

# Walk the Way in a Day

## Walk 26 Bowes to the Tan Hill Inn

A long walk, once again combining alternative Pennine Way routes. An expanse of open moorland with some boggy ground leads to Tan Hill Inn - Britain's highest pub. Navigation is fairly straightforward and the return route is on good tracks and quiet roads.



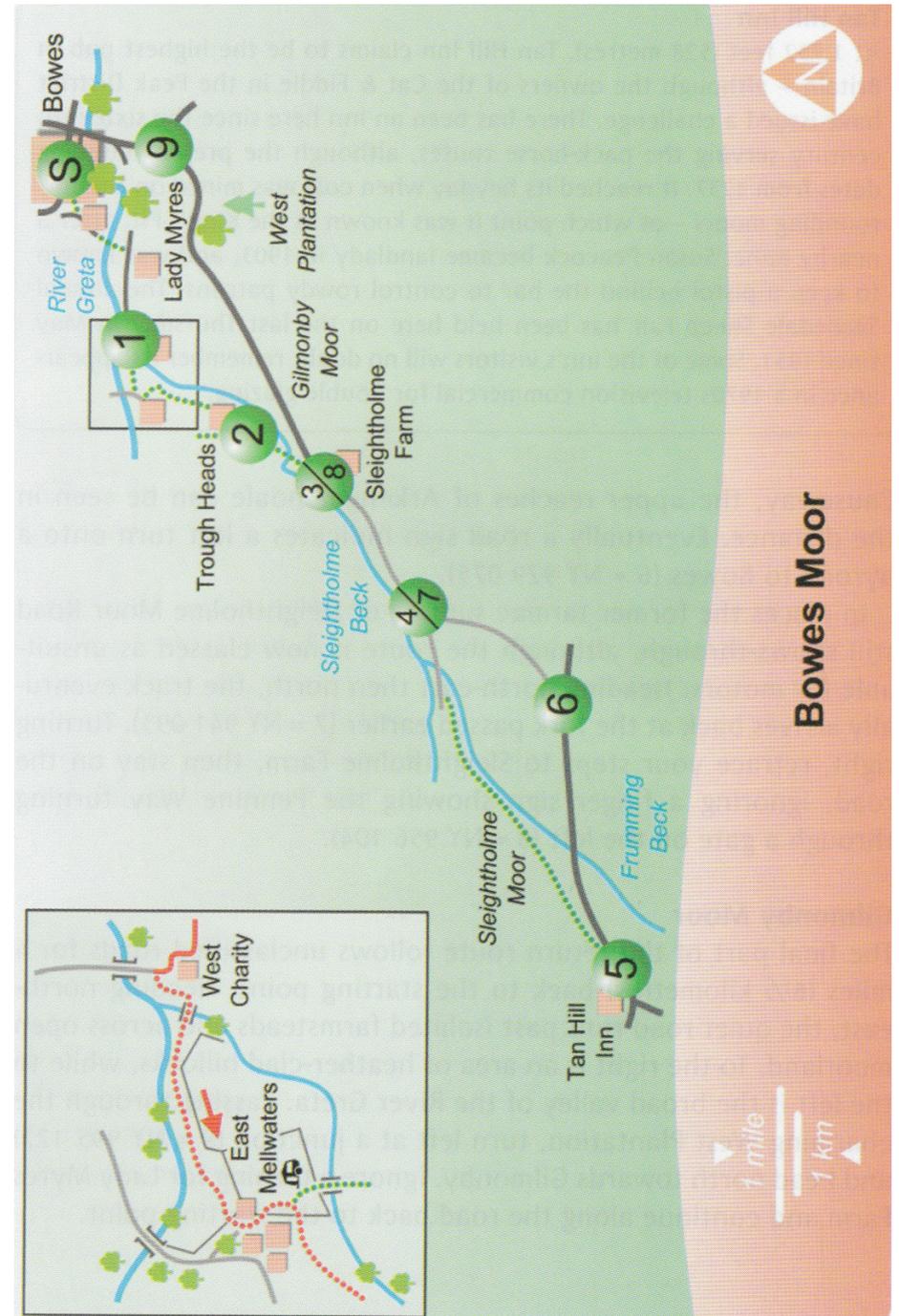
- Length: 17½ miles (28 kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,263 feet (385 metres)
- Highest Point: 1,759 feet (536 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 30 ('Yorkshire Dales - Northern & Central Areas') (North Sheet)
- Starting Point: Bowes village centre (NY 994 135)
- Facilities: Inn at Bowes.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-26-bowes-tan-hill-inn>

### River Greta and Sleightholme Beck

On the front street, next to St. Giles' Church, a sign points down a lane leading to Bowes Castle. From here, the Pennine Way runs across fields before turning onto a walled lane leading to Swinholme farm. Passing the farmhouse, follow a rough track heading down to the point where the River Greta is crossed by a footbridge above a limestone weir. Joining an access road at Lady Myres farm, this is followed west as it runs across pasture towards West Charity farm (1 = NY 973 128).

