

The missing river

A self guided walk from Durham City into the surrounding countryside



Explore a wide and deep valley without a river
Discover how ice sheets shaped the landscape
Find out why the River Browney changed its course
Walk over a giant pile of glacial debris

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**the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks**





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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Cover image: River Browney © Rory Walsh

The missing river

Discover why one of Durham's rivers completely changed its course

A river valley without a river? Surely that's a contradiction in terms. But not in Durham.

Find out the fascinating story of how ice sheets left great piles of debris that blocked the path of the River Browney and changed its course.

This great walk takes you out from Durham city through a nature reserve and into open countryside.



Along the way you'll discover all the signs of the missing river – a distinct valley shape and even particular street names. Then you'll climb up and over the ice sheet deposits into another valley to find the re-routed river.



Find out how this landscape has been used and exploited by humans: deposits of sand quarried, layers of coal mined, and rivers dammed to power mills. Also discover how locals have fought to protect a bog!

You'll also see ruins of a medieval manor, a former pit village and see a lesser-known view of the magnificent cathedral.

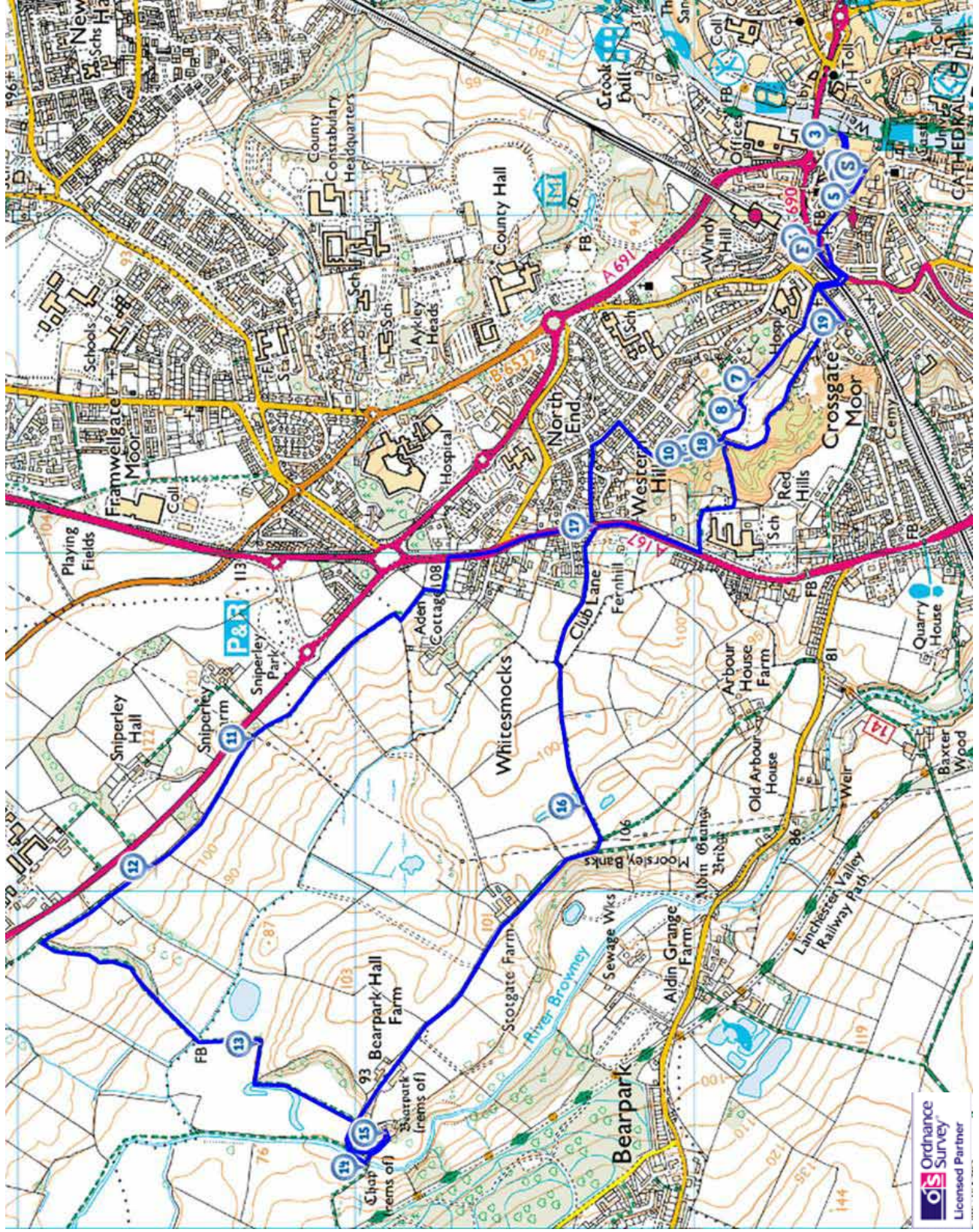
Top: River Browney © Rory Walsh / Bottom: Flass Vale © Rory Walsh

