

Mr Danby's Druidic Dream

A gentle walk from a peculiar mock-druidic temple through rich farmland near Masham.

Distance 4.2 miles (6.8km)

Minimum time 2hrs

Ascent/gradient 426ft (130m)

Level of difficulty Easy

Paths Tracks and field paths, 7 stiles

Landscape Valley and farmland, with some surprising constructions

Suggested map aqua3 OS Explorer 298 Nidderdale

Start/finish SE 177787

Dog friendliness Keep dogs on leads or under close control

Parking Car park by Druid's Temple

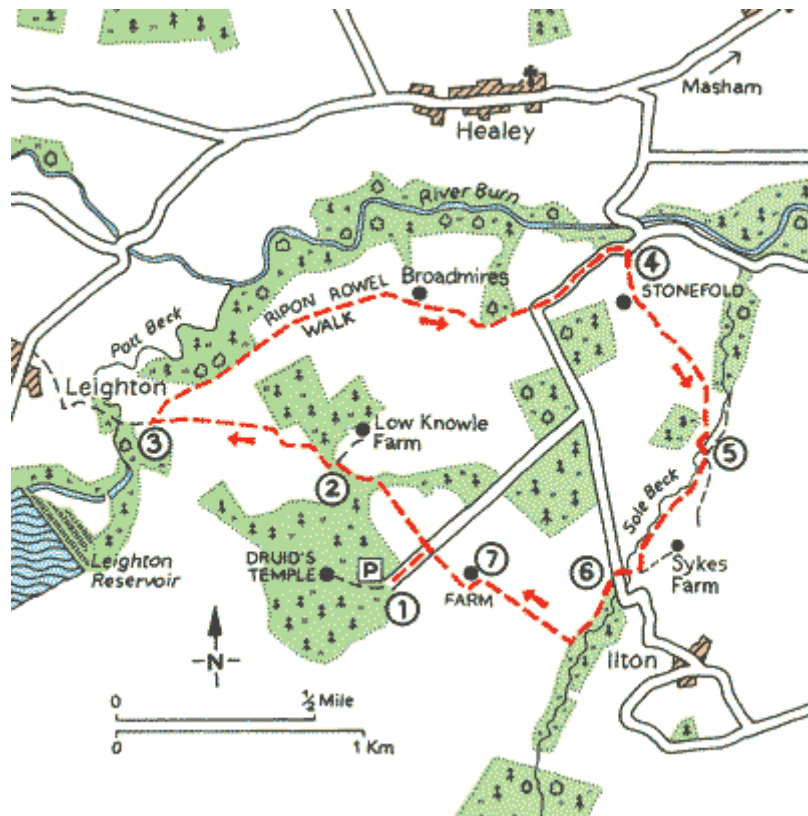
Public toilets None on route

Start or finish the walk with a druidical flourish by visiting the Druid's Temple - one of the most extraordinary of Yorkshire's rich crop of follies. It was created on the orders of William Danby, eccentric master of nearby Swinton Castle, in 1809. One of his purposes was philanthropy - there was widespread unemployment in Nidderdale, and he saw his version of Stonehenge as an early job creation scheme. What his workers thought when they were paid to build something so strange is not recorded; they were no doubt supposed to remain silent - and grateful.

Danby's Druid's Temple bears only superficial resemblance to Stonehenge. It is oval, not round, and sits in a hollow, solidly lined with great upright stones. At the opposite end from the entrance is a cave, said to contain a rare type of luminous moss. And outside the Temple, like tugs around an ocean liner, are pretend cromlechs, consisting of huge flat stones on uprights. These betray the early 19th-century origins of the temple - they are spaced with perfect symmetry, in the best classical tradition. Less classical, though very fashionable, was the hermit who is said to have inhabited the cave for four and a half years, without cutting his hair or beard.

The walk passes through what was perhaps a trial run for the splendours of the Druid's Temple, a gateway of massively piled boulders, before descending towards the valley of the Pott Beck - a reminder that the area, for council purposes, goes under the delightful name of Ilton-cum-Pott. You will see the dam wall of Leighton Reservoir ahead (you can see the reservoir itself from just beyond the Druid's Temple). It was under construction at the outbreak of the First World War (the neighbouring Roundhill Reservoir had been constructed more than ten years before), and the engineering works were served by a light railway from Masham. As war broke out, the site was taken over by the 1st Leeds Battalion - the Leeds Pals - who were stationed here for nine months, before being transferred first to Ripon, then, via Hampshire and Egypt, to the Somme.

Much of the walk follows the Ripon Rowel Walk, a 50-mile (80km) circular route centred on the city of Ripon, and officially starting from the cathedral. It is, appropriately, named after the rowels - the small spiked wheels fitted to the back of a horserider's spurs - that were Ripon's speciality in the 16th and 17th centuries. So renowned were the rowels manufactured here that a royal charter recognised their superiority, and they gave rise to a common folk saying 'As true steel as Ripon rowels'. A spur appears in the city's coat of arms (along with a horn) and can be seen on the top of the 300-year-old obelisk in the Market Square. Many local clubs and societies also use this symbol in their emblems and even their titles. The Ripon Rowel Walk is well waymarked by a spiked wheel symbol.



1 Park in the car park by the Druid's Temple (to visit the Temple, walk through the wood, then return to the car park) and walk down the road you drove up. Just after a row of metal posts, cross a stile on the left marked with the Ripon Rowel Walk symbol, opposite a farm track. Walk ahead across the field and go through a gate surrounded by boulders. Bend left, along the edge of the wood and at the farm track go left to a gate.

2 After the gate turn right following the track. It bends away from the wood and down to a ladder stile. After the stile, bear half left across the field towards the pine trees to a stile in a crossing wire fence. Continue ahead, over the ridge of the hill, to descend by a small wood to two waymarked wooden posts.

3 At the posts turn sharp right, uphill, on the grassy track. Follow the track through five gates. Near a farmhouse go through another gate and walk to the right of the buildings. After a gateway the track becomes a metalled lane. At a road junction continue straight ahead. As the road begins to descend, turn right through a metal gate towards Stonefold farm.

4 Walk through the farmyard, past the buildings, then bear left through a gateway into a field. Go through a gate on the right and then half left towards a row of trees to another gate. After the gate, go half right across the field through a gateway in a crossing fence and descend into a valley. Turn right, beside the stream, then half right through a metal gate and over a stile in a wire fence to a footbridge.

5 Cross the bridge and go over a waymarked stile, then turn right, along a track. Go through two gates, past a barn, and through another metal gate on to a lane.

6 Turn left, then turn right up the next track. Go over a stile beside a gate, and along the track. After a gateway, turn right alongside a wall toward the farm on the ridge. Climb the hill on the track and go through a metal gate, then over a stile in a wire fence.

7 After the stile bend to the left, following the fence, in front of the farm building then through a metal gate on your right-hand side. Follow the farm track, going through a metal gate, and continue to meet the metalled lane. Turn left back to the car park.