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Cowlam and Cottam

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Roadside parking in large passing place (SE 973635)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer 300 – Howardian Hills and Malton
Distance	7.2 miles
Date of Walk	17 September 2017
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: If you like solitude, this is the walk for you. I did the entire route without seeing another person.

The walk explores some lesser known dales in the Yorkshire Wolds, including one with the intriguing name of Philip's Slack. You would struggle to find these on the OS map by casual browsing. The walk also visits two churches one at Cowlam and the ruin of another at Cottam.

Cowlam is a tiny hamlet and all that remains of a medieval village, deserted after the Black Death. The little church of St Mary is the only substantial reminder of its medieval past, though it was restored in 1852. It is Grade II listed but classed as "at risk" because of the poor condition of the roofs and stonework, although I have seen worse!

At Cottam, is the derelict Holy Trinity church. This is on the site of another deserted medieval village. However the church is brick built and Victorian, built in 1890. If Cowlam church is on the "at risk" register, then Cottam should be on a "doomed" register because judging from the state of it, it may not be with us much longer. However, at the moment, it makes for a dramatic approach along Cottam Well Dale.

Conversely, the medieval cultivation terraces mentioned on the OS map are quite well preserved as these things go and can be made out at the other side of the dale, opposite the church, if you look closely. There are also lumps and bumps around the church a legacy from the old village. The whole site is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and therefore regarded as of national importance.

The dales visited typify those of the Yorkshire Wolds, with flowing sinuous curves, looking as though a sculptor has been at work.

The walk starts from what is strictly a passing place on a quiet road, off the B1253 Fridaythorpe to Bridlington Road. Normally I would not suggest parking in a passing place but this is a large one and as long as you park at an extremity, there is plenty of space for the passing place to function. Also, there is virtually no traffic on this road to pass! There is not really anywhere else to park, unless you use the parking at the monument to Sir Tatton Sykes (SE 985619) and walk along the lane opposite. However, this would add around three and a half miles to the overall distance.

Having said that, the monument is certainly worth a look in its own right.

To get to the passing place parking, turn south off the B1253 at Cowlam Grange. Just short of two miles further on, after passing Cowlam Manor and Low Cowlam, look out for the fingerpost on the left indicating the start of the walk. The parking spot is almost opposite.

One final point, there were several fields containing cows on this walk. The grass is lush and I expect there are likely to be cows somewhere at almost any time. Also at one point, the "Bull in Field" sign, for once, actually meant what it said, horns and all! However, my wife and I gave it and the cows respectful distance and other than keeping a beady eye on us, it caused us no concerns. However, definitely not a walk on which to take a dog I think.

Start: From the parking spot (SE 973635), follow the direction of the public bridleway fingerpost across the road.

Walk along the bottom of the dale (Cottam Well Dale) until it divides, then branch left, along Cowlam Well Dale. Just past four large concrete blocks (probably World War II relics), turn left following a blue bridleway arrow through the gate.

Go through another gate and turn left along a broad track, eventually passing an old gravel pit.

As you come out of the valley, join another, better used, broad track and turn left again. Continue to the farmyard and turn left to visit St Mary's church.

Retrace your steps down the valley to the concrete blocks, then turn left along Cottam Well Dale once more.

Keep going along this Dale and the brick built ruin of Holy Trinity church appears on the skyline. As you get to the church, note the wide "ditch" in front of it along which you turn left to continue the walk. However looking to the right here, you can make out the remains of the cultivation terraces at the other side of the dale.

Walk along the "ditch" for a short distance and as you go under the power lines, you will see a kissing gate ahead, marked with yellow arrows. Once through the gate, keep straight ahead and to the left of the hedge.

When the hedge stops, follow the power lines to Cottam Grange. Note the white building you see ahead is not the Grange. This is behind the trees. Once you get to the Grange, follow the drive straight ahead to the right of the barns and following a public footpath fingerpost.

Keep ahead on the tarmac lane until you get to the end of the field on the left, marked by a hedge. There are good long distance views to the south-west and on the horizon, you should be able to pick out the spire of the monument to Sir Tatton Sykes.

By the road at the end of the hedge, you will find a post marked with yellow arrows. Turn left off the road, along the right hand side of the hedge. You start on a well

“tractored” track but when this swings left into a field, you continue straight ahead and down into the picturesque dale Philip’s Slack. In this sense, “Slack” denotes a depression between hills and may derive from Old Norse meaning a shallow valley. Who Philip might have been is a mystery.

At the floor of Philip’s Slack, cross the stile and turn left.

When the dale divides, you may recognise the gate to the right through which you went on the route to Cowlam church. To access it, go through the double gates, back through the familiar gate, then retrace your steps back to the car.



