



ABOVE: Panoramic view over the Vale of York from the top of Kilburn White Horse
LEFT: Looking back towards Whitestonecliff and Gormire Lake

Stunning Sutton Bank

Starting near the iconic Kilburn White Horse this walk takes in superb long distance views over the Vales of York and Mowbray from Sutton Bank and a visit to Gormire Lake.

Words and photographs: Paul Heaton (fotocraft Images)



The Mouseman visitor centre in Kilburn



The walk passes down this field and through the col between Roulson Scar and Hood Hill

The White Horse at Kilburn is a landmark that can be seen from many miles away across the Vale of York. It is an interesting place to visit to see how the figure has been constructed. This walk combines a visit to the white horse with a stroll along the edge of Sutton Bank, described by Alf Wright (otherwise known as James Herriott) as the finest view in England, and a visit to Gormire Lake.

My preference when planning a walk with a climb is to arrange the route so the main climb is at the beginning rather than the end of the walk. This route therefore starts in the small, and normally quiet, White Horse Bank Car Park between Kilburn and its white horse.

To begin, turn left out of the car park, cross the road then take a path on the right which runs parallel to the road. The path climbs quite steeply through trees following the road around a couple of zig-zags.

Keep an eye out on the left for the main white horse car park (and its prominent green sign). There are three narrow side paths cutting across to the road in this area. Take one of these, enter the car park and climb the stone steps on the right hand side. These steps lead past the white horse. The shape of the horse is difficult to make out from so close. However, it is easy to see how it has been made. The horse was completed in November 1857, cut from the rock by 31 local men, with the surface whitewashed to make it easily visible from a distance. The grey chalk used to dress the surface of the horse is very different to the buff coloured limestone seen elsewhere on this walk. The Kilburn White Horse Association is a local charity which raises funds for the maintenance and preservation of the horse.



Steps up the side of the Kilburn White Horse

At the top of the horse the path bends around to the left, across the animal's back and flattens out. It is worth stopping at this point, both to recover from the climb, and to admire the superb view south across the Vale of York. The route follows a well made gravel path for over a mile along the top of the bank. The views over the lowland change slowly, and the Yorkshire Gliding Club provides additional interest to the right of the path. When conditions are suitable gliders can be seen taking off and landing at close quarters.

Ignoring side paths along the way, a direction indicator is eventually reached, showing the places that can be seen from Sutton Bank. The path bears right at this point and continues to meet the busy A170 which runs between Thirsk and Scarborough. Cross the road with care. The walk route turns left on the other side of the road. It is however worth making a short detour straight on to visit the Sutton Bank National Park Centre. This has a shop, cafe, conveniences and displays about Sutton Bank and the National Park.

Returning to the route, the path continues partly among trees along the top of the bank. Gormire Lake comes into view along this section surrounded by trees. There are few natural lakes in the North York Moors National Park. Gormire is an exception, and was created by a major landslip thousands of years ago. It is unusual in having neither an inlet or outlet stream – being fed by springs, and drained by underground channels through the limestone rocks of the area. There are attractive views back along the route along here. The crags of Whitestone Cliff stand above Garbutt Wood, with Gormire Lake and Hood Hill also visible. Garbutt Wood is an area of ancient semi-natural broad leaf woodland owned by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

Turn left at a bridleway sign for Thirlby Bank. The route now

descends through trees. Carry straight on at a blue bridleway sign. The sunken path in this area can be quite muddy but many of the worst areas can be avoided by walking along the embankments on one or other side of the path. The route zig zags down the hill and leads to a wooden bridleway sign at the bottom. Turn left at this sign and walk along a clear gravel surfaced path among the trees of Garbutt Wood. Glimpses of Gormire Lake can be seen on the right, and shortly afterwards the path reaches the lake shore.

After leaving the lake shore there is a gentle climb up to a fork of the path. Keep left to come to a wooden gate with a sign 'Bridleway A170'. Pass through the gate and along to Gormire Farm. Turn right into the farmyard, and left around the side of a garage. There is a somewhat overgrown path leading on to a metal gate. Pass through this gate and a second gate then follow the right hand field edge until a stile and footpath sign are seen in the hedge in front. Turn left after crossing the stile and descend to a second stile next to a metal gate at the bottom corner of the field.

This stile is by the side of the A170. Cross the road, turn right and walk about 100 yards to reach a stile in the hedge. Cross this stile and head straight down the field to a wooden gate. Pass through this gate and continue downhill next to a wire fence. Walk through a gate at the bottom onto a farm road, and through a second gate offset to the right. The path leads next to a small stream around Hood Grange up to a gate into a large field. Turn right and head across the field towards a protruding corner of the woods ahead. As you approach this corner you will see a footpath sign. This path leads along to a forestry road. Turn left, uphill along this road and carry straight on uphill at a junction of the forest roads.



Kilburn White Horse

Soon after the road starts to descend, it begins to bear left, and a narrower path heads off straight on from the right of the forestry road. Take this path which continues downhill, bends left, and soon afterwards reaches a gate. Carry on through this gate in the same direction to a second gate leading out onto a road. Turn left for no more than 50 yards to the car park entrance on the left.

It is at this point I like to look back on the many pleasures of the route, and to reflect on the good sense of parking at the bottom of the hill, as I certainly would not relish walking back up White Horse Bank right at the end of this walk!



Sutton Bank National Park Centre

Information box:

- Walk length: 6 miles
- Maps: OS Explorer OL26 (North York Moors Western Area), OS Landranger 100 (Malton, Pickering and surrounding area)
- Going: Steep climb up to the top of Kilburn White Horse at the start of the walk, and less steep climb through Hood Hill plantation on the return. Mainly good paths, but the descent to Gormire Lake is often muddy. 3 stiles.
- Start and finish: Follow signs for the White Horse from Kilburn. White Horse Bank Car Park is on the left hand side near the bottom of the hill. The entrance is just after a blue "Parking ½ mile" sign.
- Refreshments: Sutton Bank National Park Centre on the route, and the Mouseman Visitors Centre and Forrester's Arms in Kilburn.
- Toilets: Sutton Bank National Park Centre
- Public transport: Moors Bus service M11 links Kilburn with Northallerton and Thirsk on Sundays only until 27 October. Service 59 runs from Thirsk to Kilburn on Mondays and Fridays only. Kilburn is about ½ mile from the start of the walk.
- 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

