along a concrete path. This leads to the footbridge which was passed on the outward journey. Turn left and retrace your steps downstream along the River Skell to the start point. ■



Left: Map with the route in red
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