

FOUNTAINS ABBEY CIRCULAR WALK

Studley Royal and the River Skell

Visit my website for full details: <https://www.paulbeal.com/fountains-abbey-circular-walk>

Introduction to the Walk

This six-mile circular walk begins at the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Visitor Centre before heading into the historic deer park. The route passes Studley Lake and follows the River Skell through the picturesque Seven Bridges Valley, before leaving the estate for woodland, farmland and quiet country lanes. The return journey leads through Studley Roger and back into the deer park.

Highlights of the Walk

One of the main highlights is the Seven Bridges Valley, where the River Skell winds through a steep-sided ravine crossed by a series of old stone bridges. The route then continues through Chinese Wood and climbs gently through woodland before crossing the open fields of Hum Hill towards Whitcliffe Hall. From here, quiet lanes and a peaceful bridleway lead towards Studley Roger.

The final part of the walk returns to Studley Royal Deer Park, where red, fallow and sika deer can often be seen grazing across the open parkland. The route passes Studley Royal House, Choristers' House and the striking St Mary's Church before following a shady tree-lined path back to the visitor centre. Historic buildings, landscaped parkland and riverside scenery feature throughout the walk.

Additional Information

Distance: 6 miles (9½ kilometres)

Duration: Approximately 2¾ hours (excluding stops and breaks)

Difficulty: Generally straightforward, with mostly gentle walking through parkland, woodland and farmland, including a gradual woodland climb and several sections across grassy paths and fields.

Trail Conditions: A varied mixture of surfaced stone paths, grassy tracks, woodland paths, public footpaths, bridleways, field paths and quiet country lanes.

Recommended Map: OS Explorer 298 Nidderdale

Parking: Two large free car parks, car park A and car park B, are available beside the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Visitor Centre. Car park A is the closer of the two and has an additional overflow area. Electric vehicle charging points are available, and signs state that both car parks are locked at 6 pm.

- **Google Maps Link:** <https://maps.app.goo.gl/kA1kV4Yu5qK6ktg49>
- **What3Words:** ///acclaim.mainly.monkeys

STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS

Start your Fountains Abbey circular walk from the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Visitor Centre. There are two large free car parks to choose from, car park A and car park B, both reached from the roundabout on the Fountains Abbey access road near the visitor centre.

Car park A (1) is the closer of the two, and although Fountains Abbey can get very busy, both are large and car park A has an even larger overflow area. The car parks also have charging points for electric vehicles. Note that both are locked at 6 pm according to the signs.

After parking, make your way to the entrance of the visitor centre, where you'll find a signpost on the grassy picnic area in front of it. Follow the route for St Mary's Church and Studley Royal Deer Park. A further sign directs you along a surfaced stone path signposted to St Mary's Church and Studley Royal Water Garden via Deer Park.

Follow this for about a third of a mile with woodland on your left and a large hedgerow on your right, running parallel to the Fountains Abbey access road. At the **wooden gates (2)**, turn right to enter Studley Royal Deer Park, again signposted to St Mary's Church and Studley Royal Water Garden via Deer Park.

Immediately after entering the park, turn right along a grassy path signposted to the Studley Royal Entrance and Studley Royal Water Garden. Keep to the main path and follow it downhill to the **car park beside Studley Lake (3)**. Take the second road on the left down to the water, signposted to the Seven Bridges Valley.

Walk around the water's edge and cross the footbridge beside the weir, then turn left onto the stony track, still signposted for the Seven Bridges Valley. Follow this for about half a mile through the valley, crossing five arched stone bridges over the River Skell.

You'll reach the **metal gates (4)** that lead out of Studley Royal Deer Park and into Chinese Wood. Continue along the track through the wood for about a quarter of a mile, looking out for the footbridge over the River Skell on your right. Cross it and follow the path uphill through the woodland.

At the **T-junction (5)** at the top of the hill, turn left, then leave the woodland through a gate and follow the public footpath across the fields of Hum Hill. Aim for the farm buildings of Whitcliffe Hall ahead of you, with a fence and a line of old twisted hawthorns to guide you along this stretch.

When you reach the tarmac lane at **Whitcliffe Hall (6)**, turn left and continue straight ahead, passing the farm buildings on your right. Follow this lane, Whitcliffe Lane, north for about three quarters of a mile. At the crossroads at the **bottom of Whitcliffe Lane (7)**, turn left onto Hell Wath Lane. This is roughly the halfway point of your Fountains Abbey circular walk.

Follow Hell Wath Lane straight ahead, ignoring the right turn into Hell Wath Grove, and pass a large car parking area and Ripon City Panthers Junior Football Club on your right. Continue past Hell Wath Cottage and stay on the public bridleway straight ahead through a gate.

Cross the **bridge over the River Skell (8)** and keep following the bridleway north for about half a mile. **At the crossroads (9)** where the bridleway meets another public footpath, turn left, signposted to Fountains Abbey. Follow this footpath for just under half a mile to reach the **village of Studley Roger (10)**.

At the village, cross the road and take the public footpath directly opposite. Follow it straight ahead between the fields and go through a **metal gate into Studley Royal Deer Park (11)**, where a large interpretation board displays a map of the area. Rather than following the grassy path straight ahead, turn right in the direction of Studley Hall Stables and the site of the lost Studley Hall. The map on the board makes a useful guide, as it shows the main grassy paths and hard-surfaced lanes across the deer park.

Continue along the main grassy path until it splits at a fork, and take the left-hand path. A little further on you'll reach a T-junction with another path. Turn right here and follow the path down to a bridge whose parapets are built from very large stone blocks. Cross it and shortly afterwards you'll reach a hard-surfaced lane. Turn left and follow it towards Studley Royal House, which stands on your right.

At the **driveway leading to Studley Royal House (12)**, rather than carrying straight on along the hard-surfaced lane, take the grassy path on your right, heading diagonally across the fields. Halfway across, the path forks, so take the right-hand branch. When you reach the hard-surfaced **lane near Choristers' House (13)**, turn right.

Walk past the front of the National Trust holiday cottage called Choristers' House and then past St Mary's Church, following the lane to the gates that lead out of the deer park. Turn left and follow the path for about a third of a mile all the way back to the visitor centre and car park to finish your Fountains Abbey circular walk.

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MAP OF THE WALK

