

The River Wharfe

The source of the River Wharfe is in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, where it rises off Carboniferous limestone at Beckermonds, at the confluence of Green Field Beck and Oughtershaw Beck in Langstrothdale.

The river flows swiftly past Kettlewell, Grassington, Bolton Abbey, Addingham, Ilkley, Burley-in-Wharfedale, Otley, Wetherby and Tadcaster through pasture land, but the last 16km (10 miles) below Tadcaster are tidal with a gentler flow.

Here the river is more typical of a lowland river where flood embankments protect adjacent land. After 130km (81 miles), the Wharfe joins the Ouse near Rhythor.

For much of its length it is the county boundary between West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire. The name Wharfe may derive from the Old English 'weorf' or Old Norse 'hverfr' meaning "winding river". Or it could come from the Saxon 'guerf' meaning 'swift'.

The Wharfe at Otley

The river Wharfe flows through the town of Otley. There are 2 methods of crossing the river – the road bridge which is thought to be about 800 years old (a pedestrian walkway was added to the side) and the White Bridge in the park which is for pedestrians only.

The river is known to flood in the winter and frequently overflows into Wharfemeadows park. Flood defences were added to the northern side of the river in 2021 and were successful in stopping flooding of the houses on Farnley Lane.



The river Wharfe is now predominately used for tourism and leisure. People fish, swim, walk alongside and canoe on the river.

