

## St Aelred's Bridleway Trail for horse riders



Please note this is written up as it was ridden by Mary Thew and Janet Cochrane in September 2024, with only minor amendments. This is a draft route and will be subject to change if permission is granted by landowners to access private land to achieve a better route.

Churches with Pilgrim Passport stamps are indicated in bold on the route descriptions below. Due to narrow gates, roads, and other access limitations around the churches, you will find it much easier to visit them all if you have a companion and take it in turns to hold your horses.

The draft route as described here is 50 miles (around 80km) and is split (fairly) evenly across the four days.

You don't have to travel this route over four days, but accommodation for horses is limited and largely determines stopping points. In addition, if you are walking with a packhorse, remember not to over face yourself, let alone your horse! Weather and ground conditions in this area can be difficult and it's much better to have time to spare at the start and end of a day, than be travelling tired and against the clock.

Regardless of what apps and electronic mapping devices you have, always carry a paper map and compass, and know how to use them. In poor weather accurate navigation is vital to stay safe on the moors. Lanes, public rights of way, and moorland access may be closed at any time for maintenance or shooting, so be prepared for changes of plan at short notice.

We recommend that before starting to plan a trip, you familiarise yourself with the relevant BHS Guidance on hill and upland riding, and the use of bridleways, byways, and roads (see the final page of this guide for links).

## Day 1

*Helmsley to Bilsdale East Moor. 13 miles (21km)*

**Churches: All Saints Church Helmsley, Helmsley Methodist Church, St Mary Magdalene East Moors**

Starting from Helmsley, head East on the bridleway (BW) from Carlton Road (more or less opposite the Youth Hostel). Follow the BW NE through Monk Holme Wood and into Riccal Dale Wood. Continue North, staying on the same BW until you reach the public road at Cowhouse Bank.

To access St Mary Magdalene's church, follow Cowhouse Bank North for about 1km. You can just about fit a well-behaved horse through the churchyard gate, although if you have a packhorse, it may be a very tight squeeze!

Once you've stamped your Pilgrim Passport and taken a break, retrace your steps back up the road, South to the BW junction at Cowhouse Bank. Rejoin the BW and head NW until you meet the end of the public road at a four-way junction (road, BW, byway and footpath). Leave the BW and follow the byway through Roppa Wood to the edge of Laskill Pasture Moor.

*Note: Although this moor is open access for walkers, access for horse riders is permissive. If you encounter estate staff, please be polite and respectful, and be prepared to divert if requested to avoid moorland management or shooting.*

Follow the sandy shooting tracks as marked on the Trail route. These tracks take you in a generally Northerly direction across Coniser Howl, with beautiful views of Bilsdale to the left, before re-joining the BW just East of Black Holes. Take the BW East until you meet another shooting track above Bonfield Ghyll. At this point, rather than taking the direct BW into the back of Bonfield Ghyll Farm (this is very steep and overgrown and we wouldn't recommend it), turn SE on the track, meet the public road, and follow the road to the farm's driveway.

### **Accommodation:**

The Old Back Kitchen, Bonfield Ghyll

01439 771493

[trudysanderson@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:trudysanderson@hotmail.co.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/TheOldBackKitchen/>

## Day 2

*Bilsdale East Moor to Hawnby. 9 miles (14km)*

**Churches: St John's Midcable, Bilsdale**

From Bonfield Ghyll, retrace your steps back up the driveway, up the road, along the shooting track and back to the BW. Follow the BW West past Black Holes and come down off the moor above Low and High Crossett farms. The BW takes you NW, past High Crossett Farm and into Kirkhill Plantation.

The BW through Kirkhill Plantation is in a steep gully and may be overgrown. Please remember to carefully fasten the gates at the top of the plantation as cattle have free range of the High Crossett fields. At the bottom of Kirkhill Plantation, a five-bar wooden gate leads you onto the B1257. The gate is set quite close to the road, so take great care here as it doesn't leave you much space on the verge to get the gate closed, and the road is fast. If you and your horse are not already wearing high-viz, we would recommend pausing at the top of the plantation to put some on.

Follow the B1257 South for about 100m until you see the driveway to Low Mill on the other side of the road. Carefully cross the road and head up the driveway, and around the house to meet a slightly overgrown hedged track heading South.

*Note: The B1257 is a very fast road and is heavily used by motorbikes. Sight lines for driver and bikers are not good, and they are unlikely to be expecting to see horses.*

*We are working to get warning signs erected on the relevant stretch of road, but this is proving difficult. Take care, and if you feel unsafe for any reason, please make a note of the details of any incidents and report to the Trail organisers, plus the BHS, the National Park, and North Yorkshire Police if appropriate. Links for reporting are at the end of this file.*

Follow the hedged track into Fangdale Beck then take the public lane back down to the green phone box beside the B1257. If there are two or more of you together, rather than taking the horses back onto the B1257, we would recommend waiting at the phone box and sending one person on foot to stamp your Passports in St John's, which is on the opposite side of the road. If you are travelling alone, you may want to omit this church.

