



www.derbysheritagewalks.com
enquiries@derbysheritagewalks.com

Twitter: @DerbysWalks
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Cromford Station to Riber Castle Circular

Distance: 6 miles.
Time: 3 hours.
Difficulty: Moderate – Some steep climbs and descents.
Maps: OS Explorer OL24 – The Peak District: White Peak Area.
Toilets: None on route. Closest toilets are at Cromford Canal Wharf.

This six-mile walk takes in a number of locations and interesting views. It begins at the pretty and well-preserved Cromford Station, before climbing the hillside to the hamlet of Riber. There, it passes Riber Castle, the well-known landmark that dominates the skyline above Matlock, and gives fine views across the town below. The return leg of the walk gives views across Matlock Bath and the Heights of Abraham, before dropping back down into the valley for the return to Cromford Station. Due to the terrain involved, it does include some steep climbs and descents.

The buildings at Cromford Station are somewhat unusual and highly distinctive. The station at Cromford was first opened as a temporary passenger halt on the Derby to Manchester line in 1849 while the Midland Railway and the main landowner at the time, Peter Arkwright, tried to resolve a dispute over the final location for Cromford Station. The Midland Railway wanted the station to be adjacent to the Cromford Canal at the south end of Cromford Meadows with full goods facilities and a new canal wharf there, while Arkwright wanted the goods facilities to be at the existing canal wharf by his family's mills. In 1855, with no agreement reached, the Midland Railway abandoned their plans for the station by the canal, and made the temporary station permanent, although lacking any goods facilities. The buildings they constructed for the new permanent station were of an unusual French-influenced style, and were designed by G.H. Stokes, the son-in-law of Sir Joseph Paxton. In 1995, the station found a measure of fame when it was used for a photoshoot by the rock band Oasis, with one of the pictures used for the cover of their single '*Some Might Say*'.

From the station platform, walk down the ramp to the flight of steps on the left leading down to the main road. At the foot of the steps, turn left along the road. Just beyond the railway bridge over the road, go through the stile on the left, which is waymarked 'Derwent Valley Walk'.

From the stile, the path leads steeply up the hillside, with the wood by Wood End to the right of you. The footpath crosses a path and then continues straight ahead, climbing steeply (and indistinctly at times). If you keep the wood on your right and the field on your left as you climb the hillside, you won't go far wrong on this section of the walk.

After a while, the path reaches a farm road and a wall at grid reference SK306574. To your right, just on the downhill side of the farm road, you can see a raised knoll. This is the site of an old lead-mining shaft, the remains of an industry long associated with Derbyshire at least as far back as far as Roman times, and maybe even earlier than that.

Cross the road and pass through the stile in the wall, ascending diagonally to the right and following the wall up the hill. From here, you can enjoy some fine views back to Cromford and across the Derwent Valley. Continuing up the hill, the path begins to pass between two woods. It then enters the left-hand wood via a stile, and continues upwards through the wood

between a wooded bank on your left and the wall on your right. However, the wall soon turns right, away from the path, at which point you should continue ahead to join a farm track, known as Hearthstone Lane, at grid reference SK311574.

On joining Hearthstone Lane, turn left and follow it along to Hearthstone Farm. As you walk, look out for the rocky boulder field of Bilberry Knoll on the left. To the right, you have fine views towards the Memorial Tower atop Crich Stand, while ahead you will soon have your first views of Riber Castle.

Also known as Smedley's Folly, Riber Castle was built in the mid-19th century by local industrialist John Smedley (1803 – 1874). After it ceased to be the family home, it was used as a boy's school and later as a wildlife park, with the building itself becoming derelict. Since the closure of the wildlife park in September 2000, the building has been restored and converted into luxury apartments.

Having passed through Hearthstone Farm, follow the waymarked footpath to the right through the woods. This leads to open fields which the path crosses via three stiles, eventually joining Carr Lane close to the junction with Riber Lane at grid reference SK308588. Joining Carr Lane, turn left to the junction with Riber Road. At the junction of Carr Lane and Riber Road, look out for the original gateway and castellated lodge building for Riber Castle. Turn right at the junction and walk along Riber Road, keeping a sharp lookout for passing traffic as there are no pavements. As you walk along the road, you will pass Riber Hall Farm, with its early-17th century Gothic-style building.

