



2.5 kilometres / 1 hour

Accessibility – Mostly unmade paths with a number of slopes and therefore not suitable for wheelchairs, children's buggies, etc.

# Beckfoot and back along the River Aire in Bingley

Our walk starts at Bingley train station. Parking is available next to it in the Wellington Street pay and display car park (BD16 2NB)

To reach the river head up to Main Street and across the Town Square. You will find the route down to the river at the rear of the Queen Street car park. Both the flight of steps and sloping path lead down to the river. At the bottom turn left.

A throstle is a traditional colloquial name for a song thrush.

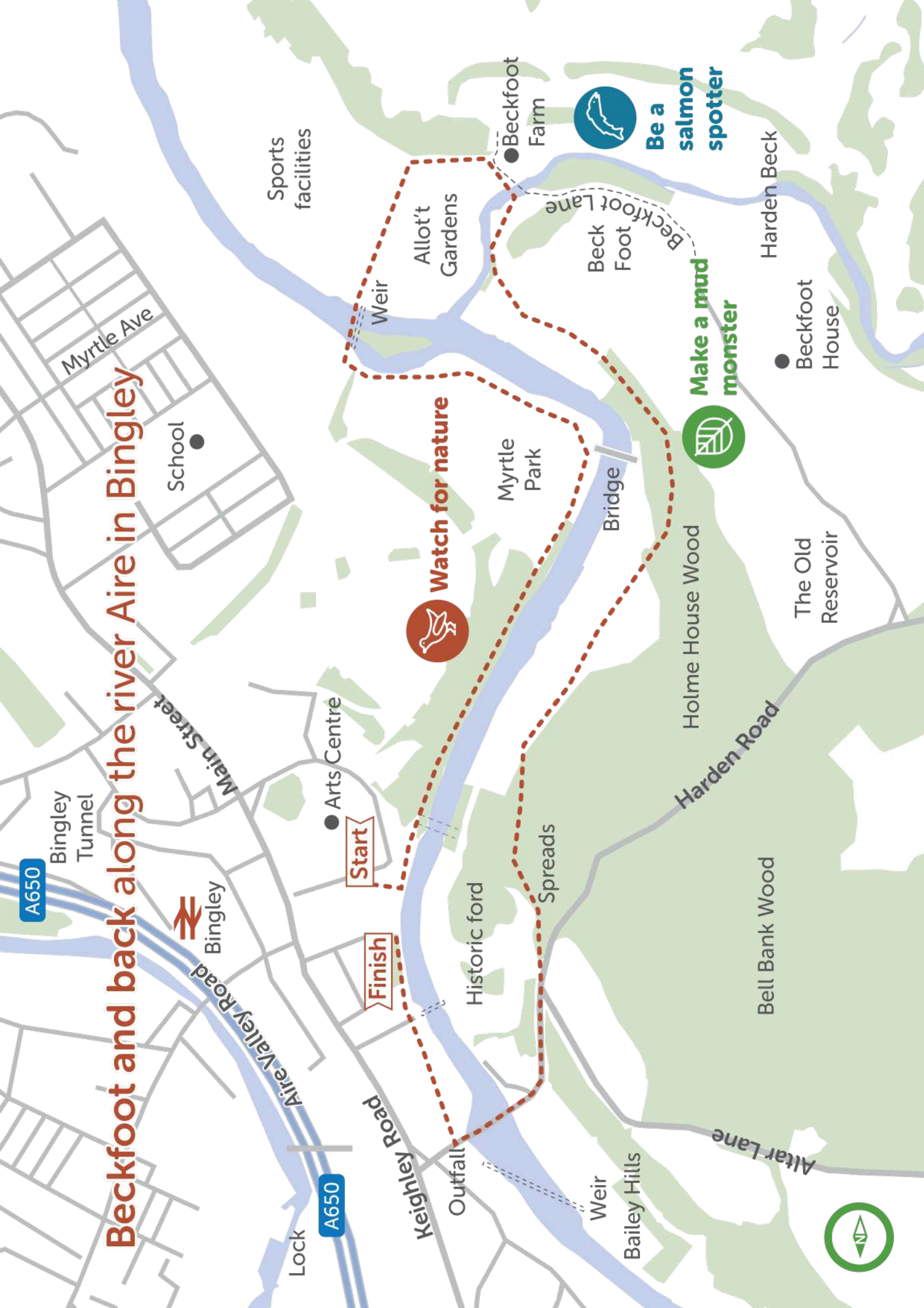
"That's the wise thrush; he sings  
each song twice over,  
Lest you should think he never  
could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture!"

