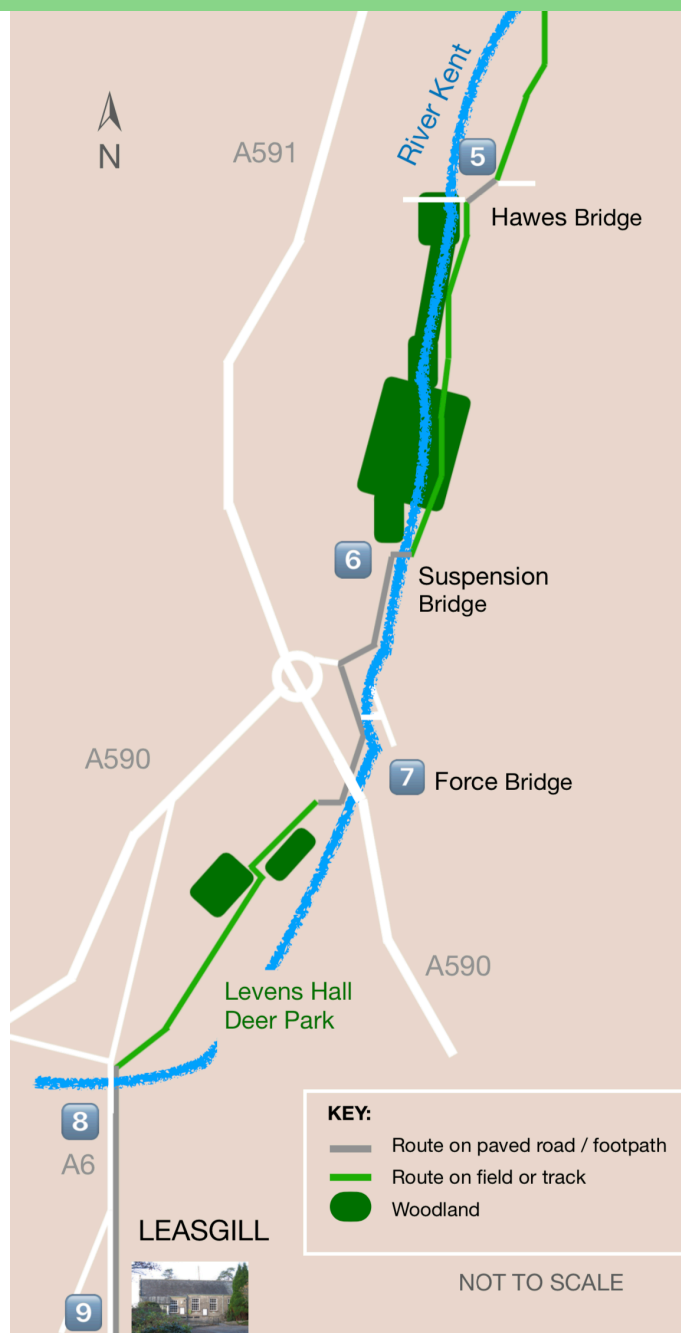
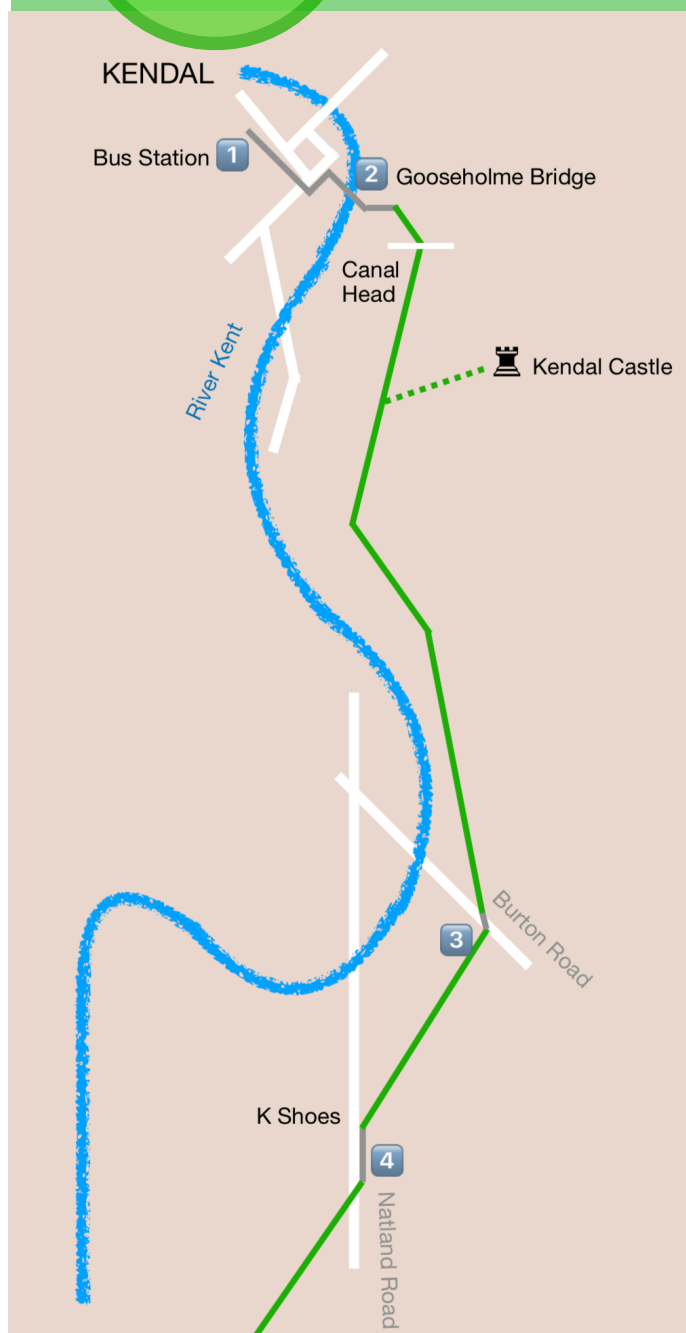