From Fangdale Beck, take the public lane South to Malkin Bower. From here, take the BW South along a surfaced farm track. About 1km South of Helm House, where the BW splits, take the bottom track past Lincoln Slack. This brings you out onto a surfaced road. Note that the bottom route past Lincoln Slack includes a small stream crossing; if you are worried that your horse will not cross water you can take the top

track up Benhill Bank instead. This brings you out on the same road, just slightly higher up.

Follow the road down to the SE, past Woolhouse Croft, skirting round the bottom of Bilsdale West Moor, and you will see Easterside B&B on your left.

*Note: The intended route of the Trail will leave the road past Benhill Bank / Lincoln Slack, and head up the BW past Wethercote Farm, and onto the moorland byway past Bumper Castle. The route will then drop South via either High or Low Banniscue. However, as described in the trail blog, the rights of way coming off the moor past Bumper Hagg are currently in a very poor state, and we cannot currently recommend a safe route for horses off the moor. These problems have been reported and once we have reached a solution, in conjunction with the relevant authorities, the Trail description and maps will be updated accordingly. If anyone wishes to discuss this area, please contact us via the Trail website.*

**Accommodation:**

Easterside Farm B&B

01439 798277

<https://eastersidefarm.co.uk/our-bb/>

## Day 3

*Hawnby to Rievaulx. 16 miles (26km)*

**Churches: All Saints' Hawnby, All Saints' Old Byland, St Michael's Cold Kirby, St Mary's Scawton, Rievaulx Methodist Church, St Mary the Virgin Rievaulx, Rievaulx Abbey**

Day 3 – a busy day of churching! In terms of a route, this is by far the most messy day. Due to a lack of access for horses, some of these churches are effectively dead ends. Cold Kirby and Scawton are particularly difficult, although personally I think Scawton is beautiful and well worth the detour to visit.

We are working on a more efficient route for horses, but it relies on permissive access by local landowners, so we will keep the website updated as and when we hear back.

*Alternative routes: The following description is the route we rode, but depending on your own priorities (ticking off all the churches or just having a nice day of riding with your horse) and where you are staying overnight, you may want to put together an entirely different route.*

The first part of the day is straightforward. From Easterside, head back down the steep road to Hawnby village. In the village, go across the crossroads and underneath the pub sign before reaching the church at the bottom. There's a nice patch of grazing outside the church. After stamping your Passport, continue SE on the public road, past South Farm and head South over Hawnby Bridge. Follow the road steeply uphill, SW up Murton Bank. Although BWs are available in the bottom of the valley, the road is by far the easiest way to climb the bank.

At Murton Grange, take a breather and enjoy the view over Hawnby and the moors, before taking the road directly South for about 250m. Turn left onto Ox Pasture Lane, and follow this grassy track for about 2.5km, keeping the open fields away to your left. When you reach a BW junction at the bottom of East Ley Wood, head South towards Barnclose Farm. Go through Barnclose Farm and past Tylas Farm. Just after Tylas Farm, cross directly over another BW and continue SW up the hill past Tylas Barn. There are lovely views away to your left at this point, and after about 300m the BW takes a sharp turn to the South to join Clavery Ley Lane into Old Byland.

After visiting the church at Old Byland, you have a choice. You can take the public road SW, then take the BW South through fields to bring you out on the other side of the village green to St Michael's Cold Kirby. This church is currently out of use, although plans are in place to re-open it. If you do choose to do this, you'll have to retrace your steps back to Old Byland, as there is no other route out of Cold Kirby for

horses; or at least, not heading in the way you need to go. Alternatively, you can omit Cold Kirby and head straight for Rievaulx, taking the BW East out of Old Byland along Low Gill. Continue heading East until you hit the public road; turn left and almost immediately take the byway on the right into Lambert Hagg Wood. The track zig zags back on itself before crossing the river at Bow Bridge, the old packhorse bridge. Follow this track down through the wood and come out onto the road in Rievaulx village next to the Methodist Church, and just opposite St Mary the Virgin.

After stamping your Passport at St Mary's, take the road South through the village, stopping off at the Abbey to get their stamp on your Passport at the Visitor Centre. There are toilets in the car park and a tie-up point and mounting block for horses on the wall next to the Visitor Centre, so you can go in for a well-earned takeaway coffee and a snack.

Follow the road along the river and turn right over Rievaulx Bridge, then continue on the road West past Hagg Hall. The road is very narrow so listen out for traffic and you will probably have to make use of the passing places at some point.

About 250m after Hagg Hall, turn right onto a BW that will take you West past the Fish Ponds. At the far end of the Fish Ponds, ford the stream next to the big stepping stones and pick up the BW South along the edge of Spring Wood. After 500m you'll join the public road again. Continue South to Scawton, to visit the church there, then retrace your steps back to the point where you joined the road.

Instead of heading back up the BW you came down, follow the road downhill to the East for 200m or so, after which you'll see a driveway signposted to Bungdale Head Camping & Caravanning site. This long, very steep drive takes you up to the campsite.