Practical information

Location	Durham, Northeast England
Getting there	<p>Car - Durham is easily accessible from the A1(M) (exit at Junction 62) and the A167. City centre parking is available at The Gates, Sidegate, Durham station and location but charges apply.</p> <p>Train - Durham station is on the East Coast mainline and served by long-distance services from London Kings Cross and Edinburgh Waverley as well as regional services from Newcastle and Middlesbrough.</p> <p>Bus - Durham is served by buses from across the northeast region as well as local routes; alight on North Road.</p>
Start point	Bottom of North Road by the Gates Shopping Centre, DH1 4SJ
Directions from railway station to start	From the station entrance follow the road down Station Approach. After the road bends round to the right, look for the pedestrian bridge on the left over the main road. Cross the bridge and go down the curving ramp. At the roundabout turn left into North Road. The shopping centre is at the end of North Road.
Finish point	North Road roundabout, DH1 4UE
Onward journey	The route is almost circular. To return to Durham train or bus stations from the final stop please use the Directions 19.
Distance	5 ½ miles
Level	Moderate – There are some climbs and descents but they are mostly steady; there are also a handful of stiles along the route
Terrain	City pavements, paths through woodland and fields, gravel tracks
Conditions	The paths in the woods and fields can be muddy after wet weather

Suitable for	<p>Families - Spotting different birds and butterflies in the Vale might appeal to children</p> <p>Dogs - Keep on leads near busy roads and on grazing land</p>
Refreshments	Once the walk leaves the city centre there is nowhere to stop for refreshments on the route. We suggest purchasing supplies in Durham before starting the walk. There are various cafes and shops on North Road near the start of the walk.
Facilities	The only public toilets on the route are at The Gates Shopping Centre (start of walk)
Places to visit	<p>Durham Cathedral - the greatest Norman building in England Open to visitors 7 days a week (Monday to Saturday until 6pm; Sundays until 5.30pm). Entry is free but donations are welcome. Tours are available and it is possible to climb the tower for excellent views of the city.</p> <p>Durham Castle - the 11th century castle provides accommodation for students during term time but public tours are available.</p> <p>Prince Bishop River Cruiser - Enjoy a boat trip which gives views of the cathedral, castle and 5 bridges; the commentary includes history, natural history and geography. Departs from Brown's Boathouse near Elvet Bridge (Tel: 0191 386 9525).</p>
Tourist information	<p>Durham World Heritage Site Visitor Centre Owengate, Durham, DH1 1HB Tel: 03000 262 626 www.thisisdurham.com</p>