7

Kendal, Canal, River Kent



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: 9.5 km / 6 miles. Bus journey, then mix of tarmac, pasture and track.

Catch the **555 bus** towards Kendal from the stop by the postbox at the bottom end of the Athenaeum car park. This goes every hour around 15 minutes past, but check with the operator - stagecoachbus.com

1 Get off at **Kendal Bus Station**



2 Walk back along Blackhall Road to the river and cross Gooseholme Bridge, turn left along Little Aynam, round a bend to find a footpath on your right through a small wooded park, signed Lancaster and Kendal Castle. As you exit the park, cross Kirkbie Green road and take the foot and cycle path running along the right hand side of the recycling depot. Follow this path on the route of the canal, crossing over and under roads when necessary.

Gooseholme Bridge is a modern pedestrian and cycle bridge which opened in 2022 to replace an earlier bridge damaged in Storm Desmond in 2015, when much of this area was flooded. Following this, a major programme of flood risk management was started along the River Kent, creating new embankments and stone walls through the town.

Canal Head, to your right, as you pass the recycling centre, was the northern terminus of the Lancaster Canal. It is hoped to restore and rewater the canal basin in the future as part of the Kendal Vision improvements. There is even talk of restoring the canal to join the navigable section running south from Tewitfield, making good the sections which were blocked by the M6 and A590 or filled in by farmers.

The Lancaster Canal is quite short - only 41 miles from Preston to Kendal - and is unusual in having no locks. It reached Kendal in 1819. The main cargos were grain, timber, coal, slate, potatoes and gunpowder. Commercial traffic on the canal ceased in 1947.



Kendal Castle. To your left, there are paths leading 200 yards or so up to the ruin of Kendal Castle. This was built in the late 12th century as home of the Lancaster family, Barons of Kendal. It passed into the hands of the Parr family, the most famous of whom was Catherine Parr, the last wife of Henry VIII, but by that time the castle was becoming a ruin. Her grandfather is thought to have been the last Parr to live at the castle.

