

Introduction

Nidderdale is probably the least known of the major Yorkshire Dales. It is wedged between the two great valleys of Wharfedale and Wensleydale, and is the most eastern of all the dales. Although outside the Yorkshire Dales National Park, in 1994 it was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in recognition of its exceptional landscape. The Nidderdale AONB covers 233 square miles (603 square km), has a population of 17,700 and includes part of Wensleydale, lower Wharfedale and the Washburn Valley.

Nidderdale is unique among the dales in having three large bodies of water – the reservoirs of Gouthwaite, Scar House and Angram – linked by the River Nidd, whose name means ‘brilliant’ in Celtic. It also boasts impressive natural features such as Brimham Rocks, Guise Cliff and How Stean Gorge. The lower dale is a domesticated landscape with lush pastures, gentle hills and plentiful woods with scattered farms and villages. The upper dale is bleaker, with sweeping horizons and remote heather-covered moors. Author Paul Hannon justly describes Nidderdale as a ‘jewel of the Dales’.

Over its 54 miles (87 km), the Nidderdale Way takes you through the finest walking in this little known valley.

Gouthwaite Reservoir and dam



Planning and preparation

The Nidderdale Way is a waymarked long-distance walk that makes a 54 mile (87 km) circuit of the valley of the River Nidd. Almost all of the Way lies within the Nidderdale AONB, and although not a National Trail the Way is marked on Ordnance Survey maps. For the development of the route, see page 70.

Because the Way is a circuit, you can start at any point. In this book, we begin the Way at Pateley Bridge, which can be reached by bus from Harrogate but is not on the rail network. To help users of public transport, we have included two Link routes in Part 4. These let you walk the Way from Ripon or Knaresborough (both well served by public transport) to start the Way at Ripley at the south-eastern end.

The Link routes are described in both directions so you can arrive by one Link route, walk the Way and leave by another: see the diagrams on pages 6 and 11. How long the Link routes will add to your itinerary will partly depend on the time of your arrival at Ripon or Knaresborough. The Link route from Ripon is 10.7 miles (17.2 km) and offers an optional detour to Fountains Abbey, so it's likely to justify a full day. The Knaresborough Link route is much shorter at 6.1 miles (9.9 km) and can easily be walked in half a day.



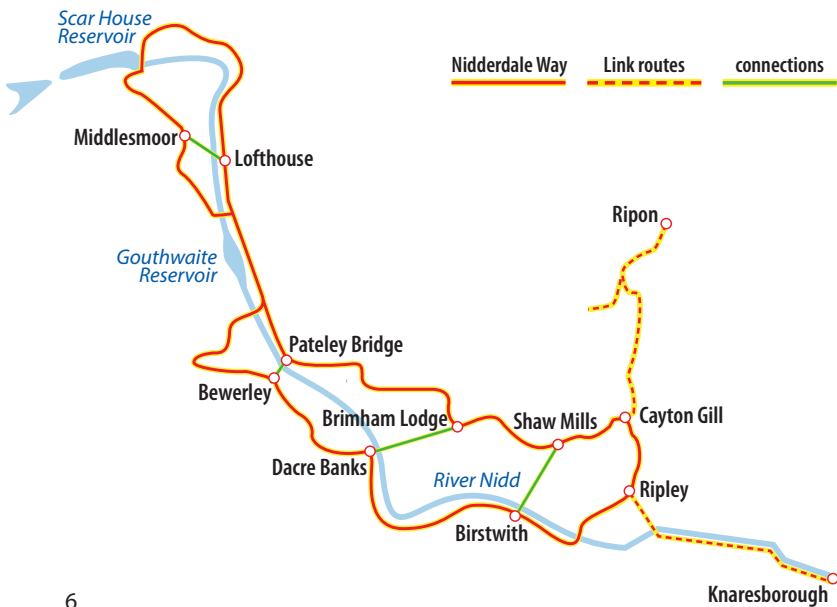
A circuit with many options

Previous guidebooks varied, but we follow Nidderdale AONB's choice to start the Way in Pateley Bridge, halfway up the valley. Clare Balding also started there when she walked the Way in 2017 for her BBC Radio 4 programme *Ramblings*. Pateley Bridge has a wide range of options for accommodation, and some walkers may not only start there but perhaps also base themselves there for several days. Others may find it more intuitive to start in Ripley at the southern end of the dale, walking up to the head of the valley and back down the other side; Ripley is easily accessible by public transport. Start your walk wherever best suits your preference and convenience.

The circuit is traditionally walked anticlockwise as described in this guidebook. However, there is no compelling reason for this tradition. If you decide to walk clockwise, you will need extra vigilance to navigate the route, but recent improvements in waymarking should help.

