

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 21 Maize Beck from Cow Green

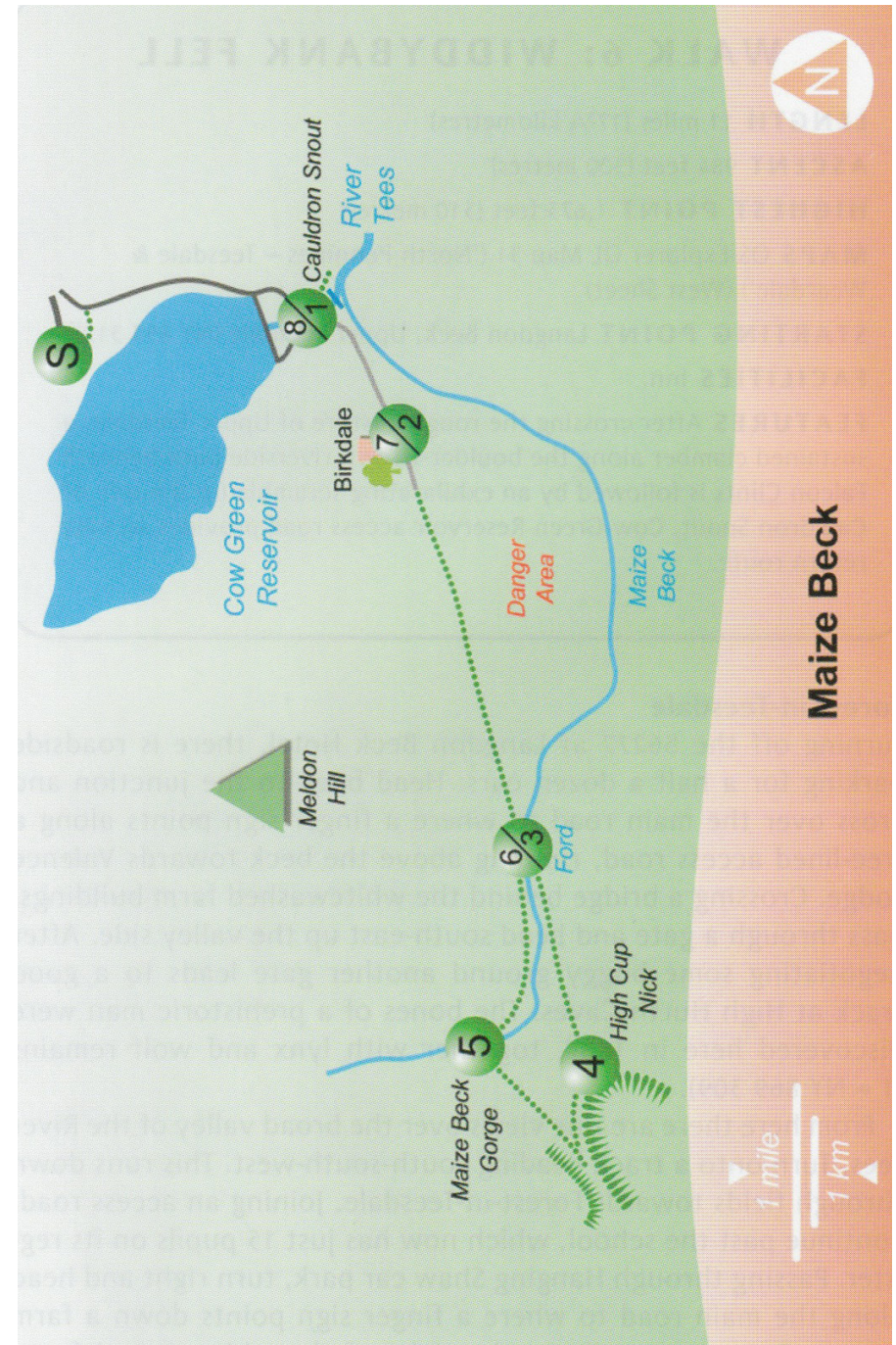
The walk combines alternative Pennine Way routes - one following an old miners' track, the other crossing rough moorland terrain. In addition to Cow Green Reservoir, the great gorge of High Cup is once again a highlight. Note that if Maize Beck is in flood, a linear route must be followed.



- Length: 14¾ miles (23¾ kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,280 feet (390 metres)
- Highest Point: 1,936 feet (590 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Maps 19 ('Howgill Fells & Upper Eden Valley') (Upper Eden Valley [North] Sheet) and 31 ('North Pennines - Teesdale & Weardale') (West Sheet)
- Starting Point: Cow Green Reservoir car park, Upper Teesdale (NY 811 309)
- Facilities: Inn and Langdon Beck.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-21-maize-beck-cow-green>

Widdybank Fell Nature Trail

Cow Green Reservoir is reached by turning off the B6277 at Langdon Beck Hotel, 7 miles (11 kilometres) north-west of Middleton-in-Teesdale, and following an unclassified road for 3 miles (5 kilometres). Given its remoteness, the car park is surprisingly popular. Heading back along the road, a sign points along a gravel path leading to an access road. This is followed south for 1½ miles (2½ kilometres) to the dam. Across the reservoir is the heather-clad dome of Meldon Hill, while Cross Fell and its neighbours form the skyline. Straight ahead is the long ridge of Mickel Fell. Outcrops of sugar limestone can be identified beside the road. A



meteorological station was placed here when the reservoir was built - answering fears that such a large body of water would raise temperatures and displace the rare flora.