Bridge 186 is a "change bridge", dating from the time when barges were pulled by a horse. The design of the bridge allowed the horse to cross to the towpath on the other side of the canal, without unhitching the tow rope.



3 After passing behind Kendal Leisure Centre, the canal bridge has been filled in, so you need to cross Burton Road and re-enter the path on the far side.

K Shoes dates from the 1840s and was a major employer in the town. It prospered as a manufacturer and retailer until the 1980s, when it merged with Clark's since foreign competition was making UK labour costs uncompetitive. As the canal path draws parallel with Natland Road, what was K Shoes' last factory and distribution centre stands to your right.

4 The footpath now joins Natland Road. Continue along the road for approximately 80 yards and cross over to find a continuation of the path forking off to the right.

The path is no longer tarmac but a stony track which winds its way along the slopes of the Kent valley. The river itself is behind the line of trees down to your right.



The gorse and heather covered hill beyond Oxenholme village to your left is **The Helm**, which boasts an iron age hill fort constructed around 800BC by the Brigantes tribe (thought to be the origin of the word "brigand"). The hill is grazed by native Fell Ponies.

5 As you near a clump of woodland on the right, at a point where the canal path veers left under a bridge, exit the field onto Hawes Lane through the gate beside the fingerpost. Turn right and go downhill to Hawes Bridge. Cross the stile on your left, just before the bridge, and follow the path at the top of the bank, parallel with the river.

Hawes Bridge is an 18th century stone bridge over the River Kent and grade II listed. This was the site, according to legend, where the body of Sir Charles de Leyburne was washed up, after he had been murdered and thrown into the Kent by his son Roger, who was impatient to inherit the family fortune.

The **River Kent**, down in the gorge below to your right, tumbles over limestone slabs, and produces an amount of white water, especially after rain. During its descent from Kentmere it was used to power a variety of corn, bobbin and paper mills. This section from Hawes Bridge to Force Bridge powered gunpowder mills, the black powder mainly being used for blasting in quarries and mines.

About 400 yards south of Hawes Bridge, the river broadens out for a while and there is a popular spot down on the bank for people to take a break.



Shortly after, the path enters woodland, close to the steep gorge. The far bank was the site of the **Sedgwick gunpowder works**, which was an important customer of the canal. There is very little left on the site, which is now a caravan park.

The path emerges from the woodland to join a track which leads into a large meadow. Ahead you will see **Low Park Wood suspension footbridge**, which was built for the benefit of the employees of the gunpowder works.



6 Cross the suspension bridge and turn left onto the lane and continue for 600 yards, ignoring the turn to the right, until you reach a T-junction. Turn left and walk 200 yards down the road to Force Bridge.

7 Do not cross **Force Bridge** but continue straight ahead down the lane marked as a dead end. At the far end of the lane a path takes you under the huge concrete bridge carrying the A590, up some steps and onto a continuation of the lane.

Force Bridge (from the northern word for a waterfall) is the site of **Bassingill gunpowder mill**. 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. After closure, the timber buildings were burned, 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.

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 into the **Levens Hall deer park**. Follow the way markers through the park.

Dogs must 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 Guillaume Beaumont, gardener to James II, 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.



8 The path brings you down to the river at Levens Bridge, opposite Levens Hall. Exit the park onto the A6, turn left and follow the footpath to the fork, marked Leasgill and Heversham. Follow the village street back to the Athenaeum. **9**

Levens Hall 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 at the same time as the deer park.

Grievegate Lane, a bridleway branching off to the left before the fork into the village, is a former packhorse route from the South Lakes to Crooklands and Kirkby Lonsdale. An ancient milestone with a plaque stands at the foot of the fingerpost.

On your left, soon after you leave 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.

End of walk

Produced by Heversham Parish Council
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