

## A Medieval Walk from Fountains

**From the magnificent ruins of Fountains Abbey to the fascinating medieval manor of Markenfield Hall.**

**Distance** 6.4 miles (10.4km)

**Minimum time** 3hrs

**Ascent/gradient** 328ft (100m)

**Level of difficulty** Medium

**Paths** Field paths and tracks, a little road walking, 8 stiles

**Landscape** Farmland and woodland

**Suggested map** aqua3 OS Explorer 298 Nidderdale

**Start/finish** SE 270681

**Dog friendliness** Dogs should be on leads on field paths, can be off lead in parts of woodland

**Parking** Car park at west end of Abbey, or at visitor centre

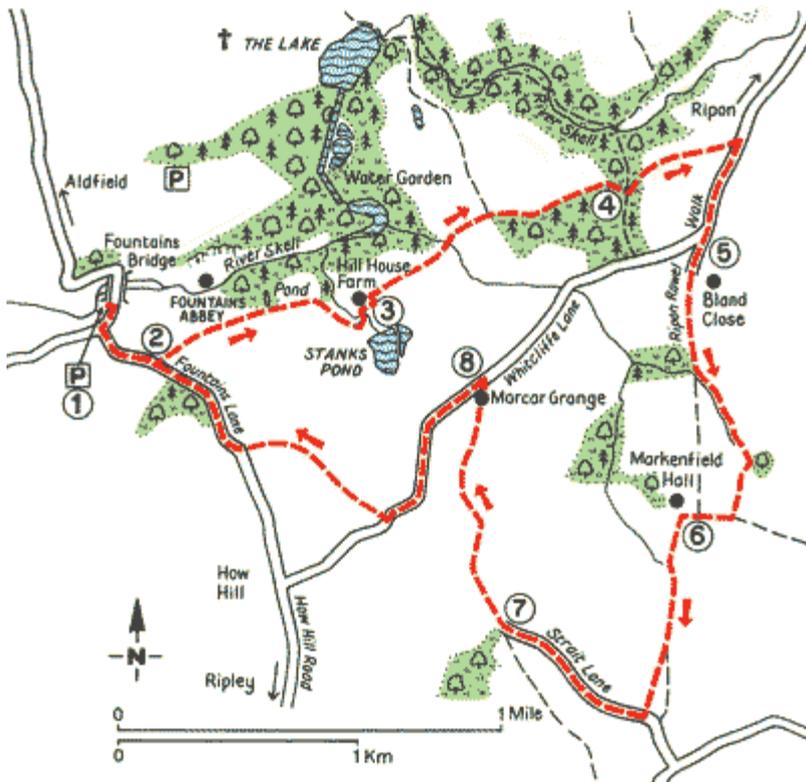
**Public toilets** Fountains Abbey visitor centre

After you have climbed the hill from the car park and begun the walk along the valley side, following the ancient abbey wall, the south front of Fountains Hall is below you. Built by Sir Stephen Proctor in 1611, it is a fine Jacobean House, with lots of mullioned windows and cross gables. Were it anywhere other than at the entrance to Fountains Abbey it would be seen as one of the great houses of the age. Sir Stephen was, by all accounts, not the most scrupulous of men, having made his huge fortune as Collector of Fines on Penal Statutes. Nor did he respect the Abbey buildings; the stone he built his house with was taken from the south east corner of the monastic remains.

A little further along the path, the Abbey ruins come into view. When monks from St Mary's Abbey in York first settled here in 1132 it was a wild and desolate place. Nevertheless their abbey prospered, and became one of the country's richest and most powerful Cistercian monasteries. More remains of Fountains than of any other abbey ruin in the country. Its church was 360ft (97.5m) long. The other buildings, laid out along (and over) the River Skell, give a vivid impression of what life was like here in the Middle Ages. All came to an end in 1539 when King Henry VIII dissolved the larger monasteries. This was only a few years after Abbot Marmaduke Huby had built the huge tower, a symbol of what he believed was the enduring power of his abbey.

Beyond Fountains Abbey are the pleasure gardens laid out between 1716 and 1781 by John Aislabie and his son William. John had retired to his estate here at Studley Royal after being involved - as Chancellor of the Exchequer - in the financial scandal of the South Sea Bubble. It is one of the great gardens of Europe, contrasting green lawn with stretches of water, both formal and informal. Carefully placed in the landscape are ornamental buildings, from classical temples to Gothic towers. The Aislabie's mansion stood at the north end of the park; it was destroyed by fire in 1945.

The highlight of the southern end of the walk is Markenfield Hall, a rare early 14th-century fortified manor house, built around 1310 for the Markenfield family. You can see the tomb of Sir Thomas Markenfield and his wife Dionisia in Ripon Cathedral. Open on Mondays during the summer, the house still clearly demonstrates how a medieval knight and his family lived; it is part home, part farm. You can still see the chapel and the hall. The gatehouse, convincingly medieval, is actually early 20th century.



**1** From the car park turn right uphill, signed 'Harrogate'. At the fork go left, signed 'Markington, Harrogate'. Just after the road bends right, go over a stile beside a gate with bridleway signs.

**2** Follow the grassy path just inside the ancient Abbey Wall, past a small pond. Go through a waymarked gate and follow the track as it curves round to the right through another gate then left round the farm buildings of Hill House Farm. Go through a small gate near the farm house.

**3** Turn right then follow the footpath signs to go left at the end of a large shed and then right. Go through a metal gate on to a track. At the end of the hedge go ahead down the field to a gate into the wood. Follow the track, passing the ruined archway, to descend to a crossroads.

**4** Go straight on, signed 'Ripon'. The track climbs to a gate with a Ripon Rowel Walk sign. Follow the track beside the line of trees to a gate on to Whitcliffe Lane. Turn right. At the top of the rise go straight ahead on the metal road.

**5** Go over the cattle grid by Bland Close, then straight ahead with the hedge on your right to reach a stile. Continue along the waymarked track, eventually with woodland to your right. Go over a stile near a metal gate and follow the track as it goes right to reach a gate. Turn right to some farm buildings by Markenfield Hall.

**6** Follow the wall to the left, going through a metal gate and straight ahead down the track, through a gate. Follow the track, then a waymark sign, across a field to a stile by a gate. Turn right up the narrow Strait Lane, to emerge into a field.

**7** Follow the waymarked path beside a field. Go through a gate in the field corner and continue ahead with the hedge to the right. Go through four more gates and follow the track as it curves towards farm buildings. Go over a stile into the farmyard of Morcar Grange, and ahead to the metal Whitcliffe Lane.

**8** Turn left and follow the lane as it bends left then right. At the next corner, look for a stile on the right beside a gate. Cross the field half left and go over three stiles, following the waymarked path towards the buildings. Go over a stile and pass between the buildings to reach a metal road. Turn back to the car park.