Thomas Browning

Can you spot the art  
work in the path at  
your feet?



# Beckfoot and back along the river Aire in Bingley





Visitors for many generations will have enjoyed this promenade along the river to Myrtle Park. This should take you about ten minutes. Along this stretch of river you may spot wildlife like herons and cormorants.

When you get to Myrtle Park you are going to take the second bridge across the River Aire.

Myrtle Park was purchased in 1908 for the enjoyment of local town people. The Bingley Show has been held here since 1920. In its heyday it was one of the largest one day agricultural shows in the North attracting over 25,000 visitors.

As you pass the first bridge, notice the inscription on the bridge. The Festival of Britain gave Britons a feeling of recovery and progress after the Second World War. It aimed to promote better-quality design as British towns and cities were rebuilt. The Festival also celebrated the centenary of the 1851 Great Exhibition. Imagine the excitement of the children of Myrtle Park Primary school as they watched this bridge being craned into place.

Take the second bridge across the River Aire and follow the footpath past the allotments to Beckfoot Lane. Turn right along it.



If you stand on either bridge you will no doubt see fish below. If you are fortunate you may see otters on this section of river at dawn or dusk.

Terriers along this stretch of River Aire were bred with Otterhounds to enhance their scenting ability and hunting skills around water. These dogs were known as Waterside or Bingley Terriers, later to be named as the Airedale Terrier.

Thankfully, such persecution is now a distant memory. The river's much improved water quality has seen fish and the river life that feed on them multiply.

This illustration taken from the 1881 book "The Illustrated Book of the Dog" shows Thunder, a Bingley Terrier and one of the founders of the Airedale Terrier breed.







Beckfoot Bridge and ford  
© Joe Regan (cc-by-sa/2.0)

The bridge stands on one of the oldest roads in the district through the forest from Cottingley. The current packhorse bridge replaced a wooden one in 1723 for the princely sum of £10 (or approximately £1,160 today).

The 1848 book, *Topographical Dictionary of England*, described "a powerful Harden Beck, which abounds with trout... and propels the machinery of three worsted mills in which the greater part of the population is employed." Beckfoot Mill is in fact the lowest of six mills that stood on Harden Beck. All are now converted to private residences.



Various spellings of Harden Beck have appeared over time including Heredene, Heredenbroc and Hardenbrok which translates as either Rock Valley or Hare Valley Beck.

Pause to cool your feet in the ford at Beckfoot before heading on. The footpath is through a stile and down a step to your right once you have crossed the packhorse bridge.

The path goes uphill initially with Harden Beck on your right. Then continue on uphill to the house (Hesp Hills) and follow the footpath signs in front of the building and through a gap in the wall into the woods. Continue on through the woods and when the path descends down you will reach a junction/crossroads, take the path down to the right to reach a grassy area in front of the Festival of Britain bridge

In spring you will find the floor of this beech woodland carpeted in wild garlic and bluebells.





This walk is part of the Developing the Natural Aire programme. This partnership programme between the Environment Agency and The Aire Rivers Trust is reconnecting sixty kilometres of your river with fish passes to enable wildlife to thrive and Atlantic salmon to return.

We are hopeful that the gravel beds found in the bottom of Harden Beck will provide the ideal habitat for them to lay their eggs. Salmon will have travelled from the Atlantic Ocean around Greenland to lay their eggs.

