

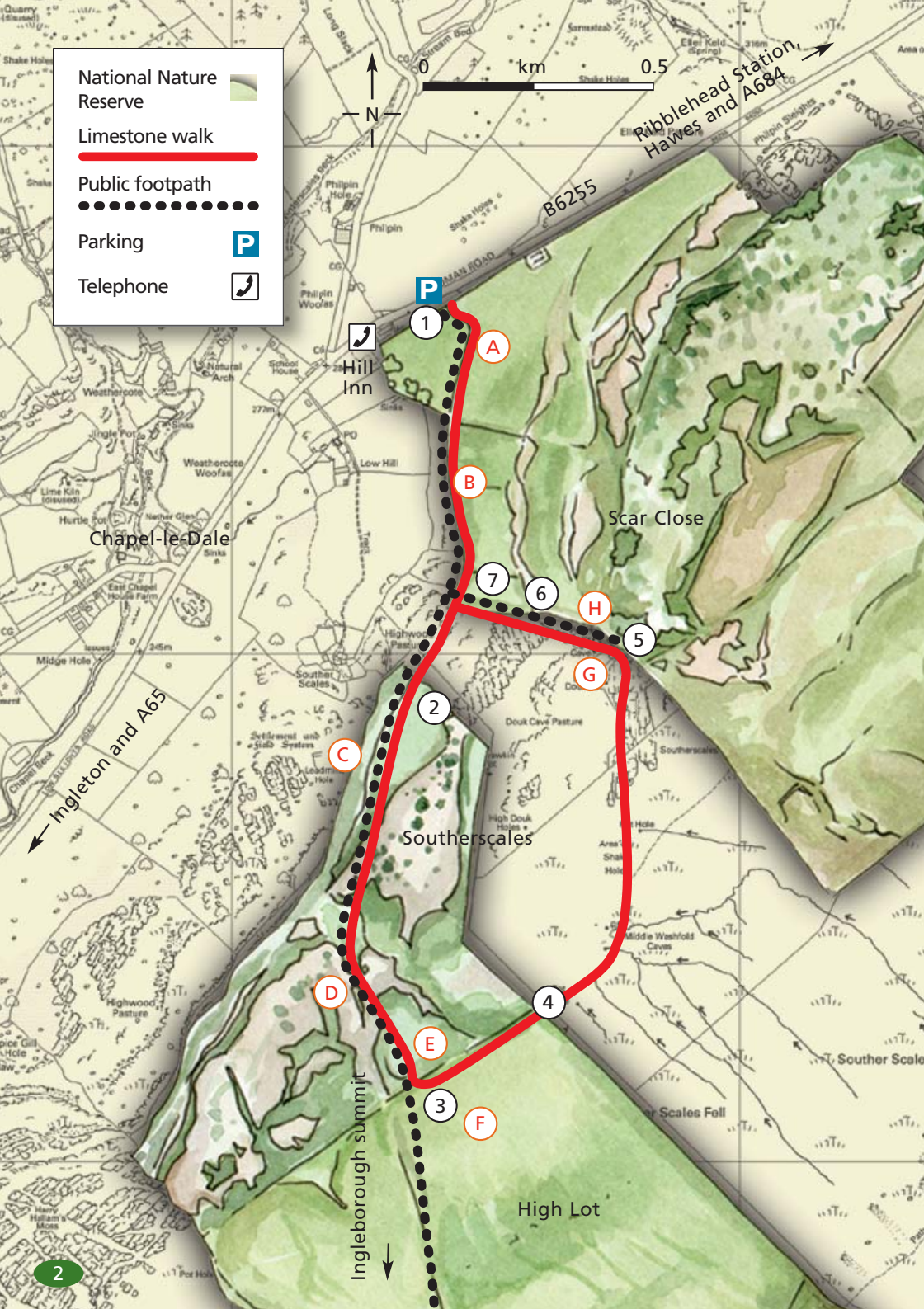


# Limestone walk

Ingleborough National Nature Reserve



working towards *Natural England*  
for people, places and nature






# Limestone walk

*Ingleborough National Nature Reserve is renowned for the wildlife and geology of its limestone pavement and other limestone features. The area's importance has been recognised by English Nature through the creation of this National Nature Reserve which covers an area of 1,014 hectares. Ingleborough is also a wildlife site of international importance, being part of the Natura 2000 series created by the European Union.*

This fascinating short walk is approximately 5 kilometres (3 miles) long and should take between 1 and 1.5 hours to complete.

Difficulty level is easy to medium with several stiles and some boggy sections.