**Accommodation:**

Bungdale Head Camping

01439 770589

[Sm.foster@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Sm.foster@hotmail.co.uk)

<http://www.bungdaleheadcamping.co.uk/>

## Day 4

*Rievaulx to Helmsley. 12 miles (19km)*

**Churches: St Chad's, Sproxton**

The final day is a much more straightforward route back to Helmsley. Leaving Bungdale Head, follow the drive back down to the road (be careful because it really is steep). Follow the road NE along Bradley Bank, then East past Hag Hall. Past Hag Hall, continue until a BW leaves the road to the right, passing along the side of a group of farm buildings on a rubble track.

The track takes you South, past the old mill, and then heads up, curving around and into Hags Wood. It's a good track with nice easy footing all the way along Seamer Howl. Keep an eye out for markers as the BW leaves the track and heads up a soggy gully to the left, taking you out of the wood and up onto Claythwaite Rigg. The definitive line of the BW follows a wet, overgrown gully up into the fields, so you may want to go straight up the side of the gully as soon as possible and just walk on the flat field.

Follow the track across a couple of large rough sheep fields until you come into the back of the farmyard at High Lodge. Continue directly on, through the yards and onto the drive, with horses in the fields on the left and ponies behind a fence on the right that looks like it was built to contain dinosaurs.

At the top of the drive, cross straight over the A170 and follow the bridleway West along the wide verge on the far side of the road. Look for the BW signpost and follow it into the woods. The definitive line of the BW takes you down to Wass Bank Road, on which you head North again to Tom Smith's Cross. There are also multiple tracks taking a shorter route through the woods to the Cross, marked in white on the 1:25,000 OS map.

At Tom Smith's Cross, join High Street in a SE direction. Caution (and hi-viz) is required as you may encounter speeding drivers on this long straight road. Follow the road past the entrance to Studfold Farm on your right and the surfaced forestry track on your left (as shown on Google Maps, this plantation is crossed by a network of surfaced tracks). Continue for another 1km on the road, then where the wood bears away from the road, take the BW on your left to enter Pry Rigg plantation. Follow the BW North past Pry Rigg Farm. Around 500m after the farm the BW exits the wood and passes Holly Bower on a new concrete farm track with large sheds of potato crates on the right-hand side.

Follow Hag Lane and briefly join the B1257. This is a reasonably busy road. You are joining it on an uphill stretch just before the main road junction, so vehicles shouldn't be travelling too fast, but take care. Cross the B1257 next to Sproxton Church. It's

hard to find a good stopping place here, and the churchyard is up a small flight of steps leading directly off the main road, so it's not possible to stamp your Passport unless there are two of you (with one holding the horses outside).

At the end of the village, take the BW past Sproxton Hall. Where the BW splits, head NE past Low Parks Farm and Ellers Wood. Cross the bridge and enter the fish farm compound. The BW runs along a bank at one side of the fish farm; it's only a short stretch but the machinery makes funny noises, and some horses may not like it.

After the fish farm, follow the BW along, between the river on your left and the old railway line, which is raised up on an embankment to your right. Go through a series of gates / sheep pens to pass underneath the railway line, then head East across the field and join the Harome to Helmsley road. This is another stretch where you really need to be wearing hi-viz. Traffic is generally considerate but the road is used by farm vehicles so be prepared to wait in gateways if necessary.

At the junction, take the A170 (Linkfoot Lane) West into Helmsley. There is a wide verge on the left-hand side of the road that takes you almost all the way into town. At the BATA garage, you can turn right onto Carlton Road, then turn left onto Carlton Lane, which leads you back to All Saints Church. Alternatively, you can continue on the main road (Bondgate) to the Market Square. If you do the latter, be aware that although the road is not fast, it is busy and will likely be parked up on both sides.



## Reporting an incident

The North York Moors is generally a very safe place. However, should anything happen to cause you concern, please report it to the appropriate people or authorities.

Please report any problems on the trail, including on public roads, to the Trail organisers via the website: <https://www.saintaelredspilgrimtrail.com/contact>

If possible, we would be grateful if you would also report problems with rights of way and BW signage to the North York Moors National park using this form:

<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/plan-your-visit/rights-of-way/rights-of-way-feedback-form>

You may also want to report to the British Horse Society, who keep a log of incidents causing danger to horses and riders at <https://www.bhs.org.uk/go-riding/record-an-incident/incident-report-form/>

Finally, if you feel you have been put in danger due to someone failing to abide by the law, for example dangerous driving or out of control dogs, you can report this to the police by calling 101 or using their website:

<https://www.northyorkshire.police.uk/ro/report/>

## **BHS Guidance for riders**

### **BHS Advice Notes**

Links out to guidance on issues such as tackling hazards and reporting problems when using rights of way.

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/go-riding/access-and-bridleways-advice/>

### **Hill & Upland Riding**

A useful PDF of advice on hill and upland riding – a must-read before riding on the Moors.

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/qgzdgthl/hill-and-upland-riding-0624.pdf>

### **Hacking**

Guidance on map reading, how to behave when out hacking, and considerations before you set off.

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/go-riding/riding-out-hacking/riding-on-roads/>