Other options are opened up by the fact that the circuit is so narrow in places that you can easily walk from one branch to the other: see the diagram below. This allows you, for example, to spend two nights in Lofthouse or Middlesmoor if you split the first section (Pateley Bridge to Middlesmoor). Or, if you reach Beverley after two days of walking, you could overnight in Pateley Bridge on night three as well as night one, allowing you to leave some baggage behind by arrangement with your host.

The connections between Dacre Banks and Brimham Lodge, and between Birstwith and Shaw Mills, are longer but may be useful to day-trippers as the basis of a mini-circuit. Please park with care and consider making use of the number 24 bus to link up parts of the route: see the diagram on page 11.



How long will it take?

We present the route in four sections in Part 3. However, you should decide the number of days for yourself according to the preferences, experience and fitness of those walking. Very energetic walkers may choose to walk it over three days, and most experienced walkers could complete it in four days. However, it can easily be split over five or six days, allowing time to explore sights both on and off route, such as Brimham Rocks and Scar House Reservoir.

Another option is to walk it in two sections – Upper Nidderdale and Lower Nidderdale. It is also suitable for the day walker because it can readily be split into a series of circular walks using links such as the one between Pateley Bridge and Bewerley – where the outward and return branches of the route are only 600 m apart.

One constraint is the limited choice of accommodation in Upper Nidderdale. Lower Nidderdale is generally better endowed, but (other than self-catering) there is no on-route accommodation between Ripley and Pateley Bridge. However, there are B&Bs and inns within a mile or two of the route, and some hosts will pick you up at the end of your day's walk and perhaps also take you back to resume the next day. The number 24 bus has a regular service from Pateley Bridge to Harrogate and this extends your options, as does the use of local taxis. If relying on taxis for a rural journey, ask about the fare in advance: depending on where the taxi is based, it may be much higher than you expect. For the typical recreational walker, we recommend the five-day option: the first section, from Pateley Bridge to Middlesmoor, is the most demanding and requires a full day's walking. If you split it with an overnight at Lofthouse, you'll be able to get into your stride without any concern about time and daylight. With only 6 miles/10 km for your first day, you could travel in the morning to arrive at Pateley Bridge by lunchtime; on the next day, you could consider extending your 8 miles/14 km with the walk around Scar House Reservoir.

The Way can be split over 4, 5 or 6 days

| | 4 days | | 5 days | | 6 days | |
|----------------|--------|------|-------------|-------------|--------|------|
| | mi | km | mi | km | mi | km |
| Pateley Bridge | | | | | | |
| Lofthouse | 14-8 | 23-8 | | | 6-4 | 10-3 |
| Middlesmoor | | | 8-4 | 13-6 | 8-4 | 13-6 |
| Bewerley | | | | | | |
| Birstwith | 11-9 | 19-1 | 11-9 | 19-1 | 11-9 | 19-1 |
| Ripley | | | | | 9-8 | 15-8 |
| Shaw Mills * | | | | | | |
| | 14-1 | 22-7 | 14-1 | 22-7 | | |
| | | | | | 9-5 | 15-3 |
| Pateley Bridge | | | | | | |
| Total | | | 54-1 | 87-0 | | |

* as of 2023 there was no accommodation at Shaw Mills but walkers could go offroute to Bishop Thornton





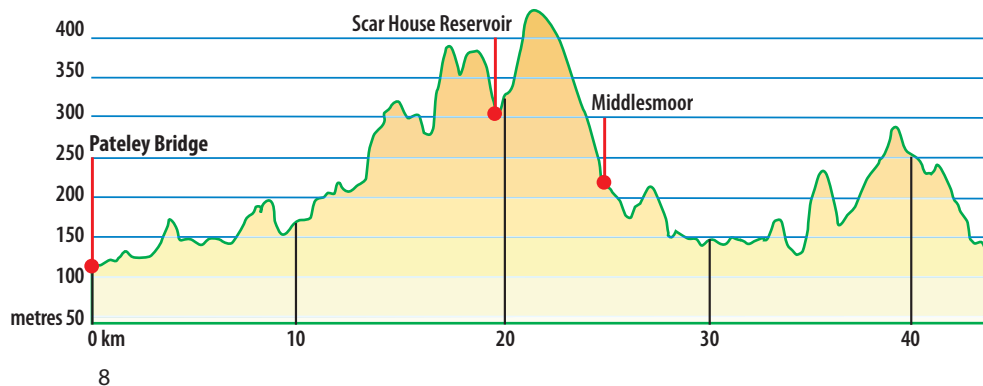
Upper Nidderdale from Middlesmoor

Time of year and weather

Unless you live locally and can arrange to go at short notice on a good forecast, avoid walking the Way in winter. Between November and February, daylight is short (7-11 hours) and the weather can be treacherous, particularly in Upper Nidderdale. There will also be fewer accommodation options and baggage transfer may not be available.

