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West Tanfield Circular and The Marmion Tower

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Free car park (donations) (SE 269788)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer 298 - Nidderdale
Distance	7.8 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This walk from West Tanfield in North Yorkshire, makes use of some of the Ripon Rowel route at the beginning and end with a “cross country” section in between. The Ripon Rowel walk is a long distance footpath of some 50 miles in the countryside around Ripon.

West Tanfield is a very attractive village and the view from the bridge frequently crops up as a “Yorkshire” picture on calendars etc. The Marmion Tower sits alongside St Nicholas Church. The Tower, built between 1350 and 1400, is in the care of English Heritage and was the gatehouse to a long lost manor house. It is free to look round the Tower. If this was only the gatehouse, one can only wonder how grand the house itself must have been. There is an impressive projecting oriel window from which there are nice views. You need to take care on the spiral staircase. As a matter of interest, did you know that spiral staircases in castles etc almost always go anti-clockwise on the descent so that anyone defending against an intruder has the advantage with a sword.

St Nicholas Church is quite impressive too and contains effigies of Sir John and Lady Elizabeth Marmion. He died in 1387, fighting in Spain and his wife may have lived in Marmion Tower after his death.

The walk follows the River Ure for some of its length. There is some road walking – a short stretch on the main A6108 through North Stainley, though worth it, to see the village ponds and the old toll booth and a mile section on a very quiet road before reaching the tranquil village of Mickley.

The walk is very easy with little in the way of gradient. Good views across to the North York Moors.

The walk starts from the free car park at the West Tanfield Memorial Hall, immediately to the north of the river bridge. Donations requested. West Tanfield is on the A6108 between Ripon and Masham.

The best spot for a picnic is probably about half way round the walk, after you turn off the road beyond Musterfield. There are a few rocks on which to sit by the side of the path.

Start: From the car park (SE 269788), cross the road and walk along Church Street, alongside the Bull Inn. The Marmion Tower is at the end of the street, on the left of the Church.

Retrace your steps to the main road and turn right over the road bridge. Immediately after crossing it, turn left to follow the right hand bank of the River Ure, in the direction of the Ripon Rowel fingerpost.

The path follows the riverbank for about half a mile before joining a tarmac track which leads to the Sleningford Watermill Caravan Park (SE 277784). Turn left and follow the track to the complex of buildings. The old watermill is on the left and chatting to the site manager, I learned that it is probably 18th century and that all the machinery is still in place. It may be restored in the future.

The public footpath exit from the building complex is to the right of the reception. There is a yellow arrow on a post. In the field beyond, keep to the slightly raised, flattened, grassy area to the right. It leads to a walkers' gate after which, turn left.

As you approach the next group of buildings (Sleningford Grange), the footpath goes left through a gate and drops down the banking, to circle clockwise around the property. This is a diversion from the route on my OS map and the route of the old path inside the fencing was still visible.

You will come to another walkers' gate on the right. Go through this and follow the path to the main A6108 at North Stainley (SE 286773). Turn left to walk along the road, now leaving the Ripon Rowel route.

North Stainley has a number of village ponds, the largest on the left having an information board outlining the wildlife you might see. The church St Mary The Virgin was closed when I passed but has intricately carved stonework around the doorway, now protected by a porch.

Continue along the road and turn right at Cock Pit Close (SE 286768), following the Public Bridleway fingerpost. Before you turn however, if you look ahead along the main road, there is a curious small round building you might want to investigate. There is no information about this but it is no doubt an old toll booth.

At the fork in Cock Pit Close, keep right and go through the walkers' gate at the end. Keep to the left of the field beyond and straight ahead on the broad track, once you have gone through the 5 bar gate at the end.

The track climbs very gently and behind you, views of the North York Moors start to appear. Pass a quarry on the left and follow the track as it bends right at 90° (SE 275759) (the public bridleway seems to have been diverted by quarry workings, no longer going through Musterfield). Views of the NY Moors are better along here. At the road, turn left.

You now walk along this quiet road for a mile, forking right at the first junction and ignoring the right turn for Mickley – we are going there but I preferred footpaths to minimise road walking.

Stay on the road until it does a sharp left hand turn. On the bend, turn right following the Public Bridleway fingerpost (SE 262755).

At the end of the first field, go through a gate, marked with a blue bridleway arrow and shortly at a junction of bridleways, go straight ahead ignoring the one going left. There are a few large stones along here where you could perch for a picnic.

Stay on the right hand side of the field and through a gate at the end, to enter a wood. The path meanders along its left hand boundary. Judging from the bulb leaves, it looks as though this will be a riot of blue in the bluebell season, though I was a little early.

Leave the woods through a gate [It has been reported in 2023 that this gate was locked but it is a Right of Way and should not be!] where there is a right hand turn, indicated with a yellow arrow, which you ignore. A few yards further along, note the fence line to the right, descending the slope (SE 250761). Turn right here, keeping to the right of the fence. It drops down, then climbs the banking, going right to a double set of farm gates.

Go through both gates. The continuation of the path runs along the left of the field boundaries, to the left of the gates, for the next two fields. At the bottom of the second field, turn right through a gate, following the yellow arrow (SE 253767).

Over a small stile and ahead is a barn (SE 255766). Proceed to this then turn left, descending a wide track. At the junction of tracks where left clearly goes to the farm buildings, turn right, coming out at the road by Mickley Village Hall. Turn right here.

As the road bends right to leave the village (SE 258770), turn left by a bench, to rejoin the Ripon Rowel walk, clearly signposted. You enter a field and need to keep just to the right of the line of trees running ahead of you, along the middle of the field. Go through the gap in the woods ahead and bear left after the gate.

Stay on the Ripon Rowel walk route, ignoring one right turn by a dilapidated wall and another further on. Keep following the river [it was reported in September 2023 that this section is poorly maintained and obstructed by high bracken. You may wish to take this into account according to the time of year]. You pass an interesting seat cum art installation.

As the river bends very sharply away from you (SE 269780), just by Quarry House Farm, the footpath route crosses two fields diagonally. However to save crops, I walked along the right hand edge of the two fields, then turned left along the boundary of the second to join the broad track to the farm. A right turn here takes

you to the bridge at West Tanfield. Note the precarious steps up it to the old stile – stick to the track!

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