



## ASH DALE and RICCAL DALE

from Helmsley 8½ miles (13.5km)

**T**his woodland walk takes in the parallel valleys of Ash Dale and Riccal Dale. The fine contrast of scenery and the flora and fauna are hard to surpass.

Helmsley is a picturesque market town with many interesting buildings including four former coaching inns. The spacious square contains an ancient market cross and an imposing memorial to William, the Second Earl of Feversham, who was killed in the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Sited about one mile south-west of Helmsley lies Duncombe Park, the family home of the Fevershams. Built in 1713 it is set amidst rolling parkland overlooking the river Rye. Following the death of the Second Earl, it was leased as a preparatory school for girls. In 1986 the present Lord and Lady Feversham decided to return and turn it into a family home once again. The house and gardens have

since been restored to their former glory and are open to the public. The 450 acres of parkland, much of which is designated a national nature reserve, contain many ancient trees and a wealth of wildlife.

Closer to the town are the spectacular ruins of Helmsley Castle, which testify to its former strength and impregnability. It stands on a rocky outcrop above the river Rye surrounded by huge earthworks. The first castle on this site was built by Walter l'Espece in the early twelfth century and was a timber structure. Some sixty years later this was replaced by a stone castle, which was added to and strengthened throughout the Middle Ages.

A formidable fortress, the castle saw little action until the Civil War which brought about its destruction. In 1644 Sir Jordan Crosland, of Helmsley, defended it for the King. He held out against 1000 troops under Sir Thomas Fairfax in a three months' siege, before

surrendering honourably, 'due to lack of food'. After this Cromwell ordered the defences of the castle to be destroyed, rendering it useless in any future conflicts.

Leaving Helmsley we follow a clear path through the fields to the beautiful wooded valley of Riccal Dale. Bluebells and primroses make a stunning display in the spring. During the summer common sorrel, lady's bedstraw, meadow cranesbill silverweed and tormentil follow on, and the rare chickweed wintergreen has also been recorded, earning Riccal Dale the title 'the valley of the flowers'.

Our route continues along the woodland margins to the abandoned Rea Garth Farm, where a monkey puzzle tree towers above the buildings. Monkey puzzle trees, introduced from South America, were very popular in Victorian times. The name came about in 1834 when Charles Austin, attended a tree planting ceremony in Cornwall. After touching the spiny foliage he said, 'That tree would puzzle a monkey.' The name stuck.

From Rea Garth we pass through open fields and descend to a clearing by the river Riccal. The earliest form of Riccal in the Domesday Book is 'Ricalf', derived from the Norse 'Rye grain' meaning 'a branch of the Rye'. We leave the clearing and begin a steep climb out of the valley, passing (*or perhaps pausing at*) a seat commemorating Joe Cowton,

who was a gamekeeper on the Duncombe Park Estate for 52 years.

After reaching the road we follow it to the outskirts of Carlton. This was a freeman's village until the Norman lords of Helmsley annexed it for hunting. They enclosed the land with a fence known as the 'park pale' and an internal ditch. This design allowed deer to leap into the park but the extra height on the inside made it difficult for them to escape. The 'park pale' was pulled down in 1799.