At any time of year, walkers must be prepared for wind and rain. In Upper Nidderdale especially, the weather can change very fast and you may be a long way from shelter. Annual precipitation increases as you go up the dale from a modest 30 in/76 cm in Knaresborough to 40 in/102 cm in Pateley Bridge, and 48 in/122 cm at Scar House Reservoir. In winter, some of this will fall as snow, sleet or hail, and on the high ground, snow may lie for days.

Whatever time of year you set off, check the long-range weather forecast before you finalise your packing, and try to get the next day's forecast while on the route. At 24 hours range, even British weather can be forecast reliably, and an update may affect the best time to depart. For sources of weather forecasts, see page 70.

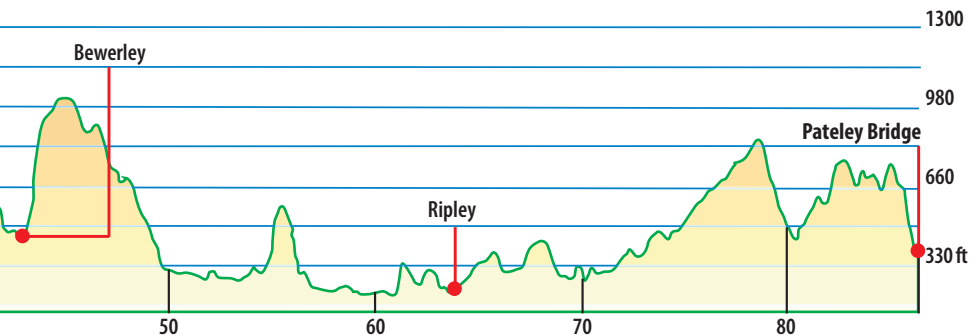


Terrain and gradients



The route runs mainly on loose-surfaced tracks, with some field paths and a few short sections of road and roadside. During and after rain, many sections are prone to be muddy or boggy, so choose footwear accordingly. The photos above show the variety of terrain. When planning your daily distances, bear in mind that frequent stiles and gates interrupt your stride and reduce your average speed more than you might expect – as will the need to change direction frequently and check your progress against this guidebook.

Most of the Way is gently undulating but there are a few steep climbs and descents. Mostly these are on sound tracks or even tarmac road; there are few protracted climbs. The highest point on the Way is 434 m (1425 ft) and is reached just south of Scar House Reservoir: see page 36. The overall height gain/loss is about 2140 m (7030 ft).



Accommodation and facilities

| | B&B/hotel | bunkhouse | pub/café | shop | campsite | toilets |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|------|----------|---------|
| Pateley Bridge | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Wath | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| Lofthouse | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Scar House Reservoir | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Middlesmoor | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Stean (& Studfold) | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Heathfield | | ✓ | ✓→ | | ✓ | |
| Bewerley | ✓ | | | | | |
| Dacre Banks | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Summerbridge | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Darley | ✓→ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓→ | |
| Birstwith | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Hampsthwaite | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Ripley | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Shaw Mills | ✓→ | | ✓→ | | | |
| Brimham Rocks | ✓→ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |

Many of the above are open only in season and some only at weekends and for restricted hours. → off-route by 1-2 km

Link routes:

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| Ripon | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Studley Royal | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Markington | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Knaresborough | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Harrogate | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

The table above shows what facilities were available along the route at the time of writing (2023). It helps you to plan where to stay and shows where you may be able to get food and drink on route. At any one location, a tick in the café/pub and hotel/B&B columns may represent a single pub or inn that offers both food and accommodation. In larger places, a tick may signify that a wide choice exists. Since the pandemic, many places have limited opening hours and it's important to check before relying on any of them.

The accommodation varies widely in price from campsites through family B&Bs to luxury hotels. There are no hostels in Nidderdale but there are some bunkhouses for groups (typically with a minimum stay of two nights). Choice can be limited and it is always wise to book ahead. Solo walkers often find B&Bs expensive because rooms are surcharged for solo occupancy and single rooms are rare. It's worth checking with hotels and perhaps also considering www.airbnb.co.uk.

Some walkers like to book their own accommodation, travel light and carry for themselves, others prefer to have their baggage transferred so they need carry only a day pack. Others use an operator that provides a complete service – accommodation booking, baggage transfer and sometimes even airport transfers as well. For updated listings of all such services that we know about, please visit www.rucsacs.com/books/ndd and click the Support services button.