

5

Levens Deer Park

This is one of a series of short walks around the villages of Heversham and Leasgill, near Milnthorpe, Cumbria.

Disclaimer: Walkers are responsible for their own safety, particularly when on public roads, and are asked to observe the country code when crossing farmland.

Starting Point: The Athenaeum village hall on the main village street Leasgill LA7 7ET. The hall has a car park, but this is intended for users of the hall. There is free parking on the surrounding roads.

Terrain: 5.9 km / 3.7 miles. Mix of tarmac, pasture and rough track.

1 From the Athenaeum head north up the village street to the junction with the A6

On the left of the road, a boundary stone stands opposite Leasgill Cottage, indicating Levens to the north, Heversham to the south, probably dating from the turnpike improvements of 1804.

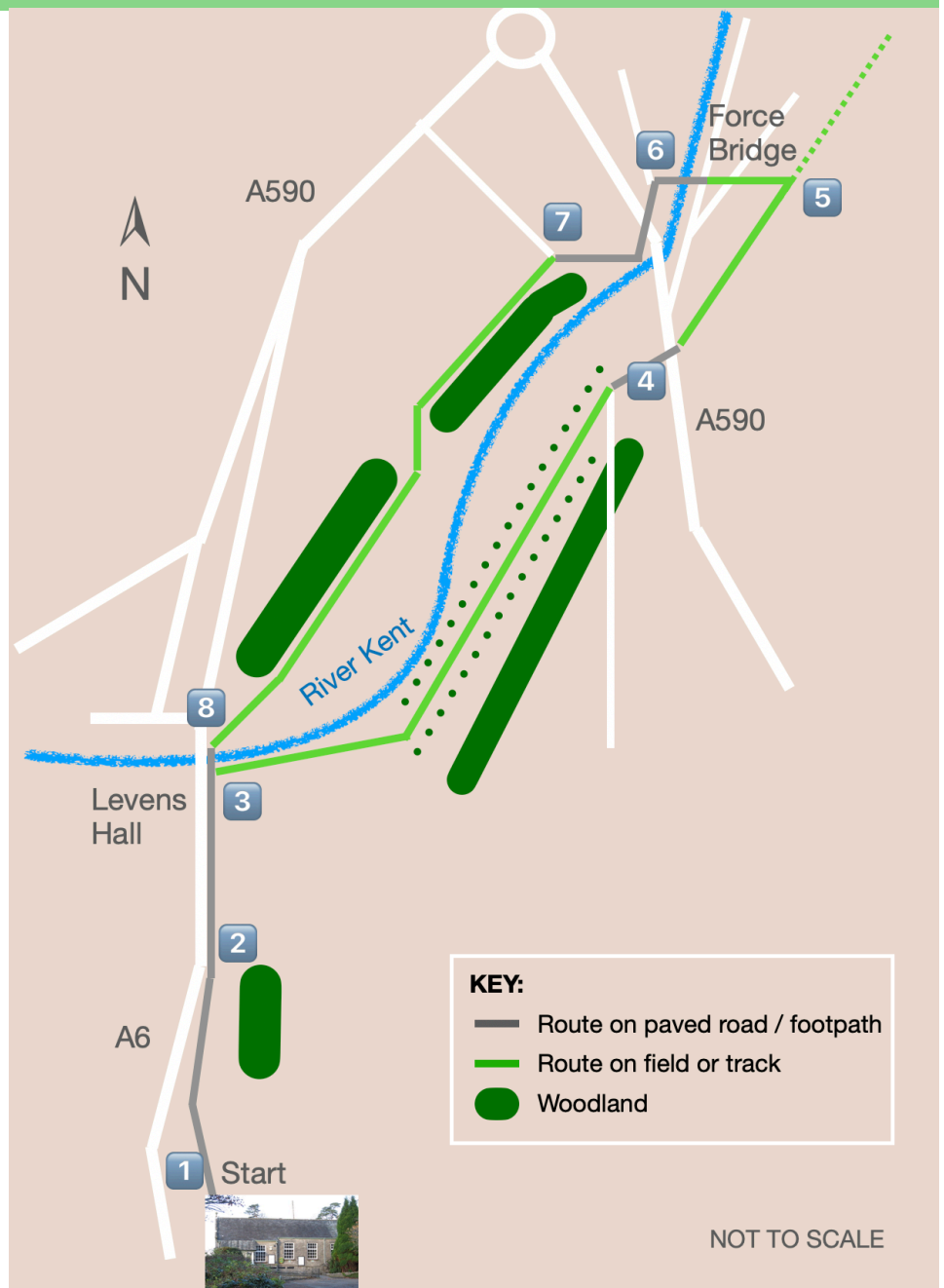
On your right, as you near the A6, stands Eversley, a large house built in the mid 19th century by Frank Argles, a wealthy Liverpool

businessman, who converted a barn and workshop in Leasgill into a penny library, which he named the Athenaeum, after the club in Liverpool of which he was a member.