Common rock-rose.  
Laurie Campbell

*Three Peaks footpath (which is the flagstone path up to Ingleborough summit) and take a waymarked path along the side of the drystone wall.*

*4 Cross stile and follow path to gate.*

*5 Continue on path past Little Douk Pot and around Great Douk Cave.*

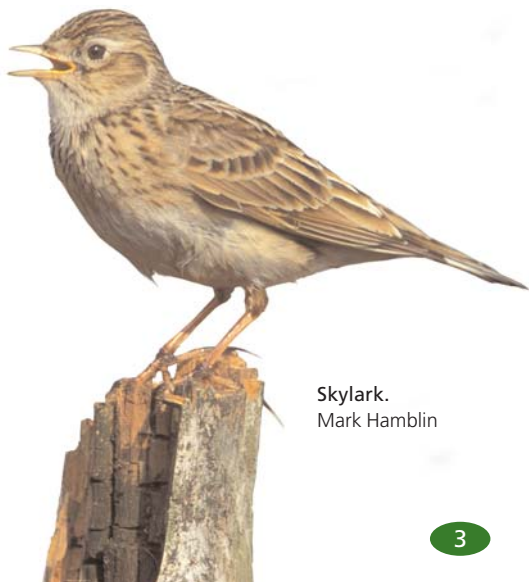
*6 Take the public footpath to return to the Three Peaks footpath.*

*7 Turn right and retrace steps back to your initial starting point.*

*1 Take the public footpath off the B6255 road (signposted to Ingleborough) 100 metres north of the Hill Inn (Chapel-le-Dale). Continue along this footpath on a well-defined track across three fields.*

*2 Continue through Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's land at Southerscales.*

*3 Just past Braithwaite Wife Hole cross the stile. Turn left off the main*



Skylark.  
Mark Hamblin



Limestone pavement. Whitfield Benson

## A) Limekiln and pasture

On your left is an old limekiln which was used to burn limestone (Calcium carbonate) to make quicklime. The quicklime was slaked with water to produce builders' lime (Calcium hydroxide); farmers used it to reduce the acidity of pastures and improve grassland. Prior to purchase by English Nature this field had been subjected to applications of fertiliser and high sheep grazing which explains why wildflowers are rare in the grasslands.

## B) Limestone landscapes

Looking to your right and down Chapel-le-Dale is like looking back to distant beginnings.

The rocks which dominate this landscape were laid down as marine deposits during the Carboniferous period 300 million years ago. They consist of shell debris compressed and recrystallised to form the spectacular limestone rock we see today.

This Great Scar Limestone is in places up to 200 metres thick and outcrops as a series of benches and scars in terraces around the flanks of Ingleborough.

During past ages the entire region, including the summit of Ingleborough, was covered by ice and the Chapel-le-Dale valley was scoured out by glaciers into a characteristic U-shaped valley.

Looking down Chapel-le-Dale you see a series of scars where hard rock outcrops have been eroded by glaciers; scree slopes of frost-shattered debris have been left at the base.

Keep an eye open for the white rump of the wheatear, a conspicuous feature when the bird flies. Skylarks can also be seen and heard during their high-flying display flight.



Male wheatear.  
Mark Hamblin

## C) Limestone grasslands

As you enter Souther scales the textures and images change. The thinner, drier soils give rise to flower-rich limestone grasslands.

The most common wildflower species is purple wild thyme – the perfume can be overpowering in summer. In the spring early-purple orchids make colour splashes across the grasslands.



Above: Wild thyme.  
Mary Sykes

Right: Harebell.  
Mark Hamblin

By early summer yellow rock-rose, bird's-foot trefoil and white limestone bedstraw are in flower and the delicate flowers of the quaking grass tremble in the wind.

As we move into August the colour cast shades to blue as the flowers of small scabious and harebell take their turn, along with the yellow flowered hawkbits. The grazing regime on this land is designed to encourage plants to flower.



## D) Limestone pavements

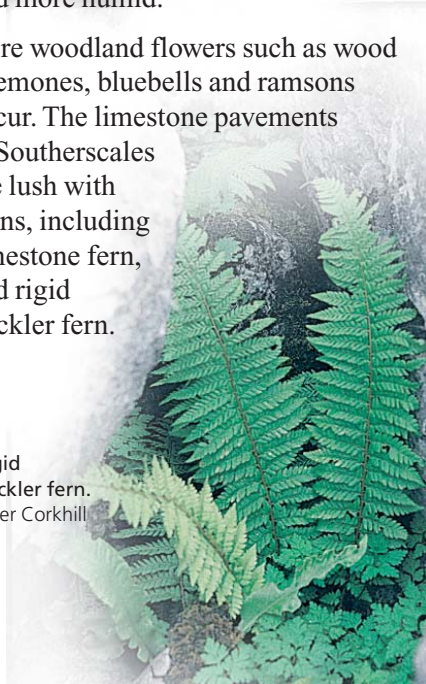
The outcrops of Great Scar Limestone and its distinctive landscapes are known as 'Karst'. These landscapes are characterised by dramatic outcrops of bare limestone rock (pavements), interspersed with green limestone grasslands.

