



## Walks Further Afield

During the pandemic in 2020 Ruth, who is a Pointer and also a local walks leader, shared some of her favourite local walks on our Facebook feed. They are a very personal collection of ramblings and we think they're worth sharing more widely. Some are within easy reach of Durham, others a day trip away. These are the original notes Ruth made; those on the website are a shortened version. (Note: As these are personal reflections should you choose to undertake any of these walks this will be at your own risk)

### **Blaid's Wood**

What 3 Words [///bounty.advice.cars](http://bounty.advice.cars)

Blaid's Wood is wonderful in spring because of its carpets of bluebells and other spring flowers - wood anemones, stitchwort and wild garlic especially. Warning - the footpath is always muddy in parts! At the end of the wood, other footpaths can lead you to the Woodland Trust site at Low Burnhall, Hollingside Lane and the Botanic Gardens and on to Great High Wood.

*Access: from South Road, the layby just past the crematorium*

### **Flass Vale**

A mere 5 minutes' walk away from North Road and the bus and train stations, Flass Vale is a haven of peace and tranquillity in the middle of the city. A delightful mixture of woodland, grassland and marsh habitats, there are many paths leading uphill towards the A167. There are 6 access points and the Friends of Flass Vale have produced a map that can be downloaded. <http://fofv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/A-Walk-around-Flass-Lft.pdf> The Vale contains 3000 years of traceable history - a Bronze Age Burial Mound, an important site for the Battle of Neville's Cross in 1346, Hangman's Hill and Gibbet's Hill, the remains of a curling pond, pleasure gardens, allotments and a Nature Reserve. It is lovely at any time of year and from 2002 has been maintained and improved by the Friends of Flass Vale. Flass is a Scandinavian word for marshy - so stout footwear is recommended!

*Access: Download the leaflet to identify the best route*

## Great High Wood

What 3 Words [///arena.really.yarn](#)

Explore for bluebells in April before they fade away for another year. Great High Wood is managed by Durham University and was given to them by the Bishop of Durham when the University was founded in 1832. Enter from Hollingside Lane near the Botanic Gardens and after a short distance there is a fork in the path. Go down to the right and you will walk through beech and oak trees where the floor is a vibrant blue carpet of fragrant bluebells. If you stay on the same path, you will eventually come to the A177 near Houghall College. On the other side is the entrance to Maiden Castle and more delights!

*Access: From Hollingside Lane on the right just past the Botanic Gardens carpark*

## Observatory Hill

What 3 Words [///spoil.escape.bunks](#)

A short walk uphill brings you to the Observatory. This was founded in 1839 and is a Grade II Listed Building. It belongs to the University of Durham and was used for nearly a century for both astronomical and meteorological study but from 1937 has only been used for the latter. Go past it and you will come to a gate with a slightly awkward stile. Clamber over this and walk a few paces forward for the most stunning panoramic view of Durham and the surrounding area. If you position yourself correctly you should be able to spot Penshaw Monument way off in the distance. Lovely on a fine evening. From here there is an official footpath that leads you to the White Gates above Prebends Bridge and unofficial footpaths that lead to Potters Bank where you take your life in your hands crossing to the other side. Please take care!

*Access: From Clay Lane near the traffic lights on the A167 at the Duke of Wellington. Turn right at the T junction of paths then left*

## Aykley Wood Nature Reserve

What 3 Words [///snail.salads.beats](#)

From Framwellgate Peth, turn to pass the old DLI Museum, and walk a little way along the cycle path where you will find an entrance on your right to Aykley Wood Nature Reserve. Follow the path down - this turns left and follows the line of the railway for some time, which should please children of all ages! Be prepared to wave to passing trains. The Nature Reserve is a mixture of ancient woodlands, meadows and ponds with deer, ground nesting birds and great crested newts all in residence. The path takes you towards Newton Hall and Framwellgate Moor. In Spring, there are lovely yellow carpets of cowslips in the meadows

and bluebells in the woods. If you turn back and follow one of the various paths back to your starting point, there are wonderful views of the city and the Cathedral to be had..

*Access: Off Framwellgate Peth near Old DLI Museum*

## **Oakenshaw Nature Reserve**

What 3 Words ///oath.honestly.unscathed

We went a little further out of Durham for our walk around Oakenshaw Wildlife Reserve. About 6 miles from Durham is the old colliery village of Oakenshaw. We used the Brandon to Bishop Auckland railway path to cycle there. At the junction with Stockley Lane, we turned right up the hill and before reaching the turn off for Oakenshaw village found a short lane that leads to a car park where we tied up our bikes and proceeded on foot. If you miss this there are ways into the Reserve from Oakenshaw itself.

This is not a long walk, though you can of course extend it on public footpaths if you wish to do so. There are three small lakes surrounded by both mature and more recent trees and it is a peaceful place for a short stroll and a picnic. There are well marked paths and plenty of benches. It came into being after Banks ended their opencast operations and created the reserve we see today. It was opened by a certain Tony Blair MP in 1996. It is now owned by the Forestry Commission who welcome walkers.