Route overview



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Stopping points

Start Bottom of North Road

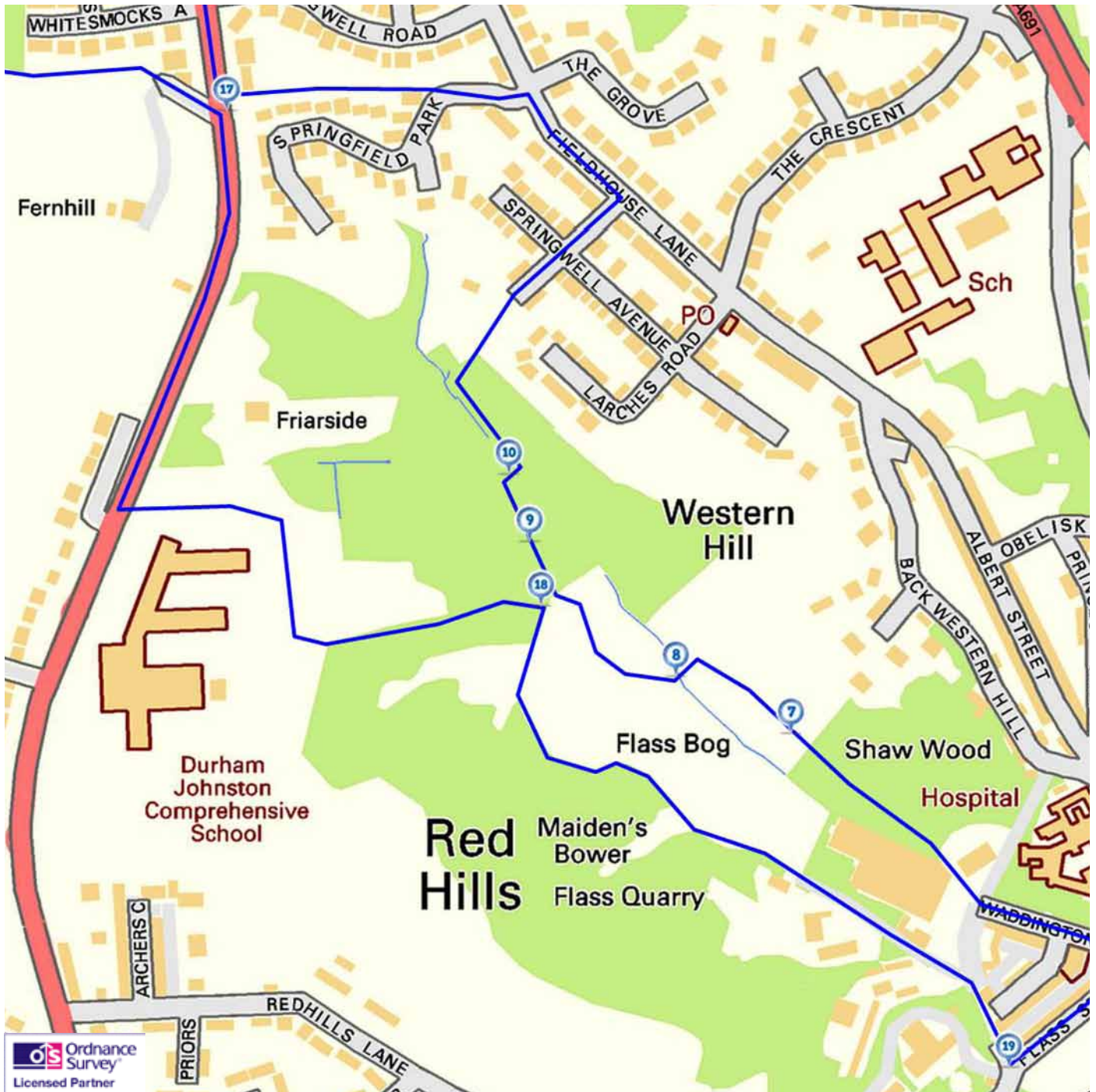
2. North Road entrance to The Gates Shopping Centre
3. Riverside footpath
4. North Road entrance to The Gates Shopping Centre
5. Former cinema, North Road
6. North Road roundabout