Eversley is now split into four residences. There is an impressive giant redwood in the grounds, visible from the road.

2 Continue north along the footpath beside the A6 until reaching the bridge over the River Kent

Grievegate Lane, branching off to the right is a former packhorse route from the South Lakes to Kirkby Lonsdale. An ancient milestone with a plaque stands at the foot of the fingerpost.





Levens Hall on the left by the short dual carriageway is an Elizabethan house, home to a branch of the Bagot family. The house is open from April to the start of October, but the Kitchen café is open 7 days a week throughout the year. There is an impressive topiary garden, apparently the oldest in the world, created by Guillaume Beaumont, gardener to James II.

3 Enter Levens Hall deer park through a narrow metal gate at the near side of the bridge, signed to Hincaster Lane, and follow the footpath through the park. The path climbs gradually and swings a little left to enter a long avenue of trees

Dogs are required to be kept on the lead in the park to protect the residents, a herd of rare breed Bagot goats and a herd of fallow deer. You may or may not be lucky enough to see these.

The deer park was laid out by Beaumont at the same time as the gardens, so many of the trees are listed in the Woodland Trust's inventory of ancient and veteran trees. Sadly, gales tend to result in casualties, if only a few large branches.



4 At the far end of the avenue, exit the park over a step stile, turn left and cross the bridge over the A590, to find a footpath ahead of you on the right side of the road, up a few steps and through a kissing gate. The fingerpost reads "to Hawes Bridge via Canal Towpath." Follow the path up a short rise to join the line of the long filled-in Lancaster canal, heading towards a canal bridge.

The Lancaster canal opened as far as Kendal in 1820. Rather than taking a direct route north from Tewitfield to Kendal, it was diverted west through Hincaster tunnel (see Walk 3) to serve the gunpowder mills along the river Kent. The canal closed to commercial traffic in 1947. The ambition is to restore the canal, which would require an aqueduct over the A590.

It is possible to walk the towpath straight ahead under the bridge, over the Sedgwick aqueduct and all the way to Kendal.



5 At the canal bridge, turn left down the hill, cross the lane through two metal kissing gates and exit the further field through a squeeze stile beside a short length of ornamental iron fencing.

To your right, as you come down the slope from the canal bridge, you will see Sedgwick House, built in 1868 by the prolific Lancaster architects Paley and Austin for William Wakefield, banker and owner of W H Wakefield, the gunpowder company. Formerly a school, this is now private accommodation.



6 Cross the bridge and turn left. Continue down Force Lane to pass under the A590 and up steps onto a continuation of the lane.

The River Kent is only 20 miles long, rising in Kentmere and passing through Kendal, hence the town's name. Since the 13th century it has powered mills grinding corn, making bobbins, paper, wool, snuff and gunpowder. Here at Force Bridge the river is in a gorge, resulting in a series of low waterfalls. After rain, the white water is popular with kayakers.

Bassingill mill was the newest of the gunpowder mills on the Kent, built in 1790 and only closed by its then owner, ICI, in 1935. It was an incorporating mill, grinding the mix of sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal in support of the other powder mills a little way upstream. The "black powder" was mainly used for blasting in mines and quarries, rather than for ammunition.

After closure, the timber buildings were burned down, but a few yards down Force Lane you can still see, on the far bank, the waterwheel pit emptying at right angles into the river, with the foundations of a grinding stone on either side.



7 After about 200 yards on the continuation of Force Lane, take the stile on the left by the gate just beyond Random Cottage and Park Head cottage, then head diagonally across the field to a step stile at the corner of the wood. Cross the stile and follow the wall for 350 yards to reach a step stile on the left, taking you back into the deer park.



8 Follow the marked path back through the deer park to reach a small gate and steps by the road bridge across the River Kent, opposite the gates of Levens Hall. Turn left, cross the bridge and return to Leasgill and the Athenaeum.

End of walk