*Access: From Oakenshaw Village*

## **Wolsingham**

What 3 Words ///delight.alerting.successor

Wolsingham is just over 14 miles from Durham and makes a great centre for exploring this part of Weardale. Walks can be short or long, down by the river or up on the Moors and there are 140 miles of footpaths to explore!

A moderate circular walk can be taken from Wolsingham to Tunstall Reservoir which was completed in 1879. It is a truly delightful spot and Backstone Bank Wood with its ancient oak trees on the eastern bank of the reservoir is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There is parking at Tunstall Reservoir itself and a short stroll can be taken right around the reservoir.

Closer to Wolsingham is the luxury housing development at Holywood Hall. The Hall itself was built by the Victorian Industrialist Charles Attwood and at his death in 1875 became a TB sanatorium until the 1960's. My own father in law was a patient there after contracting TB in the Far East during the Second World War.

Just along the road from the houses is an interesting looking well. This is connected to St Aelric and St Godric who met and became hermits in the area in the 12th Century. After St Aelric died, St Godric undertook a pilgrimage to Rome and ended his days as a hermit in Finchale Priory in Durham. He was a centenarian when he died and the first known English lyricist. There is a memorial stone to him in the ruins of Finchale Priory.

*Access: from Wolsingham village*

## **Low Burnhall Woods**

What 3 Words ///sneezed.shackles.amount

Low Burnhall Woods - another delightful place for a walk. Once again it is hard to believe you are only a mile or so from the centre of a city when you stroll through the woods and meadows, or use it as a stage on a longer hike.

Originally farmland, the Woodland Trust bought the fields in 2008 with the aim of creating a 168 acre forest. They have linked fragments of ancient woodland with new plantings of native trees but have also left more open areas for wildflower meadows and wetlands. There are waymarked trails, sculptures and a bird hide. In the warmer months there are skylarks overhead and sand martins flying in and out of their nests in a sandy bank by the River Wear.

There are several pedestrian entrances along the A167 between the Cock of the North roundabout and the Honest Lawyer. One of these is near a lay-by should you need to park. Here you can find a totem pole carved with a poem. The main entrance with a car park is at the Cock of the North end of South Road. From here follow the trail marked with fish in a circle. This will give you a good overview of the whole site and its patchwork of habitats including the river banks. Be warned - it can be very muddy after heavy rain!

*Access: Car Park off South Road*

## **Croxdale Estate**

What 3 Words ///bounty.advice.cars

The Croxdale Estate can be accessed by turning right (if travelling south) off the A167 and almost immediately left to find the old bridge over the River Wear. If **you cross** the bridge and turn left past a gatehouse and through a tunnel under the main road, you will find a stately avenue of trees following the river. After crossing Croxdale Beck, keep right uphill (steps) till you come to Croxdale Hall, a Georgian house and seat of the Salvin family for 20 generations - since 1402.. If you look closely at the windows of the chapel in the house, you will see that they are blocked. I understand that the Salvins, who have kept to the Roman

Catholic faith throughout, blocked the windows so that no one could see them celebrating mass. I have also recently learned that the Hall was used as a maternity hospital from 1945 to 1958 and that one of our very own Pointers was born there - Moira!

The house and estate are still owned by the Salvins so please keep to the marked public footpaths and do not trespass on their private lands. Past the Hall you will come to the ancient St Bartholomew's Church, not normally open, which dates from the early 12th century. The eagle eyed among you may be able to make out the carved tree of life in the stone lintel over the door. The door, with its iron hinges and straps, is original - amazing! A little further on is a splendid 18th century hay barn.

From here there are footpaths aplenty to provide pleasant walks of varying lengths.

*Access: Off the A167 at Sunderland Bridge*

## **Ushaw**

What 3 Words ///ditching.loads.ripe

More of an amble than a ramble, the grounds of Ushaw provide a pleasant environment for a stroll. The former Catholic seminary is not far from Durham City and was hidden away from public gaze for 200 years. Now we are lucky to be able to visit the magnificent house with its beautifully decorated chapels and learn about its history and the people who lived, studied and worked there.

We can also take in the 500 acre estate. In the late spring there is a magnificent show of rhododendrons but there is interest in the formal gardens, the mature woodlands and parkland all year round. A team of volunteers help to maintain these. The former lake is now reverting to a bog habitat. Look out for the charming carved wooden sculptures created by carver Tommy Craggs. These are sometimes adorned with scarves, hats and jewellery!

A visit to Ushaw can be part of a much longer walk using the footpaths that lead into the grounds.

## **Blanchland**

What 3 Words ///marriage.baker.slap

Just over the Durham border in Northumberland lies the picturesque village of Blanchland. It is based on the site of the 12th century Blanchland Abbey, dissolved in 1539. Some original features remain and the stone from the ruined abbey was used to build much of the village. The river Derwent flows through it, and there are many walks both long and short taking in river paths, woodland and exposed moors.

A very short walk takes you along one side of the river to Baybridge, with its attractive steep roofed houses and picnic site, and back along the other side. It is less than 2 miles but makes a pleasant stroll before partaking of refreshments in the White Monk Tea Room, the Lord Crewe Arms, or the Felons Bar - a community run enterprise.

