

THE WALK

The lovely waters of the Hodder were an inspiration to the 19th century poet Gerald Manley Hopkins who taught at Stonyhurst College, the Catholic public school founded by the Jesuits.

Even in winter this walk, that follows the river almost to its confluence with the Ribble, is one to guarantee enjoyment – especially when the first snowdrops appear with their promise of spring.

Start: Quarry car park, close to Birdy Brow on Clitheroe Old Road, near Chaigley. From Junction 31a M6 follow signs for Longridge. On B6243 bear right at mini roundabout towards Clitheroe and Ribchester. Beyond St Cecilia's High School turn left opposite the church into the town centre. Follow signs for Jeffrey Hill straight ahead as the main street bears right down the hill. Where the road forks keep right. In 3k 2m reach cross roads at Newdrop Inn. Go straight across and continue for almost another three miles. The car park is on the right just as the road drops steeply to Higher Hodder Bridge.

Directions: Continue along the road descending quite steeply at first for 400m. Turn right at a metal gate and follow the direction of the left pointing waymark sign. At first follow the line of an old fence and then branch right for a gate leading out onto a farm road. Turn right. Follow the road as it bends to the left towards Rhyddings Farm and then turn right to cross a stile and drop through a meadow to gain the riverside path close to a wooden footbridge.

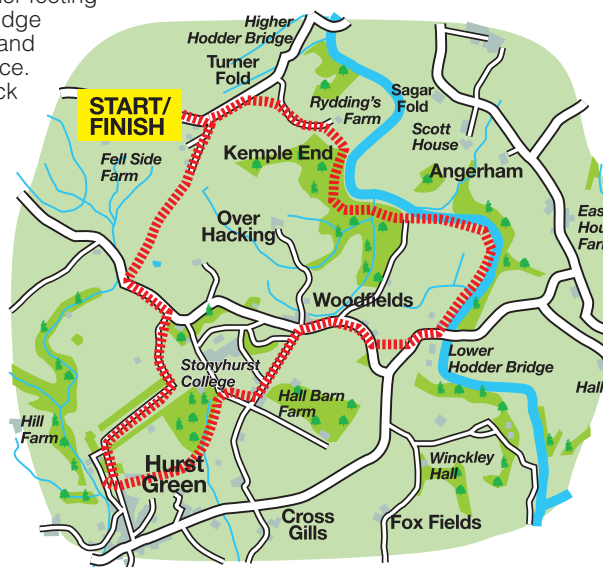
For the next 2k or approximately 30 minutes follow the riverside path to Lower Hodder Bridge. At first it weaves its way through woodland crossing two more wooden footbridges before climbing up to a stone cross and then dropping to a wide track. On firmer footing this crosses a stone bridge and ascends to the grand property of Hodder Place. Keep ahead on the track with the river on your left and open fields on the right and the way clear to Lower Bridge.

Turn right and walk up Whalley Road. Ignore the first footpath on the right but take the second as the road levels out. After a wooden gate the path (not easy to make out) crosses a field to Knowles Brow. Turn right. Keep on this lane for 500m and then as you reach as cluster of handsome houses turn left towards Hall Barn Farm.

The track leads down to the farm with the main college buildings to the right. Keep ahead to a junction of tracks on the edge of playing fields. Turn right. At the time of writing the college has an extensive building programme. Diversion maybe necessary. As you approach the chapel turn left through a gate and follow the path as it edges right to a corner of Fox Fall Wood. The path continues up a slight rise to a metal kissing gate.



Pathway of poets



Keep ahead over the next three fields to arrive at Shireburn Cottages on the edge of Hurst Green. There are three pubs in Hurst Green and if you have never visited this charming village before it is well worthwhile making a short diversion to the Almshouses. To continue the route turn right and enter the grounds of Stonyhurst College

FACTFILE

Distance: 9k 5.5m
Time: 2.5 – 3.5 hours
Map: OS OL 41 Forest of Bowland
Summary: Moderate. Steady climb back to car park. Some parts of walk may be very muddy indeed

again. This is the best approach for soon you'll be on one of the finest drives in Britain. It will not fail to impress you – yours for free; others pay thousands of pounds a year for their children to have this privilege. (They do get a little more besides.)

Follow the drive down past the playing fields and turn left following the road towards the golf club. 300M after the golf club turn left at the junction and walk up the lane. After Stockbridge Cottages and besides a barn turn right onto a footpath and leads across fields to Fell Side Farm House. At a metal gate keep ahead along an improving track. After passing attractive properties on left and right the track reaches Clitheroe Old Road. Turn left up Birdy Brow to return to the car park.

Walk devised David Johnstone and described by John Griffiths and Bob Clare. Visit www.lancashirewalks.com for an illustrated version of this walk.



NATUREWATCH

With Liam Creedon

The silhouette of a barn owl floating spectre-like over frost-frozen fields is one of winter's most haunting images. The short days and the lack of food at this time of year drive these illusive, majestic predators out from under the cover of darkness. But this year the birds have been easier to see for a far more sinister reason.

Record numbers of barn owls have been found and reported to wildlife groups by the public, with birds often being discovered near to their roosting sites in barns and farm out-buildings.

So just what is going on? Well, as other wildlife have found out to their cost, the problem is the unusual severity of our winter weather this year.

Barn owls prey on small rodents, but because of the thick crust of snow entombing much of the landscape, the owls simply haven't been able to get at the mice and voles that they rely on for food. The birds are literally starving to death.

Garden birds have suffered in the cold as food disappears and tens of thousands will die as a result over the course of the winter. But at least we can help them by putting out food in our gardens to give them a fighting chance of seeing out the worst of the weather.

But for the barn owl, which is only just fighting back from a catastrophic decline, the solution is not so straightforward. Mark Thomas, RSPB investigations officer, has been working closely on monitoring the numbers of dead barn owls during the cold snap. He says the presence of a healthy population of the birds was integral to the make-up of the countryside.

He explains: "A combination of the close association of the barn owl and man and its ghostly physical appearance makes this species one of the most recognised and charismatic birds in the British countryside. The reverse of its decline is not only a true conservation success story but also a triumph for collaborative working between land managers, farmers, conservationists and bird watchers."

Hit www.rspb.org.uk for more information about helping the barn owl.