

# Walk of the month

## A great walk around Great Ayton



Great Ayton is an attractive village centred on the banks of the River Leven. The navigator and explorer, Captain James Cook spent his childhood in the village and attended the Postgate School. This is now the Captain Cook Schoolroom Museum. Stokesley is an historic market town, renowned for its large range of building types and is also host to an annual agricultural show at the end of September, one of the biggest in the North.

A FAIRLY easy 6½-mile (11km) or a shorter 5½-mile (9km) circular walk starting from Great Ayton, going along the River Leven to Stokesley and returning to Great Ayton via Ayton Firs.

**Difficulty Rating:** Easy. You will need OS Explorer Map No.26 (North York Moors – Western Area) Grid Reference NZ 563 107.

**Parking:** Car parking is available near the Tourist Information Centre in Great Ayton.

**Public transport:** There are regular bus services into Great Ayton from Stokesley, Middlesbrough and Guisborough. Please check times by visiting [www.northyorks.gov.uk/businfo](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/businfo) or by telephoning traveline on 0871 200 22 33 (calls from landlines cost 10p per minute).



**The walk:** Leave the car park at the Tourist Information Centre and head past the statue of the young James Cook. Carry on down the High Street, passing the Schoolroom Museum and continue straight ahead. On the R there is the Norman All Saints' Church and Ayton Hall. From here continue out on Yarm Lane to the footpath on the L opposite Field House.

**1** From here pass The Grange and continue, crossing two fields to join the river. Follow the path past two farms on the R, crossing their access tracks until you reach the flood diversion channel.

**2** At this point continue straight on, crossing a field and then the A172 to a

footpath called Mill Riggs, which will take you into Stokesley.

Alternatively, if you don't want to visit Stokesley, turn L at the flood diversion channel and walk along its bank to the A173. Turn L and follow the pavement and at the fork in the road, bear R along the road to Kildale.

**3** Opposite Prospect Farm turn L onto a brideway and follow the route through several gates heading for the trees that surround Ayton Firs. (From here the views of Roseberry Topping are stunning.) After passing the trees the route turns into a surfaced track which leads to Easby Lane. Turn L then R onto Cross Lane which heads to Little Ayton.

**4** Take the first footpath on the L which crosses several fields and will eventually bring you back into the village after crossing the River Leven.

## Archaeology in the area

- This month's walk takes in low-lying ground around the River Leven. Although this was once a wet area, poorly drained, it was ideal for a group of mesolithic (middle stone age) hunter-gatherers who lived here 5-8,000 years ago. They loved to use all the rich natural resources which thrive in wetland by fishing, hunting deer and other large animals, catching wildfowl in the reedbeds and gathering a wide variety of plants for materials and food. We know this from flint tools and debris found close to the Leven by the Levensdale archaeology project a few years ago.

- Field patterns are a subject we will return to often in these articles. Do you know that their shape and size can tell us a huge amount about old farming methods and pattern of ownership? A glance at a detailed map shows that, at the Stokesley end of the walk, the fields tend to be laid out very straight and angular because they were enclosed from open fields in the mid-19th century. Despite some boundaries being removed to create larger fields, they look little different to when they were laid out.

- Further east around Ayton Firs the fields are large but with slightly wavy edges, suggesting they have earlier origins from being enclosed by agreement which kept the old boundaries but created larger fields.