Normally you can visit the Abbey Church of St Mary and there is a gift shop.

## **Brasside Ponds**

What 3 Words ///shark.quench.super

To discover another hidden gem in an unexpected area, take an easy walk from the centre of Durham to Brasside Ponds, an SSSI reclaimed from disused clay pits and now a tranquil haven for wildfowl.

Take the road to Crook Hall and walk past the sewage works keeping them on your right- I know I spoil you! This lane is not traffic free so keep an eye and ear out for cars and bicycles. If you bear left at a Y junction, you will come to Frankland Farm at the top. Turn to look back at a splendid view of the Cathedral. Walk across the front of the farm and turn left. Just before the kennels, you will find a lane on the right that leads to paths which will take you on a circular walk around 2 ponds. When we visited last, we found 7 swans a swimming - though 5 of them were signets. You will eventually see the walls of Frankland Prison looming up before you. From here, you can return to Frankland Farm and back into Durham - it is about 5 miles in total.

*Access: Frankland Lane path on left after Crook Hall*

## **Whinney Hill**

What 3 Words ///grew.credit.wink

Most local people know of the road called Whinney Hill, if only because HMP Durham is situated just before you start to climb up it. But the actual Whinney Hill is above the road on the left as you walk away from Durham. It is the site of Maiden Castle, an Iron Age promontory fort. Not much of this is evident to the untrained eye but it is obvious why the site was chosen as steep cliffs above the River Wear form almost a complete ring of defences. It affords the most wonderful views of the river, the wooded banks and Old Durham and its Gardens.

To access Whinney Hill, look for the waymark on the path that runs alongside the University Sports Complex, from the riverbanks near the Noisy Bridge to the A177 opposite Houghall College. Climb steeply up and bear right towards the top, keeping to the edge of the woodland to get the best views - even better when there are no leaves on the trees! At the top there are various routes - down to the road called Whinney Hill, back to the riverbanks or across the A177 to explore the University Woodlands

*Access: from A177*

## Beaurepaire

What 3 Words ///teeth.played.cook

After a night of heavy rain, we decided to take advantage of a few hours of dry weather and have a walk to Beaurepaire. Beaurepaire was built as a "beautiful retreat" in the 13th century for the monks of Durham Cathedral but is now a ruin. The Dream Community Charity has been working with local people to preserve what remains of this important heritage site.

We walked up Broom Lane from the Stonebridge Inn, turning right along a lane/footpath to reach Relly Mill Farm and then Baxter Wood Farm. The River Browney was indeed very brown and rushing along at a great pace. We turned left and passed the holiday cottages to join the old railway line, now the Lanchester Valley Walk, where we turned right. After passing Aldin Grange Fishing Lakes and Cafe and walking a little further, we took the wide path down to the bridge over the Browney to reach Beaurepaire.

Here the walk got a bit more challenging than we had bargained for, as the river had flooded the path that led to the bridge. We clung to the fence and sidestepped along the bottom rail to get to dry land. Needless to say, a 4x4 came past us when we were in the middle of this operation, but fortunately the driver went very slowly and did not soak us. He could have been tempted!

We climbed up to Beaurepaire and discovered all the hard work that the local volunteers have undertaken. The undergrowth has been cleared and sand put down to really outline the old building.

From here, we walked up to pass Beaurepaire Hall Farm, then turned left down Club Lane (very muddy!). We crossed the A167 into Flass Vale to make a longer walk of it as the weather was still being kind but from here you could walk back to the Stonebridge, albeit on main roads.

*Access: from B6302*

## Shincliffe

What 3 Words ///spends.coats.think

Following reported sightings of otters on the River Wear upstream from Shincliffe, we went to see if we would be lucky enough to see one or more of these engaging creatures.

Unfortunately, they had all returned to their holts for morning coffee when we got there but it was still a lovely walk. If anyone wants to retrace our footsteps and manages to see the elusive otters, please don't tell me as I will just be jealous!

We walked through the car park of Poplar Tree Garden Centre onto the riverbanks. It was rather muddy and it is easy to miss this bit out and stay on the lane - this was what we did on the way back. The route takes you past Shincliffe Hall, a 18th century listed building, now a private residence. It was built by one William Rudd and his villa is described as "seated in a delighted retirement, commanding a solemn view of the sequestered vale with its hanging woods which form a beautiful amphitheatre, a scene excellently adapted to study and retirement". With Rudd's death it looks as if it passed through many hands and is now in

private ownership. Many of us will remember it as a University Hall of Residence and it was a Land Army Hostel during the Second World War.

Both footpath and lane lead to a bend in the river where the footpath is diverted away from the river due to a landslip. Here we lingered to see if the otters would appear - but no. We returned to Shincliffe but a longer walk can be created by carrying on through Shincliffe Woods via the Sliddings (says it all) and on reaching High Butterby Farm, turning left will take you to Strawberry Lane and back to Shincliffe and turning right will lead you to the Croxdale Estate. A lovely walk at any time of year but especially when the autumn colours are at their best.

*Access: from Poplar Tree Garden Centre, Shincliffe*