We run volunteer programmes to care for the river and school visits to educate future generations about the importance of our great river.



Atlantic salmon caught and returned by Environment Agency in the River Aire below Leeds in 2010

Lighter stones in a river bed showing where spawning salmon have cleaned away the silt to spawn





Turn left at the bottom of the steps. A woodland track on the far side of the clearing will lead you up to Harden Road (opposite Altar Lane). Turn right here and head down the hill to Ireland Bridge.

There has been a bridge on this spot since medieval times. The current one was built in 1686 with the parapet added later in the 1700's. Ireland Bridge takes its name from Irish immigrants who crossed the river to drink at "The Irish Inn." this was a local name for The Brown Cow. Much of their new home, Bingley, is an island separated from the rest of the valley by the river and canal.

Ireland Bridge  
© David Dx (cc-by-sa/2.0)





Visitors to the river could hire rowing boats for the day from landing stages on both banks upstream of the weir. This included the rear garden of a pub on Old Main Street.

The Ring Of Bells pub is long gone. It closed in 1929 and turned into the Church House for All Saints Church across the road. If you stand and look over the weir you will see that much of this river scene remains unchanged.

To find the riverside path look for a footpath sign on your right after crossing Ireland Bridge. It leads you down an alleyway to the river.

Row boats on the River at  
Bingley in 1923 © Francis Frith  
Collection



Where path joins the riverbank look out on your left for a sign of the wall identifying Ailsa Well. By Victorian times, the use of the river for drinking water was hazardous. The town's water closets (toilets) and dyes from its woollen industry flowed into the river. Hempels Fat Refiners, replaced by the riverside flats, would have made this stretch of river a stinky place to visit.

The towns residents turned to springs for their clean water. Ailsa Well, named after Alice Hird who lived in the adjoining property, was noted to produce water that was 'uncommonly hard' but excellent for cooking vegetables.

You will find Ailsa Well across the yard and down a short flight of steps. It still has water in it.





People have crossed the river at Bingley since Saxon times. In summer, when the water is low, you can see the stones of the old ford in the riverbed behind you at the bottom of Ferrand Street leading up to Main Street. No one knows exactly how old these stones are but the crossing could be up to 1000 years old.

Walk along the riverbank. End your walk by returning to Bingley's Main Street up the footpath you first set out on.

Thank you to Barney Lerner from Friends of Bradford Becks for helping write this walk.

Transport links: Pay & display car parks and train links to Bradford and Skipton can be found off Main Street in Bingley.

Refreshments: The Brown Cow is locally renowned for serving great beers and food and a cafe can be found in Myrtle Park.



With support from



Can you unscramble the names of the fish  
decorating the railings at the end of the walk?



i pek



ragingly



amber



**Top thing to  
do by the river**

**Be a salmon  
spotter**



We have produced a number of  
family activity postcards to  
accompany our walks

Why not try one the next time  
you take in some fresh River  
Aire?

Find these and lots,  
lots more about  
our project at  
[www.dnaire.org.uk](http://www.dnaire.org.uk)

Can you help us spot Atlantic salmon? You may see fish leaping  
at weirs. Remember to take care near weirs and never cross any  
barriers. The fish pass at Leeds Industrial Museum Armley Mills and  
Robert's Park in Saltaire can be viewed safely from the path.

Take a walk along the upper Aire valley to look for signs of spawning.  
You may find them in Gill Beck (Baildon), Harden Beck (Bingley) and  
the shallow river near Gargrave. Look for lighter areas of gravel in the  
riverbed where a mating pair of salmon have created a nest or "redd"  
to lay their legs. Be very careful when wading not to step on these.

After their 8000 kilometre journey to mate many salmon die. If you are  
very lucky, you may find one washed up on a riverbank. If you find signs of  
spawning in the Aire please email photos to [contact@airerivertrust.org.uk](mailto:contact@airerivertrust.org.uk)



Find out more at  
[www.dnaire.org.uk](http://www.dnaire.org.uk)