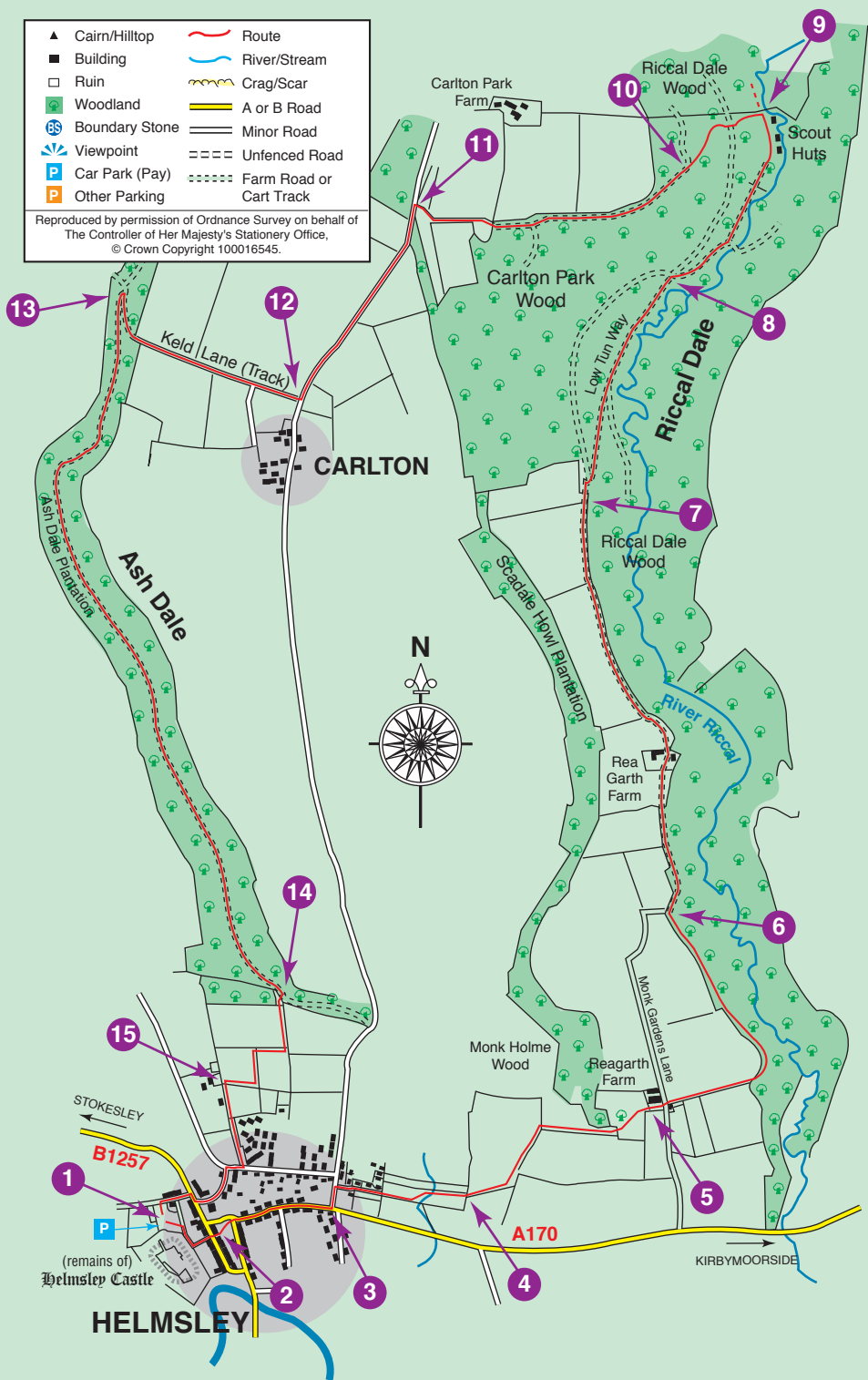
A wide track from Carlton delivers us into Ash Dale which has been covered with trees since the sixteenth century or earlier. However, none of the present trees are so old, as the woods have been regularly harvested and replanted throughout the centuries. Conifers and hardwoods such as beech are mixed with broadleaves like ash, hazel, sycamore and oak which are more typical of the original woodland. Ash Dale is a precious haven for plants, birds, insects and small mammals. During spring and summer the descent through the valley provides an opportunity to identify many wild flowers; bluebell, lady's mantle, primrose, purple vetch, rosebay willow herb, wood anemone and wood forget-me-not.

On leaving the woodland we continue via lush meadows and after a few minutes we are back in Helmsley.