Although the Great Scar Limestone is a very strong rock, acidic rainwater seeping along fractures in the limestone can dissolve it leaving blocks (clints) of limestone separated by deep fissures (grikes).

The pavements are home to a wonderful variety of wildflowers. Many of the plants occur in the sheltered conditions of the deep grikes, where conditions are cooler and more humid.

Here woodland flowers such as wood anemones, bluebells and ramsons occur. The limestone pavements at Souther scales are lush with ferns, including limestone fern, and rigid buckler fern.

Rigid  
buckler fern.  
Peter Corkhill





## E) Braithwaite Wife Hole

Braithwaite Wife Hole is a huge depression with a top circumference of 180 metres (500 feet) and is said to be the largest shakehole in Yorkshire. Shakeholes are created when underground chambers collapse in on themselves.

## F) Moorlands

The moorland vegetation of High Lot is dominated by more acid-loving plants, in particular heath rush and purple moor-grass. Amongst them you may see more colourful plants such as the yellow spikes of bog asphodel and the green and red bog *Sphagnum* mosses which act like sponges, absorbing rainwater.

The land is currently being managed to restore lost plants: ling heather, cross-leaved heath and bilberry.

## G) Little Douk and Great Douk

The steep cliffs and ledges around these potholes provide protection

for a range of trees and shrubs – in particular the rowan whose orange-red berries can be seen from late July.

In the cooler, humid and shaded confines of Great Douk is a different, almost subterranean world with large ferns, such as male fern and hart's-tongue, sprouting from the damp cliffs. At its base a small waterfall emerges from a long cave system.

## H) Scar Close pavements

Glance to your right to see wooded Scar Close. Grazing livestock have been excluded for many years allowing ash trees and hazel bushes to escape from the confines of the grikes.

This area now looks more like the landscape which existed prior to man's clearance of the upland woodlands that once covered the Yorkshire Dales. English Nature and other wildlife organisations are now encouraging more land to move to a semi-wooded state, richer in plant, bird and insect life.

Southerscales. Whitfield Benson



# Take your own safety seriously on the Limestone walk

*There is much to see and enjoy here, but peace of mind is something only you can ensure by being informed and prepared.*

Ingleborough is a wonderful but demanding reserve. A remote and often deserted mountainous area (rising to 650 metres) it is subject to extreme weather conditions, including sudden and dense hill fog. We recommend you come equipped with the following:

- A map and compass - make sure you know how to use them
- Waterproofs, spare clothing
- Emergency food and water
- A torch and whistle
- A mobile phone – limited reception but worth a try
- A rucksack to carry it all in

It makes sense to tell a responsible person exactly where you are going, how long you plan to spend and what time you will return.

## The lie of the land

Many rocks are slippery and loose and there are deep holes concealed by

vegetation, so keep your eyes peeled and don't try to travel in poor light.

There are many caves and potholes. Unless you are part of a properly equipped, experienced and supervised group, stay well away from them.

Take care with the old drystone walls – many are topped with rusty barbed wire. They may be unstable and it may be unwise to climb over or on them – use the stiles or gates provided.

## Keeping an eye on livestock

- Please try not to disturb the livestock
- If left alone, animals will generally not cause a threat to visitors
- However, cattle can intimidate, crowd or kick
- Do not get between cows and their calves
- If you are walking a dog and cows become agitated and crowd around you, let go of your animal

## Public phones

Public phones are located at Ingleton (SD696729).

You may also be able to use phones in the Station Inn, Ribbleshead and in the Hill Inn.



English Nature, the Rural Development Service, the Countryside Agency. Working in partnership to conserve and enhance our landscapes and natural environment to promote countryside access and recreation as well as public well-being, now and for future generations.

This is one of a range of publications published by:

North & East Yorkshire Team, English Nature,  
Asquith House, Leyburn Business Park,  
Harmby Road, Leyburn DL8 5QA.

Tel: 01969 623447

Fax: 01969 621298

[www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)

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Printed on Evolution Satin, 75% recycled post-consumer waste paper, Elemental Chlorine Free.

ISBN 1 85716 889 5

Designed and printed by  
Cameron Publishing NE11 0HF,  
5M, 5M.

For further information  
contact:

The Site Manager,  
English Nature,  
Colt Park Barn,  
Chapel-le-Dale,  
Carnforth,  
Lancashire LA6 3JF.

Tel: 01524 242021

For further information on the  
Southernscales section of the  
National Nature Reserve  
contact:

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust,  
10 Toft Green, York YO1 6JP.

Tel: 01904 659570

**Front cover photograph:**  
Southernscales. Whitfield Benson



Natura 2000 is a network of internationally important wildlife sites, protected under EC Habitats and Bird Directives. They have been set up to help halt the loss of European biodiversity.



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