At the next junction, turn left up the slope, past the new entrance to Riber Castle, and follow the signed footpath for Matlock through the trees to emerge onto the open hillside beyond. This hillside, known as The Acres, provides excellent views over the town of Matlock, and is the perfect spot for a relaxing refreshment halt. Continue on down the hillside to the junction of paths at grid reference SK303591. Here, take the left-hand path across the slope to join Riber Road at the apex of the sharp uphill bend in the hamlet of Ward's End, at grid reference SK302589.

On joining Riber Road in Ward's End, turn left and climb the steep hill, which reaches a gradient of 1 in 5 in places. Please take great care along this road, as it is narrow, winding, and has no pavements. The road can also be quite busy, as it forms the main access route to Riber Castle. As the trees lining the road begin to thin at the top of the hill, take the marked footpath to the right (at grid reference SK303586), keeping the wall to your left. This footpath provides you with fine views to the right across the Derwent Valley, looking out over Matlock Bath to the Heights of Abraham beyond.

Having passed through a stile, the path bears right to descend the hillside, passing through two more stiles to a mature wood, entered via another stile. In the summer, the bracken and scrub along this part of the route can be neck-high, with some encroaching on the path, so be prepared for this.

After passing through yet another stile in the woods, the path eventually joins Starkholmes Road via a squeeze stile at grid reference SK302579. Turn left along Starkholmes Road and follow it down the hill for approximately half a mile to its junction with Lea Road and Mill Road, adjacent to Cromford Bridge. As this road is a well-known shortcut for cars travelling between Cromford and Matlock, it can be surprisingly busy, so great care is needed when walking along here, and you should always walk on the right to face the oncoming traffic.

At the junction at the base of the hill, a left turn will return you to the start point of the walk at Cromford Station. However, if you have the time and inclination, a slight diversion will provide some additional interest. Turn right, following the sign for Cromford and Wirksworth, and cross the river on Cromford Bridge.

On the far side of the bridge, on the downstream parapet, you will see a weathered carved inscription in the stonework. This somewhat cryptic inscription commemorates the event in

June 1697 when the horse ridden by Benjamin Haywood of Bridge House in Cromford was spooked while crossing the bridge and jumped over the parapet. The fact that both horse and rider survived the resultant plunge into the river below was seen as something of a miracle, and so the inscription was added to the bridge to commemorate the event.

Attached to the bridge close to the inscription, and best seen from Cromford Meadows, are the ruined remains of an old 15th-century chantry chapel, where travellers could stop to say a prayer before crossing the bridge.

The small square building with the pyramidal roof was built in the 1790s by Sir Richard Arkwright as part of the estate of Willersley Castle, the grand stately home he was building at Cromford with the huge profits from his cotton mills in the village. This was used as a fishing lodge, and was modelled on the similar one built in Beresford Dale for Isaac Walton. It was later used as a house until the 1930s, but has now returned to its original use, being used for storage by the local fishing club. Like Walton's lodge, it carries the inscription 'Piscatoribus Sacrum' over the door.

Having taken in these three often-ignored sights, retrace your steps over the bridge and follow Lea Road back to Cromford Station and the start of the walk.

Useful Information:

Cromford is very easy to reach via public transport, with hourly trains from Derby and Matlock (every two hours on Sundays), and regular bus services from Derby, Belper, Ripley, Matlock, Buxton and Manchester. Most buses drop off in the village, about ten minutes walk from Cromford Station, although a bus from Ripley does drop off by the Station itself. Information on public transport can be found online at www.travelineeastmidlands.co.uk/.

A very limited amount of pay-and-display car parking is available at Cromford Station. The postcode for sat-navs to get to the station is DE4 5JJ. Additional pay-and-display parking is available nearby on Cromford Meadows, at the Canal Wharf, and across the road at Cromford Mill. The postcode for finding all three via sat-nav is DE4 3RQ.

Hot and cold refreshments are available from the cafés on Cromford Canal Wharf and inside Cromford Mill. The village of Cromford has a number of very good pubs, plus shops and a fish and chip shop.

There are no banking facilities in Cromford. The closest free-to-use cashpoint is at the Pavilion in Matlock Bath, while the closest actual banks are in Matlock.