Start/Parking:	Helmsley, there is a large long stay car park just off the B1257 Stokesley Road.
Location:	Helmsley lies on the A170 road approximately 15 miles (24km) from Thirsk and 15 miles (24km) from Pickering.
Grid Ref:	611 838
Distance:	8½ miles (13.5km) circular. Allow 4¼ hrs walking time.
OS Maps:	Explorer OL26 (1:25,000) or Landranger 100 (1:50,000).
Refreshments:	Inns, restaurants and cafes in Helmsley.
Public Toilets:	Helmsley at the long stay car park and also along a side street off the market square.
Other:	Market on Friday, Helmsley Castle, Duncombe Park, walled garden, shops, Post Office, telephone, bus service.

▲ Cairn/Hilltop	— Route
■ Building	— River/Stream
□ Ruin	— Crag/Scar
■ Woodland	— A or B Road
■ Boundary Stone	— Minor Road
⊕ Viewpoint	— Unfenced Road
P Car Park (Pay)	— Farm Road or Cart Track
P Other Parking	

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## 10 Ash Dale and Riccal Dale

- 1 (*GR 611 838*) From the long-stay car park follow the signs leading to the castle entrance. From the castle follow a wide tarmacked lane leading to the road, cross the road and continue along the side street opposite which leads into the market square.
- 2 (*GR 612 837*) Head towards the market cross. Cross the road near the roundabout and follow the A170 out of Helmsley towards Kirbymoorside.
- 3 (*GR 616 839*) Opposite the garage turn left into Carlton Road and after about 60 yards (55m) turn right (*SP Public Footpath*) and continue along a tarmacked lane. At a gate, fork left along a grassy track and go through a gate at the end. Follow the right boundary. Halfway through the field cross to the left fence and follow this to a gate.
- 4 (*GR 621 841*) Go through the gate and follow the right boundary round the field. Go through a gate on the right, stay close to the hedge and go through another gate. Bear left and climb over a small hill to reach Reagarth Farm.
- 5 (*GR 627 845*) Continue through two gates keeping to the right of the barns and to the left of the farmhouse. Keep to the right boundary across the field and go through a gate into a wood. Turn left and follow a narrow path along the edge of the wood.
- 6 (*GR 626 852*) Leave the wood and turn right onto a farm road. Follow the farm road, passing the derelict Rea Garth Farm, climbing gradually.
- 7 (*GR 621 866*) Go through a gate re-entering the woodland. At the first junction follow the right track and descend into the valley.
- 8 (*GR 622 875*) Take the right fork and continue descending. Keep left at the next junction and follow the track through a boundary gate which leads into a clearing near the Scout huts. Continue through the clearing to a gate. STOP don't use it.
- 9 (*GR 624 881*) Turn left and climb up alongside the fence to a forest road. Cross the forest road and, climbing more steeply, follow a wire fence to its corner. Leave the fence, and continue climbing to a broad forest track.
- 10 (*GR 622 879*) Turn left (*SP Link*) and follow the track keeping close to the woodland margin. On emerging from the wood continue along a fenced farm track, cross a concrete road and go through a gate onto the main road.
- 11 (*GR 613 876*) Turn left and follow the main road towards Carlton.
- 12 (*GR 610 868*) Turn right into Keld Lane (*SP Helmsley 2½ miles*). At the end of the lane go through a gate and follow a forest track to the right descending gradually.
- 13 (*GR 603 871*) Turn left (*SP Helmsley 2 miles*) and continue descending along the forest track.
- 14 (*GR 613 847*) When the track becomes a harder surface, leave it for a narrow path to the right which leads to a stile. Cross the stile and keep to the left boundary across the field. Go over another stile and turn right, keep to the right fence and go through a gate. Turn left and follow the field boundaries to the far left corner.
- 15 (*GR 611 843*) Go over a stile and follow a tarmacked path through a gate and continue into a cul-de-sac. Continue to the junction and turn right. Take the first left turn and follow this down past the church to the B1257 main road. Cross the road, turn right and after about 40 yards (37m) turn left (*sign Car Park*) and follow the road which leads back to the car park.

**HELMSLEY'S WALLED GARDEN**

Set against the backdrop of Helmsley Castle is a five acre, working, kitchen garden which incorporates glass houses designed in 1850 as a vine house. The garden, originally built in 1756, is constantly being restored using appropriate plants where possible.