

# Skelsmergh Walks

## No. 5 Skelsmergh West

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



Distance: 3.3 miles

*Sprint Bridge - Gurnal Bridge -  
Garth Row - Bow Bank - Red Bank -  
Oakbank - Sprint Bridge*

**P** Usually possible at Sprint Bridge

Follow the riverbank north. The first field you go through was once called Kirkfield and belonged to St Mary's Abbey in York until King Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries. The fields here are managed in a traditional manner and are rich in wildflowers such as yellow rattle and meadow cranesbill in early Summer.

The River Sprint is highly rain-responsive – note the Environment Agency gauging weir here that monitors river flow. Sprint Mill on the other bank is the last survivor of a series of mills that occupied both banks of the Sprint in this area. There were two fulling (woollen) mills on the Skelsmergh bank recorded in 1557 and there were probably mills here long before.

The siphon pipes over the river are part of the Thirlmere Aqueduct. This 7-foot (2.1m) wide tunnel was completed in 1894 to take water to Manchester.



*Garth Row house on the site of the former tithe barn*

The wooded area alongside the river beside the cataract has acquired the name of 'Paradise' in recent years and is at its most attractive when spring flowers give it the character of a woodland garden.

Note the rounded piers of the former wood storage sheds for Oak Bank Bobbin Mill on your right. In the 1840s Robert Seed constructed the mill, coppice sheds and the large house nearby which was both family home and workers' accommodation.

The path follows the riverbank through the field below Catholme wood. The remains of the headrace (millstream) can be seen



*Sprint Mill*

here and at the far end of the field some of the weir machinery remains.

The path leaves the Sprint to take the track above Holme House and meets it again where higher ground forces the river to take a sharp turn. Recent erosion has cut away part of the field and removed the original footpath. Just before the bottom of the descending track there is a small stile to the left that points you to Gurnal Bridge. Turn right at the bridge and follow the river beside a small wooded strip leased from the Stephenson Trust and maintained by the Parish Council. Why not pause and rest on the Millennium bench here?

Continue up the lane past the former Hollin Root farm and over the crossroads. The hamlet of Garth Row grew up on the edge of the common land of Skelsmergh Fell and is probably named after this boundary. The house that faces onto the crossroads was built around 1900 on the site of the former tithe barn and the small house beside it was once a mission room for the Christian Brethren.

Turn right by the postbox and go through the yard of another former farm – Pond Side. The flat valley beyond may have been created as a pond for the tanneries that existed at Garth Row in the 17th century.

At the end of the field cross the ladder stile and turn immediately right by a large ash tree. Descend left to the wood near Coppice How (originally Coppack How). This former farmhouse is very old and incorporates cruck frames (timber A-frames common in medieval house construction).



*Remains of weir machinery*



Sprint Bridge

At the end of the wood head for Bow Bank, home of the Pickerings, a well-known Catholic family. It was a Catholic site from 1572 until 1723 when it was purchased to support the Anglican church at Burneside.

The path passes in front of the house and then turns left between the buildings here. Head for the tree in the left-hand corner of the field ahead and a small footbridge. Keep to the right hand wall until you reach a gate and then aim for the gate in front of Red Bank. In 1600 this was 'an ancient tenement... stone-thatched' held by Robert Harrison. Like the other five farmhouses you have passed today, it was a working farm until the last quarter of the 20th century.

Take the access road in front of the house but turn left in front of the barn for the track down to Oakbank. At the road turn right and then left onto the footpath to Sprint Mill and back to the bridge.

