

Skelsmergh Walks

No. 2 Skelsmergh North

Grant aided by Cumbria County Council and Skelsmergh & Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council



Distance: 3.3 miles

*Otter Bank - Dry Lane - Watchgate Waterworks -
Garth Row - Coppice How - Stocks Mill -
St John's Well - Otter Bank*

P In the lay-by at Otter Bank

Go up the narrow road above Otter Bank and fork left along the Dry Lane bridleway. The view behind you over the valley of the River Kent was once well-known for its three foreground hills with Kendal Castle behind. The pond at the top probably occupies the site of a 'peat moss' once dug for fuel by Skelsmergh farms. Warning: Dry Lane has become markedly less so in recent years and appropriate footwear is often necessary!

The vista ahead is of the Whinfell Ridge and Howgill Fells. Turn left by the Poppy Farm lodges and follow the road for half a mile before taking the stile on your left to ascend the path beside the treatment works. The lakes below High Thorn have been made recently by extending Great Moss and are used for sporting purposes.

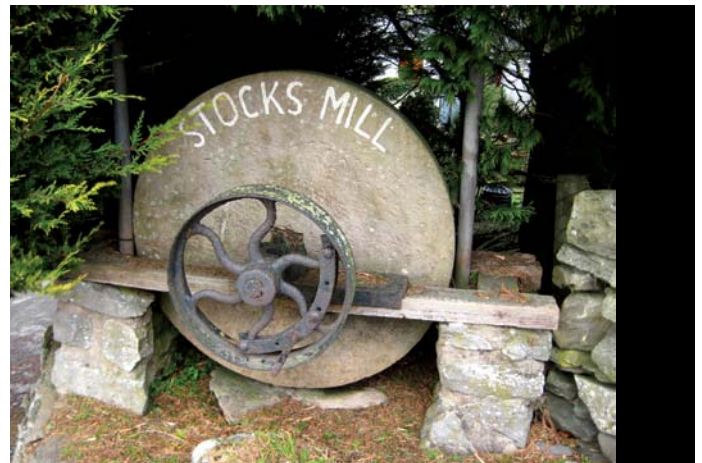


Skelsmergh Parish Woodland

Watchgate was constructed in 1972 to treat water from Haweswater and Windermere. There are also links to the Thirlmere Aqueduct and Penrith. The site is not beautiful but keeps Lancashire and Manchester taps running, and the ponds and plantations created to shield the works serve as small, undisturbed wildlife reserves.

Turn left to join the old North Road on top of Skelsmergh Fell. Just beyond the works take the stile on the right and head down the field keeping to the left of a small valley.

Cross two stiles to reach the A6. The road here was constructed on a horse-traffic-friendly gradient in the 1820s by the famous engineer John Loudon McAdam and replaced the more direct old road. Cross with care. Before the M6 was built it was busier – Firbeck the house on the corner, once catered for this traffic as the Cold Harbour Café.



Millstone at Stocks Mill

Take the road down to Garth Row but you might enjoy a short detour into the Parish Woodland on your left. It was created on what was once the Poor Allotment – common ground enclosed to support the parish poor.

At Garth Row crossroads continue straight over past some old cottages. Take the bridleway to Coppice How and go through a gate to the left before reaching the buildings. Part of the former farmhouse – once known as Coppack How – is pre-16th-century and incorporates cruck frames (curved A-frames made from pairs of trees and used in medieval house construction). Take the track below the small coppice wood that probably gave this former farm its name. Bow Bank, on the right, is another old farm site. It was owned by the Catholic Pickering family and used for secret baptisms and marriages in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Take the access road uphill to Stocks Mill and the main road. Turn left in front of this former tannery and bobbin mill and take the track just above the garage. As you re-cross the beck the shape of the former millpond can be discerned.

This sheltered valley was also the site of the small medieval Skelsmergh Chapel. Look over the hedge where the water turns under a wall and you can see the spring called St John's Well. The chapel was constructed over the stream here – a site perhaps chosen because of its pre-Christian significance. It was a ruin by the end of the 17th century, probably because the local gentry and many of the farmers were Catholic and ceased to support the established church after the Reformation.

At the Garth Row road, turn right to return to Otter Bank.



Cottages at Garth Row



Modern round valve tower above Watchgate



Bridleway to Coppice How

