

Navigating from Stanley Ferry



<http://www.theaa.com/walks/navigating-from-stanley-ferry-421273>

An exploration of the River Calder and the Aire and Calder Navigation

Distance 6 miles (9.7km)

Minimum time 3hrs

Ascent/gradient 82ft (25m)

Level of difficulty Medium

Paths Canal tow path and other good paths, no stiles

Landscape Flat land and reclaimed colliery works

Suggested map aqua3 OS Explorer 289 Leeds

Start/finish SE 355229

Dog friendliness Can be off lead on tow path

Parking Large car park at Stanley Ferry Marina

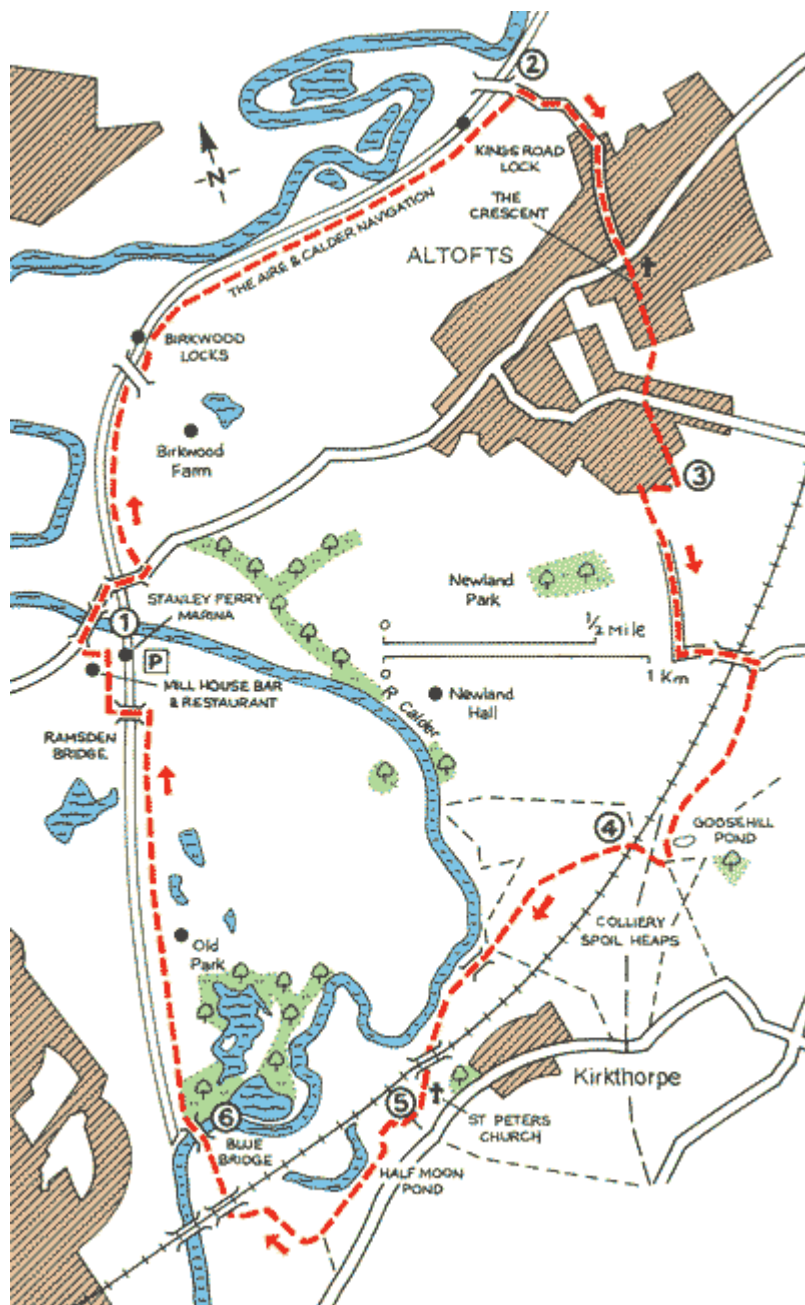
Public toilets At marina

The Yorkshire coal mines developed during medieval times. As productive as the coal seams were, the industry was held back by the high costs of transport. The same problem faced the woollen industry. Only very small craft could carry cloth along the Aire to Goole and Hull, where it was transferred to ships bound for European markets.

