

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 22 Cauldron Snout and Falcon Clints, Upper Teesdale

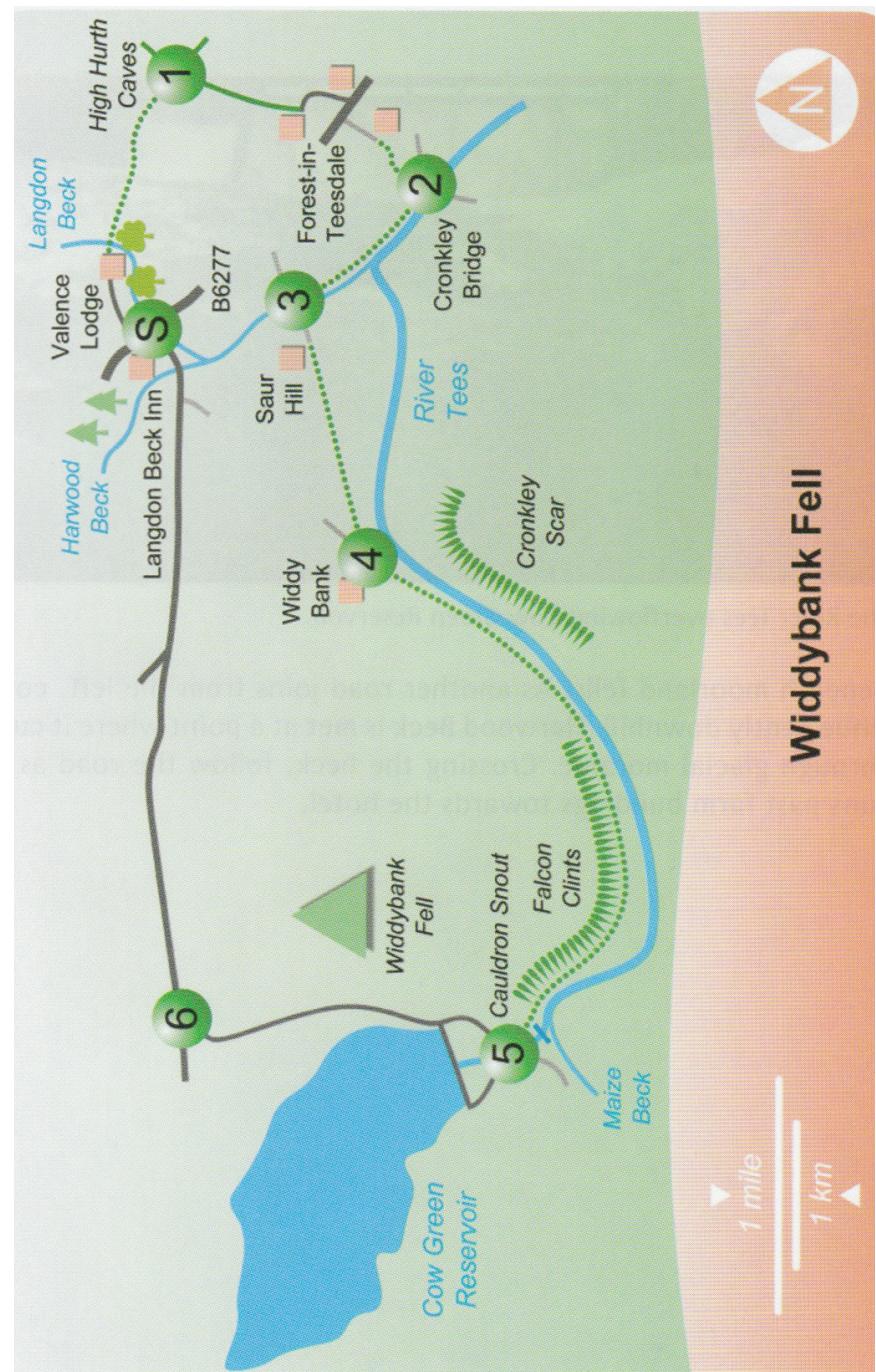
The walk combines alternative Pennine Way routes - one following an old miners' track, the other crossing rough moorland terrain. In addition to Cow Green Reservoir, the great gorge of High Cup is once again a highlight. Note that if Maize Beck is in flood, a linear route must be followed.