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- ### 19. Corner of Red Hills Lane and Flass Street

Finish North Road roundabout

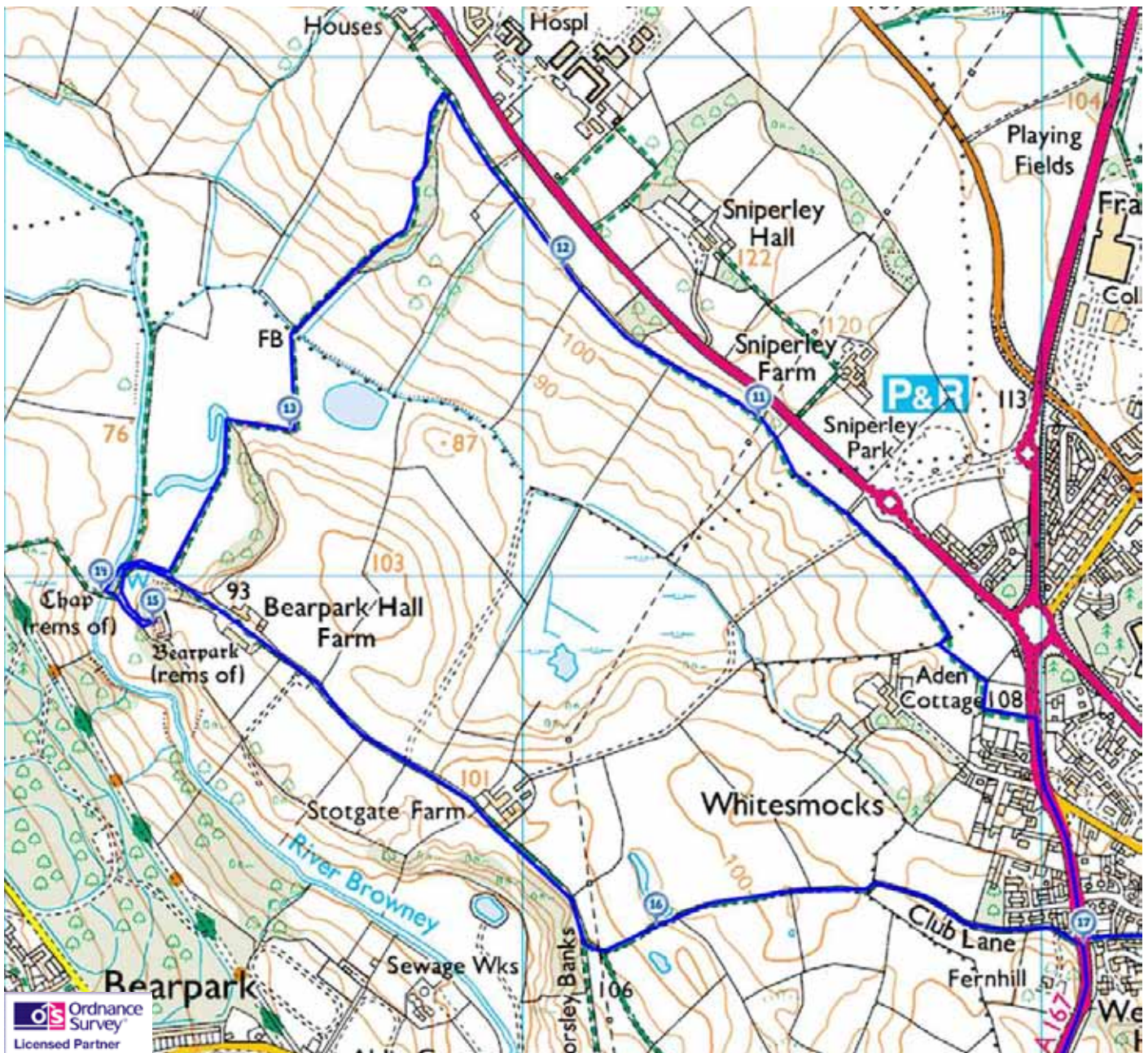
Second part of route - Flass Vale



Stopping points

- | | |
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| 7. Information board, Flass Vale | 18. Footpath crossing, Flass Vale |
| 8. Culvert over Flass Burn, Flass Vale | |
| 9. Close to overturned tree stump, Flass Vale | |
| 10. On footbridge, Flass Vale | |