### Bowes Castle

The Norman keep at Bowes was built by Alan, Earl of Richmond, in 1087 to guard the east end of the Stainmore Pass, just as Brough Castle covered the western approach. It was built using stones taken



*from Lavatris fort, and at 53 feet (16 metres) high the ruins still dominate the village.*

Passing around the farm buildings, Sleightholme Beck is crossed by a footbridge. Leaving the Pennine Way at East Mellwaters farm, in a field used as a campsite a gate leads to a bridleway running south-west, parallel to the tree-lined gorge of Sleightholme Beck. Arriving at Trough Heads farm, the Pennine Way is rejoined at the point where the alternative routes of the 'Bowes Loop' meet (2 = NY 962 114). Continuing south-west, the path is easy to follow as it runs beside a drystone wall. Switching to the other side of the boundary, a ramp-like track leads down to the valley floor, then contours around a bluff to arrive at a footbridge (Intake Bridge). Crossing the beck, continue over fields until a gate leads to an unclassified road (3 = NY 956 104).

### **Sleightholme Moor**

The next part of the walk follows the Pennine Way for 4¾ miles (7½ kilometres) over Sleightholme Moor to Tan Hill Inn. Turning right, head along the road as it passes Sleightholme farm. Climbing steeply, the road degenerates into a hardcore track as it continues parallel to the beck. There are fine views over the surrounding moorland. The heather is thick with grouse, which when startled call-out like mopeds being started on a cold morning! Arriving at a fork in the track, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way continuing south-west (4 = NY 941 093).

### **Moorland Management**

*The Pennine moors are not the untamed wilderness that they might seem. They are in fact carefully managed for grouse shooting, with small areas of heather burnt-off every 15 years or so to encourage the growth of young shoots that attract the birds. The North Pennines AONB includes nearly a quarter of the heather moorland in England and Wales, and 85% of England's population of the rare black grouse. Other birds such as the lapwing, curlew and golden plover are more common, and add a lively dimension to the moors. Sheep numbers are maintained at a level that prevents over-grazing.*

*An unfortunate side-effect of moorland management is the dearth of natural predators - in particular, stoats and weasels - which are culled to protect the grouse chicks. The result is a plague of rabbits, which compete with livestock for scarce pasture.*

Passing an 'L'-shaped field, the track heads down to cross Frumming Beck by a flat bridge. From here a path follows the north bank, crossing moorland terrain that is an untidy mixture of heather, tussocky grass and cottongrass. Side streams have cut deep gullies that reveal a cross-section of the underlying peat. Passing a beehive cairn, the path becomes less well-defined as it runs over boggy ground. A few small cairns and some marker posts aid navigation, although it is sometimes necessary to stray in search of solid ground. Conditions improve as the path climbs towards Tan Hill Inn, its generator serving as an audible beacon. Joining an unclassified road, head past an ornamental windmill towards the inn (5 = NY 897 067), which stands on the watershed of streams destined for the Tees and Humber estuaries.

### **Tan Hill Inn**

*At 1,732 feet (528 metres), Tan Hill Inn claims to be the highest pub in Britain - although the owners of the Cat & Fiddle in the Peak District have issued a challenge. There has been an inn here since the 16th century serving the pack-horse routes, although the present building dates from 1737. It reached its heyday when coal was mined on the surrounding moors - at which point it was known as the King's Pit, after a nearby mine. Susan Peacock became landlady in 1903, and was known to keep a pistol behind the bar to control rowdy patrons. The annual Swaledale Sheep Fair has been held here on the last Thursday in May since 1951. Some of the inn's visitors will no doubt remember its appearance in a 1970s television commercial for double glazing.*

### **The Long Causeway**

The return route can be tackled in failing daylight, so there should be time to visit the inn, where Millstone Grit outcrops provide a perch from which to

look across the surrounding moors towards shapely fells (Mickle Fell and Little Fell are particularly prominent). The next part of the walk follows a quiet road and good tracks for 5 miles (8 kilometres) back to Sleightholme farm (this is actually identified as an alternative 'foul weather' route for the Pennine Way). Heading north-east along the Long Causeway, the upper reaches of Arkengarthdale can be seen in the distance. Eventually a road sign indicates a left turn onto a byroad to Bowes (6 = NY 929 075).

In places the former tarmac surface of Sleightholme Moor Road still shows-through, although the route is now classed as unsuitable for motors. Heading north-east then north, the track eventually arrives back at the fork passed earlier (7 = NY 941 093). Turning right, retrace your steps to Sleightholme farm, then stay on the road, ignoring a finger sign showing the Pennine Way turning through a gate on the left (8 = NY 956 104).

### ***Gilmonby Moor***

The final part of the return route follows unclassified roads for 4 miles (6½ kilometres) back to the starting point. Heading north-east, the quiet road runs past isolated farmsteads and across open moorland. To the right is an area of heather-clad hillocks, while to the left is the broad valley of the River Greta. Passing through the charming West Plantation, turn left at a junction (9 = NY 995 127) and head north towards Gilmonby. Ignoring a turning for Lady Myres farm, continue along the road back to the starting point.

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