Length:	11 miles (17¾ kilometres)
Ascent:	984 feet (300 metres)
Highest Point:	1,673 feet (510 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Map 31 ('North Pennines - Teesdale & Weardale') (West Sheet)
Starting Point:	Langdon Beck, Upper Teesdale (NY 853 312)
Facilities:	Inn.
Website:	http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-22-cauldron-snout-and-falcon-clints-upper-teesdale

Forest-in-Teesdale

Turning off the B6277 at Langdon Beck Hotel, there is roadside parking for a half a dozen cars. Heading back to the junction, cross over the main road to where a finger sign points along a tree-lined access road, running above the beck towards Valence Lodge. Crossing a bridge behind the whitewashed farm buildings, pass through a gate and head south-east up the valley side. After negotiating some boggy ground another gate leads to a good track at High Hurth Caves, where the bones of a prehistoric man were discovered in 1887, together with lynx and wolf remains (1 = NY 869 309).

From here there are fine views over the broad valley of the River Tees.



Turning onto a track heading south-south-west, this runs down through fields towards Forest-in-Teesdale. Joining an access road, continue past the school, which now has just 15 pupils on its register. Passing through Hanging Shaw car park, turn right and head along the main road to where a finger sign points down a farm access. Over a gap stile to the right of the whitewashed farmhouse, a faint path crosses paddocks before turning down towards a rushy mire. Joining a hardcore track heading towards Cronkley Bridge, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning onto a path running along the north bank of the River Tees (2 = NY 862 294).

The River Tees

The stony path narrows as it runs beneath a steep slope. Arriving at the confluence with Harwood Beck, the tributary is followed upstream towards Saur Hill Bridge (3 = NY 855 302), where markings indicate the distances to Kirk Yetholm (121 miles) and Edale (149 miles). Crossing the beck, a hardcore track is joined. Leaving this before it reaches a farmhouse, head up to a step stile and continue west-south-west over rough pasture, with sections of boardwalk providing passage of boggy ground. The dolerite cliffs of Cronkley Scar dominate the scene as the River Tees comes back into view. Dropping to the riverbank, continue towards Widdy Bank farm (4 = NY 837 298).

Widdy Bank Farm

Close to Widdy Bank Farm is an outcrop of Silurian slate that once provided material for pencils known locally as ‘widdies’. The farm dates back to 1698, and now serves as a station for the management of the Moor House & Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve. This is England’s largest reserve, extending to 29 square miles (74 square kilometres). It is managed by English Nature, which owns the western half and has management agreements with landowners covering the remainder.

From here a grassy track runs beneath the flanks of Widdybank Fell. Passing through a gate, the way ahead suddenly pinches-out, with a narrow path weaving through boulders that run right down to the water's

edge. As the valley floor broadens and turns boggy, there are sections of boardwalk. However, the route soon degenerates into a horizontal scramble over slippery boulders. Above are the shattered dolerite cliffs of Falcon Clints, which were once home to golden eagles and may still be frequented by kestrels and peregrine falcons. Juniper grows in abundance hereabouts, and only the MoD warning signs on the far side of the valley detract from the scene. Passing the confluence with Maize Beck and continuing around a bluff, Cauldron Snout comes suddenly into view. The scramble up the side of the falls necessitates care, with a puzzle of dolerite blocks forming giant steps. Upon reaching the top, a path leads to the reservoir access road (5 = NY 815 288).

*Always my boy of wish returns
To those peat-stained deserted burns
That feed the Wear and Tyne and Tees
And, turning states to strata, sees
How basalt long oppressed broke out
In wild revolt at Cauldron Snout.*

Wystan Hugh Auden, ‘New Year Letter’.

Cauldron Snout

At Cauldron Snout the River Tees cuts through the Great Whin Sill, cascading 200 feet (61 metres) down a series of eight cataracts. The route up the side of the falls is one of the most perilous sections of the Pennine Way, the slippery rock being kept wet with spray. There have been several fatalities, and a ghost called the Singing Lady is supposed to inhabit the area. According to the tale, she was a Victorian farm girl who drowned herself here when an affair with a lead-miner ended.

Cow Green Reservoir

It is here that we leave the Pennine Way, with the final part of the walk being on tarmac - 4 miles (6¾ kilometres) back to the starting point. Heading up the access road, this is followed north as it runs along the

shoreline. Looking across the reservoir, a line of butts can be seen marching up the slopes of Meldon Hill, while the heather moorland of Widdybank Fell is itself thick with grouse. Eventually an unclassified road is joined (6 = NY 817 309).

This runs over pock-marked terrain revealing the area's lead-mining past. Snow poles provide an indication of the altitude - this being the highest point on the walk. As the road starts downhill, ahead are fine views of Upper Teesdale, with the characteristic whitewashed farms dotted about a landscape of walled pasture suspended beneath moorland fells. As another road joins from the left, continue gently downhill. Harwood Beck is met at a point where it cuts through glacial moraine. Crossing the beck, follow the road as it runs past farm buildings towards the hotel.

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