Third part of route - open countryside



Stopping points

- 11. Field path
- 12. Field path
- 13. Solitary tree
- 14. Bridge over the River Browney
- 15. Beaurepaire ruins
- 16. Dip in the track
- 17. Beside the A167 at Whitesmocks

Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

1. Welcome to Durham

North Road

Directions 1

Make your way to the North Road entrance of The Gates shopping centre. This is the start of the walk where you can listen to Track 2.

2. The Gates - aren't gates!

North Road entrance to The Gates Shopping Centre

Directions 2

Go down the hill to the right, then round the corner under a building and down to the riverside. Be careful – there are two car park entrances here so watch out for traffic. Stop on the river bank and listen to Track 3.

3. The run of the mill

Riverside footpath

Directions 3

Retrace your steps to the shopping centre entrance. Look up North Road and listen to Track 4.

4. How green was the valley

North Road entrance to The Gates Shopping Centre

Directions 4

Go up North Road for about 100 metres. On the left hand side is a former cinema, which at the time of recording was called the Live Lounge club. Stop here and listen to Track 5.

5. The pits?

Former cinema next to Durham Miners' Hall

Directions 5

Continue up North Road, noticing the steep slopes of Neville Street on the left, then of Station Bank on the right. When you reach the roundabout at the top of North Road, stop at the area to the left at the side of the chapel and listen to Track 6.

6. Built on a bog

North Road roundabout

Directions 6

From the side of the chapel, go clockwise around the roundabout to take the second exit. Go under a building and then cross the road at the traffic island. Turn right under the viaduct into Sutton Street. Then take the second street on the left, which is Waddington Street. On the right of the road is the former County Hospital and on the left is Waddington Street United Reformed Church.

At the end of the street there is a bus garage and, to the right of it, the Kings Lodge Hotel. Go through the hotel gateway – it's a public right of way. Ahead is a path that climbs into woodland. Follow this path until it leaves the shade of the trees. When you reach the display board on the left of the path listen to Track 7.

7. A rural haven

Information board, Flass Vale Local Nature Reserve

Directions 7

Continue along the path, after a time descending a flight of steps. Continue until you reach a crossroads of paths. Take the left path and after about 5 metres stop by the culvert and listen to Track 8.

8. For peat's sake!

Culvert over Flass Burn, Flass Vale

Directions 8

Continue along the path, up the steps and into the wood again. At the crossroads of paths, go right. In season you may notice the scent of honeysuckle here. Continue for about 100 metres then stop and look to the right. Listen to Track 9.

9. Highland Games

Close to large overturned tree stump, Flass Vale

Directions 9

Follow the path for another 100 metres or so until you reach a wooden footbridge. Stop here and listen to Track 10.

10. Under the surface

On footbridge, Flass Vale

Directions 10

Now go back to the bridge, cross over and turn left, passing another interpretation board. Follow the path as it climbs and bends to the right until you emerge onto a residential street, which is Flassburn Road.

Go straight over the first crossroads and turn left at the next junction onto Fieldhouse Lane. Take the first left into Springfield Park. Where the road bends to the left, go straight along a footpath that goes between the backs of houses.

When you reach the main road, turn right. After about 200 metres cross the road at the traffic island. At the far side, turn right and continue up the hill. Shortly after a large road sign for a roundabout, there is a footpath sign to the left.

Go over the stile and follow the path as it twists and turns. After the second stile, keep to the right hand side of the field. Go over the next stile in the bottom corner of the field and then turn left into the next field. Follow the edge of the field round to the right.

