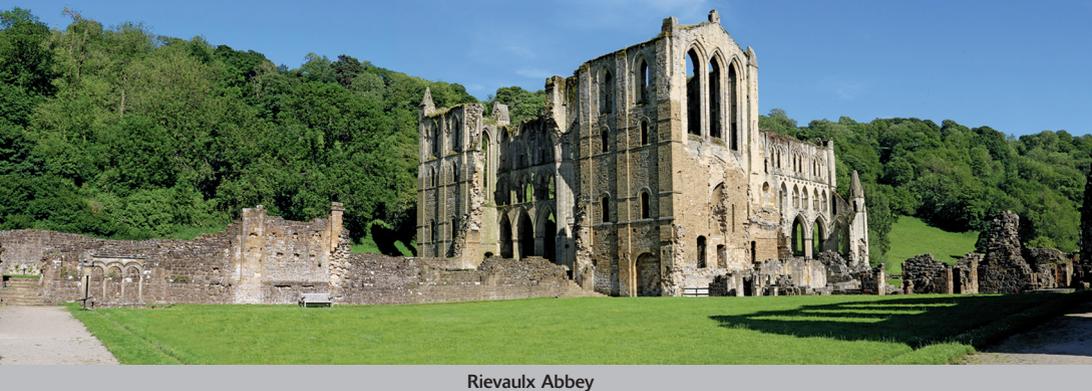


# Helmsley to the White Horse

SECTION ONE – 8¾ MILES (14.1KM)



Rievaulx Abbey

**The opening section of the Cleveland Way begins with a leisurely stroll along the beautiful sylvan valley of the river Rye, climbing gradually to the limestone plateau of the Hambleton Hills, pausing at one of Yorkshire’s most famous attractions – the White Horse of Kilburn.**

Assuming that you have previously enjoyed the riches of Helmsley, we begin our journey of discovery from the market square. There are some superb views of Helmsley Castle as we leave the town. The route meanders through the woodland, passing the site of the medieval village of Griff, to reach Rievaulx Bridge and a short detour leads to the impressive Rievaulx Abbey.

Founded in 1132, Rievaulx was the first Cistercian abbey in the North of England. Rievaulx’s foundation, initiated by St Bernard of Clairvaux, was part of an ambitious plan for the monastic colonisation of northern England and Scotland. Within a few years, Rievaulx became one of the most influential monasteries in England, a place for meditation, learning and culture. In 1136 the Abbey began to establish colonies. The most important of these was Melrose Abbey, which became Scotland’s first Cistercian monastery, endowed by King David.

Walter l’Espece, the great Norman lord of Helmsley, provided most of the abbey’s land. In addition, he granted to William, the first abbot, and his twelve monks, the present site on the banks of the river Rye together with land above the valley to the north. In all this amounted to some 1000 acres of arable land. Under the third Abbot, St Aelred (1147-1167) there were 140 choir monks and nearly 500 lay brothers in residence, and the abbey owned over 14,000 sheep. However, expensive enlargements and rebuilding during the thirteenth century resulted in the monastery falling into substantial debt. At the time of the abbey’s dissolution in 1538, only the abbot and twenty-two monks remained.

Rievaulx Abbey is an architectural masterpiece and one of the most impressive medieval sites in England. Many of the outbuildings are still standing to a consistent height, and almost the whole range is visible at foundation level. The eastern part of the abbey church rises virtually to its original height, its soaring, three-storey arches conveying the magnificence that it once possessed. The building stone was quarried locally and transported to the abbey site on barges along two canals especially dug for the purpose.

From Rievaulx we pass through the richly wooded valleys of Nettle Dale and Flassendale to Cold Kirby. The lakes beside the track attract a variety of birds, including Canada geese, coots, mallards, moorhens, mute swans, teal and tufted ducks. Apart from its church, Cold Kirby has little to delay our progress. The present building dates from 1841 replacing a much older church with twelfth-century origins. Only the font and the bells from the earlier church survive. After passing through Hambleton, we cross the busy A170 and then follow a clear track through the woodland to Roulston Scar and the White Horse.

Roulston Scar was the site of a massive hill fort dating back to c.400 BC. The fortifications covered an area of 53 acres (21.5ha), defended by a perimeter 1.3 miles (2km) in length – the most extensive Iron Age hill fort in northern England. The defences comprised a trench 6 feet (2m) deep with a box rampart, fronted by a timber palisade up to 13 feet (4m) high, topped with a defended walkway. The fort occupied a dominant position, utilising the natural defences of cliffs and steep valley sides. Furthermore, it overlooked the territory of the Brigantes tribe. Therefore, it is most likely that

the Parisi tribe constructed it, as a ‘statement of power’ to impress, deter and intimidate their neighbours.

The site, which has been the home of the Yorkshire Gliding Club since 1937, sustained damage from anti-aircraft batteries placed around the central area during World War II. Apparently, the hilltop had been fashionable with German gliding enthusiasts in the 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, the military declared Roulston Scar as a possible Nazi invasion site.

The White Horse is one of Yorkshire’s best-known landmarks – on a bright day, it is visible from over 30 miles (48km) away. The horse initially measured 314 feet long (96m) by 228 feet (70m) high, although its present dimensions are 318 feet (97m) long and 220 feet (67m) high. In 1857 John Hodgson, Kilburn’s schoolmaster, marked out the outline of the horse and a team of thirty-one villagers cut away the turf and other vegetation to reveal the grey limestone rock underneath. To make the horse stand out, they deposited several tonnes of lime over the surface. The White Horse, often nicknamed ‘the old grey mare’, requires regular ‘grooming’ to keep it in prime condition and 220 gallons (1000 litres) of masonry paint!

## SECTION ONE – MILEAGE AND ELEVATION

**Start:** Helmsley, the market square.

**Grid Ref:** SE 613 838.

**Finish:** The White Horse of Kilburn.

**Grid Ref:** SE 514 813.

**Section 1 Distance:** 8¾ miles (14.1km).

**Total Distance:** 8¾ miles (14.1km).

**Total Ascent:** 1481 feet (451m).

**Maximum Elevation:** 965 feet (295m).