The River Calder meandered circuitously through the flat landscape to the east of Wakefield. In 1699 William III authorised the Aire and Calder rivers to be made navigable to the tidal Ouse. Leeds and Wakefield wool merchants paid for the canalising and deepening of parts of the rivers. The Aire and Calder Navigation took a more direct route, with comparatively few locks, so both costs and journey times were cut significantly. The first large vessels reached Leeds Bridge in 1700 and Wakefield the following year. The Aire and Calder Navigation proved to be a profitable investment for all concerned and continued to be upgraded to allow ever larger vessels to negotiate the locks. Unlike most other canals, it is still used for commercial traffic. With the decline of the Yorkshire coal industry, however, the loads are mostly bulk deliveries of sand and gravel.

There are two aqueducts, side by side, at Stanley Ferry. The older aqueduct, built between 1836 and 1839 for the Aire and Calder Navigation Company, is believed to have been the first iron suspension bridge in the world. It's an impressive structure, carrying the canal across the River Calder in a cast iron trough, suspended from cast iron arches. The new aqueduct, a more prosaic concrete structure, dates from 1981.

About 1860 a new system was invented for bulk transportation of coal by canal. Floating tubs, each one capable of holding up to 10 tons of coal, were linked together and pulled by steam tugs. Having reached the port, these tubs were lifted out of the water by primitive hoists and their contents swiftly emptied into ships' holds. This idea was refined by hauliers on the Aire and Calder Navigation, who developed tubs capable of carrying 40 tons of coal, and hydraulic machines for loading and unloading them. These tubs became known, affectionately, as Tom Puddings. They were a common sight on the waterway, with as many as 30 joined together in a line.



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1 Park at the Stanley Ferry Marina. Turn right, along the road which crosses first the River Calder, then the canal: the Aire and Calder Navigation. Take steps to the right, immediately after the canal, to follow the tow path to the right, back under the road bridge. Walk beneath another bridge at Birkwood Locks; from here the tow path is metalled. Beyond Kings Road Lock you come to a bridge across the canal.

2 Don't cross the bridge; turn right instead, on an access road that leads into Altofts. Cross the main road and take The Crescent, to the right of the church. After 50yds (46m), at the junction with Priory Close, take a ginnel ahead between houses. Keep right when you come to a playing field, on a metalled path to a road. Cross here, and take the road ahead (to the left of a chemist's shop). After 50yds (46m), go left down another ginnel. Keep straight ahead to open fields.

3 Go right, along a field-edge path to the end of a cul-de-sac. Go left here, on a path between fields. Cross a tiny stream and continue up the edge of the next field, with a hedgerow to your right. Soon you have a chain-link fence to your left, as you join a metalled track that soon bears left across a railway line. Bear immediately right after the bridge on to a good track. Pass beneath the legs of an electricity pylon, cross a mine access road and keep to the right around Goosehill Pond. Bear right, uphill to a lane; go right again, through old gateposts and cross both arms of the railway line.

4 Go through a kissing gate and join a gravel track ahead, across landscaped spoil heaps. When the track forks, by a gate, keep left - to walk parallel to the railway line. As you come to the top of a rise, keep left as the track forks again, to descend with pools either side, to cross a stream on a plank bridge. Bear left at a T-junction of tracks, soon following a narrow path parallel to the river. Keep right beyond a gap in a chain-link fence through woodland. Go beneath the railway line, keeping right up a lane to St Peter's Church, Kirkthorpe, in its tranquil setting.

5 Keep right, after the church, and right again when you meet a road. Go left after 50yds (46m) on to a track that soon narrows to a woodland path. Beyond Half Moon Pond the path forks. Go right (signed 'Stanley Ferry'), through a gate, to the bottom of the hill, where there is another choice of paths. Go right here, gaining the top of an embankment, and soon descending to go beneath the railway again. A good track leads you to the Blue Bridge, over the River Calder, at the lock where the Aire and Calder Navigation begins.

6 After the bridge your route is to follow the canal (unless you want to investigate the Southern Washland Nature Reserve - signposted to the right - before returning to the canalside path). Cross the canal at Ramsden Bridge, pass the Mill House and return to the car park.