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Buckden to Starbotton Via Firth Fell

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Buckden - pay and display car park (SD 943774)
Ordnance Survey map	OL 30 Yorkshire Dales – Northern and Central Areas
Distance	7.9 miles
Date of Walk	21 November 2014
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This Wharfedale walk from Buckden to Starbotton via Firth Fell takes you along the ridge separating Wharfedale from Littondale. It offers great views over and along both valleys including to Buckden Pike.

The route along the top of the ridge is not marked as a footpath on the OS map but this is Open Access Land, so you are allowed to walk it and there are stone walls to guide you, which provide easy navigation.

You pass a trig. point on Firth Fell at 1991 ft (607 metres).

The first section of the walk to the top of the ridge is quite steep – borderline red/amber so I have given in a red. My route on the ascent is slightly straighter than the OS map indicates but is based on the track I recorded on my GPS receiver as I followed the obvious path. The route along the ridge can be a little boggy after wet weather and in these conditions, gaiters are recommended.

There are theoretically refreshment opportunities at the Fox and Hounds pub in Starbotton but it has never been open when I have passed, so I would phone to check before you rely on it. Otherwise, this is a pretty village worth a quick look for its own sake. You will probably pass through it en route to Buckden.

The walk starts at a pay and display car park in the pretty village of Buckden. There are toilets here. To get to Buckden, head north out of Skipton on the Grassington road (B6265). At Threshfield, ignore the right turn to Grassington and continue ahead, now on the B6160 to Buckden. The car park is through the village on the right (SD 942773).

Note: It was a misty autumnal day when I did the walk so to give a clearer indication of what you might see, I have “cheated” and used some photos from part of the same route from an earlier occasion.

Start: From the car park (SD 943774), turn left along the road and immediately right on a wide stony track. At the next road (which is to Hubberholme), turn right.

Cross the bridge over the River Wharfe (known as the “Election Bridge”, as an MP promised to fund it if elected, to replace an earlier one swept away) and a quarter of a mile further on, turn off the road on to a broad bridleway following the fingerpost “Public Bridleway to Litton 3½ miles” (SD 937775).

There are a couple of places as you climb where the track splits off to the right but keep to the main track heading up the hill.

Eventually, go through a gate by some animal pens, staying on the main track.

Just before some trees, the path divides. Turn right to follow the public bridleway fingerpost. For a while, some posts with blue tops mark the route.

You will notice the ruin of a fairly complete ruin to the right. As you come level with it, there is a track going off to the right but ignore this and keep straight ahead.

As you get closer to the ridge, there is a "manicured" stretch of path with laid flagstones, then a series of stone cairns. Follow this clearly marked route eventually passing through a gap in a stone wall (SD 925751) and turning right to follow the wall. After a short distance, the path curves off to the left.

Follow the path to a gate (SD 925750) but do not go through it. Instead, turn left to follow the wall, passing the trig. point (SD 926748) of Firth Fell and leading eventually to a ladder stile at (SD 934743). The wall has a number of turns. You can stick with the wall until you get to the stile which is a distance of 0.9 miles or, at Old Cote Moor Top, you could cut off to head E.N.E. (76° magnetic). This cuts off a corner but this only saves about 0.2 of a mile. If you follow the wall, you have less danger of going wrong.

Cross the ladder stile and turn right to follow the wall, effectively going back on yourself. The stone wall here is not in good condition and I do not recommend trying to short cut by climbing over it because of the obvious risk of collapse and injury.

From the ladder stile, follow the wall along for just over a mile, passing some deeply eroded rocks, until you meet the bridleway (SD 945730) which comes up from Arncliffe and over the ridge to Starbotton. This is a clear, well used path crossing at 90° and you should not have any problem spotting it. Turn left.

Follow the path downhill. After a short steep section, there is a two way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead following the fingerpost for "Public Bridleway Starbotton". Shortly after the fingerpost, just beyond the end of a stone wall, turn right to a walkers' gate. Go through this and head down the path for Starbotton which you can see below, slightly to the left.

The path descends via an old section of moss covered, walled path to the river by a footbridge (SD 951745). You can cross the river to Starbotton if you wish to have a look but otherwise, turn left to follow the fingerpost for Buckden.

The path running along the valley bottom is clear and runs more or less parallel with the river although the river meanders and is not always next to the path. Follow the path for a mile and a half and at SD 939765 turn right at a two way fingerpost showing the Dales Way in each direction. In effect, it is the first right turn you come to.

At the road, turn right to retrace your steps to Buckden.

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