Cow Green Reservoir

Cow Green Reservoir was built 1967-71 by the Tees & Cleveland Water Board to meet the needs of industrial Teesside. The dam itself is 1,875 feet (572 metres) long and 82 feet (25 metres) high. The high water mark is 1,603 feet (489 metres) above sea level - a tad lower than England's highest reservoir (Chew Reservoir in the Dark Peak). Many conservationists opposed the construction of the reservoir, which submerged 770 acres (312 hectares) of rare habitat. By way of compensation, the access road was made available as a nature trail.

Passing the concrete dam, the access road heads downhill. The source of the deafening roar coming from the foot of the dam is the River Tees, which here gushes through pipes. At times the reservoir overflows and water spills over the face of the dam. The Pennine Way joins from the left, just before the river is crossed (1 = NY 815 288). Beneath the bridge the river hurries excitedly towards Cauldron Snout, which although not visible is just a short way downstream. The peaty froth seen floating on the surface of the river recalls the tale of a green-haired mermaid called Peg Powler, who was said to prey upon children who ventured too close to the water. The froth is known locally as 'Peg Powler's Suds'. Here it is necessary to switch maps, taking up Sheet 19.

Birkdale

A short way along a stony track, a sign warns walkers against attempting to ford Maize Beck when in flood. Passing a barn, a short deviation over the rushy grazing on the left leads down towards the confluence of the River Tees and Maize Beck, from where there are stunning views of Cauldron Snout and Falcon Clints. Continuing along the track, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning down towards the Birkdale farm. Despite the presence of a few mature broadleaf trees that have somehow managed to

grow here, this is a desperately bleak place (2 = NY 804 279).

From here an old miners' track runs 2½ miles (4 kilometres) to the ford. A finger sign shows the Pennine Way crossing Grain Beck by a footbridge, with a rough track running over boggy ground towards the remains of Moss Shop. MoD warning signs mark the boundary of Warcop Training Area. From here the route heads west-south-west, skirting the edge of the danger area as it crosses bleak moorland. Height is slowly gained as the track runs along a stony causeway, then over peaty ground, with occasional cairns confirming the route. Heading down into the trough of Maize Beck, the track continues along the north bank. Side-streams cascade down through channels where the bare limestone has been blackened by peat. A couple of marker stones indicate the point at which Maize Beck is forded (3 = NY 768 268).

Warcop Training Area

Warcop Training Area was established in 1942 as a tank gunnery range, covering 39 square miles (101 square kilometres). Roman Fell provides the back-drop to the firing ranges, and Little Fell is still littered with shell cases. There are significant access issues, and the numerous warning signs marking the boundary intrude upon what is otherwise a wilderness.

High Cup Plain

If the beck is in flood, the north bank must be followed to the bridge at Maize Beck Gorge - in which case this becomes a linear route. Assuming that the beck can be forded, the miners' track is followed for a further 1½ miles (2¼ kilometres). The track gains height slowly as it veers away from the beck, with moss-covered cairns confirming the route. Running onto High Cup Plain, it is not unusual to encounter grazing horses during summer. A marker stone indicates a sharp turn towards High Cup Nick, with the head of the gorge once again providing a good place to stop for lunch (4 = NY 746 262).

Continuing around the head of the gorge, as the Pennine Way heads down

towards Dufton we turn north-east along a faint path running beneath the scree-covered scarp of Dufton Fell. Small cairns confirm the route, which runs past a 'rockery' of limestone outcrops. Over a rushy area, the footbridge at Maize Beck Gorge is reached (5 = NY 749 270). Here the beck has cut a deep channel, with walls of peat-blackened limestone that are home to the rare rose-root. Crossing the bridge, the gorge is followed south-east. From here there is 1¼ miles (2¼ kilometres) of difficult terrain to negotiate. As well as crossing boggy ground, one or two side-streams can themselves be quite deep. The miners' track is eventually rejoined at the ford (6 = NY 768 268).

Cow Green Reservoir

From here simply retrace your steps back to the starting point, a total of 5½ miles (9 kilometres). Birkdale Farm is a welcome sight after travelling through such inhospitable country (7 = NY 804 279). Just before re-crossing the River Tees (8 = NY 815 288), it is possible to turn onto a tarmac track heading up to the west end of the dam, from where a walkway runs along the top to rejoin the access road.

This walk is reproduced with permission from Circular Walks on the Pennine Way by Kevin Donkin, published by Frances Lincoln.