

**Starting point:** Southowram Library

**Distance:** A linear walk of 5 miles

The route takes in parts Cromwell Bottom Local Nature Reserve.

1. The walk starts at Southowram library on Law Lane, Southowram. Outside the library turn right down Law Lane for 50m to Town Gate. Before setting off though take time to look at the mature wych elm tree in the garden of Yew Tree House immediately opposite the library – a rare survivor of Dutch elm disease.
2. At Town Gate Continue down the hill past houses for another 200m. At this junction keep left and continue down the hill on to Ashday Lane. Follow Ashday Lane, keeping houses (including the old School house on your left) until reaching Southowram Cricket Club grounds after 270m. In front of the entrance to the cricket grounds, keep left down Ashday lane which is now lined on both sides by mature trees, including sycamore and horse chestnut.

Ashday Lane continues past woodland, open pasture, abandoned fields full of nectar rich flowers and tall herbs and views over to Cromwell Woods towards Brighouse. After approximately half a kilometre the lane takes you past Ashday Hall and its high walls and line of lime and horse chestnut trees.

3. After another 350m of woodland and rolling pasture, the Lane reaches a house and garden. Instead of following Ashday Lane down the a high step down to the left between stone walls, go straight ahead on a narrow bramble lined path into woods.

You soon are walking on an old stone track along the edge of Binns Wood. Sessile oak and sycamore trees dominate the canopy of the woodland but keep an eye out for occasional tall field maple and other unusual trees. There are bluebells in the spring but during the summer months the woodland floor is a mass of Himalayan balsam.

Keep to the path on the edge of the woodland, keeping left where there is a choice – you should notice a stile with the Brighouse Boundary Walk logo about half way through the woods.

The path continues downhill until it eventually emerges back at the bottom of Ashday Lane below overhead power lines in sheep



pasture. Continue to the end of Ashday Lane to where it meets the busy A6025 Elland Road opposite Cromwell House.

4. Cross Elland Road carefully and continue on the minor road straight ahead for 160m past the works on the right, until reaching a car park. Follow the road to the right in front of the car park until you reach a canal – The Calder and Hebble Navigation. A bridge over the canal then takes you into Cromwell Bottom Local Nature Reserve.

This is an important wildlife site – one of the best in West Yorkshire - and is managed by Calderdale Council to maintain its wealth and diversity of habitats, which include woodland, open species-rich grasslands, reedbeds and ponds. These habitats have developed over land between the canal and river that was once quarried for gravel, and then later filled with fuel ash and other waste. This varied use has given rise to the wide variety of soil and habitats on site. More information and an audio tour can be found on the Natural England website:

[http://www.lnr.naturalengland.org.uk/Special/lnr/lnr\\_details.asp?ID=%20918](http://www.lnr.naturalengland.org.uk/Special/lnr/lnr_details.asp?ID=%20918)

There is a complex network of paths around the site which you are free to explore. For this walk it is suggested that you take a path heading east, parallel to the canal for about 655 m through young



woodland across the northern edge of a large reed-fringed pool. You will eventually reach a lock and old stone and iron bridge over the canal. Listen out in summer for the scratchy call of the reed warbler – you might also be lucky enough to see kingfishers.

Before reaching the lock, there is a small unmarked path on the right that cuts through the woodland and down into the reeds, connecting with the path that runs alongside the River Calder. Take this small path and then turn right onto the path by the river until it meets a bridge on the left over the river. As there is a barrier across the bridge, continue along your path straight on for a short distance until reaching a junction with the canal towpath accessible through a small gate. Turn left and walk along the canal towpath for about 250m when you will reach the entrance to the reserve again.

Follow the mobility impaired access route around this section of the reserve which takes in flower-rich grasslands full of butterflies on sunny spring and summer days. Look out for orchids in the grassland and other uncommon flowers which thrive on the nutrient poor soil soils here.



You will also pass a number of wet depressions – seasonal pools that have often dried out by summer and others which hold their water for longer. On the southern section of this route the path runs along old ‘cut’ designed to bypass the weirs on the river. It’s now long over grown and there are seepages of red iron-rich water here. In summer there are several species of dragonfly and damselfly on the wing that use these pools for breeding.

5. Eventually, after running for a while alongside the river, the path leads back to the entrance gate and bridge over the canal where you entered the reserve. Most of the rest of the walk is now along the canal towpath for a distance of 1¼ miles before the path leaves the canal to join Gas Works Lane on the left and then onto Elland Bridge. There is still plenty of wildlife to be seen along the wooded banks of the canal. In early summer you will be accompanied by the aniseed scent of sweet cicely - its feathery leaves and creamy flowers lining the towpath, while aquatic plants such as arrowhead grow in the waters of the canal itself.

At the bridge turn left pausing to look down on the river below and follow the road to the left and up the hill. The road then forks about 50m from the end of the bridge.

6. Cross the road very carefully and walk up Northgate past the church and onto Church Street.

Cross over Church Street and continue down Southgate, past the car park, for approximately 140m to the junction with Coronation Street on the right. Turn on to Coronation Street, where you will find Elland Library 100m further on to the left.