You should end up walking parallel to, but one narrow field away from, a main road. Continue until you go under a line of pylons where you can listen to Track 11.

11. All is revealed

On a field path, looking out over open countryside

Directions 11

Continue along the footpath through another two fields, then stop and listen to Track 12. In April and May this path is popular with butterflies because it's sunny and the hedges provide shelter from cold winds. Watch out for peacock, tortoiseshell, orange tip and cabbage whites.

12. Scars of the past

On a field path, looking out over open countryside

Directions 12

Continue along the footpath. At one point the path becomes very narrow as it goes between two fences and may be quite overgrown. On the left is a farm storage area and you may meet a friendly horse. Continue through two more fields, crossing over their stiles. After the second stile turn left down the field, keeping a row of trees and a stream on your left hand side. At the bottom, go over the stile or through the gate and continue along the path to stop at a solitary tree. At the solitary tree, stop and listen to Track 13.

13. Pitfalls of life

Solitary tree

Directions 13

From the solitary tree, follow the path around to the right. Through another gateway, the path turns to the left with a copse on the right and an open field on the left. At the end, go over the stile and turn right onto the farm track. When you reach a bridge over the river, stop and listen to Track 14.

14. The missing river!

Bridge over the River Browney

Directions 14

Retrace your steps a few metres to the bend in the track. Go over the stile on the right and follow the footpath up to the top of the hill. When you reach some ruins, listen to Track 15.

15. Beautiful retreat

Beaurepaire ruins

Directions 15

Retrace your steps back down to the farm track and turn right. Follow the track up hill, past a converted barn and farm house on the left, and after some time past another house on the left. Continue onwards over the stile or through the gate and follow the track.

At the highest point, where the electricity pylons on the left hand side come closest to the track, you are standing above the narrow valley of the Browney. Depending on the state of the vegetation it may be possible to see the river from here; but we are about to leave its valley and return to Durham.

Go through the gateway on the left hand side. Follow the footpath under the pylons and through the field. Just before the lowest point in the track, look left through a gap in the hedge and listen to Track 16.

16. More pitfalls

Dip in the track

Directions 16

Continue along the field path. When you reach a gate and stile on the left, go over and follow the track until it meets the main road. Directly ahead, across the road, is the exit of the path you came along on the outward journey but you aren't going back down it. Cross the road here with care. If you prefer, you can cross at the traffic island to the left. Standing with your back to the Whitesmocks road sign, listen to Track 17.

17. England 1, Scotland 0

Beside the A167 at Whitesmocks

Directions 17

Continue uphill along the main road. Shortly before a bus stop there is a gravel driveway on the left leading to a large house. Don't go down the drive but instead down a path that's squeezed between the drive and the grounds of Durham Johnston Comprehensive School. This path will take you back down into Flass Vale.

Watch out for a gap in the trees on the right that gives a fine view of Durham Cathedral. Continue downhill until you come to a crossroads of paths and listen to Track 18.

18. In the Vale again

Footpath crossing, Flass Vale

Directions 18

From the crossroads, turn right and follow the path through the woods out of Flass Vale. Go down the road through the trees to another crossroads. Take the footpath opposite and to the right. Climb the steep steps up to Red Hills Lane and stop at the entrance to the Durham Miners building. Stop here and listen to Track 19.

19. When the hills ran red

Corner of Red Hills Lane and Flass Street

Directions 19

Turn left down Flass Street. At the bottom turn right into Sutton Street and go under the viaduct. Turn left at the main road, cross over at the traffic island and go under the building back to North Road roundabout. From there you can return to the railway station, bus station or car park that you started from.

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Alan Rose** for creating the walk
- **Jenny Lunn** for editing the walk materials
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- **Durham County Records Office** for kind permission to use an archive image



Britain's landscapes are wonderful.

There is a tremendous variety within our shores – whether in the countryside, in towns and cities or at the seaside. And every landscape has a story to tell about our past and present.

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