Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 27 Keld to the Tan Hill Inn

Starting at Keld - the uppermost village in Swaledale - the route crosses some difficult terrain as it navigates open moorland. The effort is rewarded by splendid views of Upper Swaledale and the surrounding fells. There are some fine cataracts along the way, most notably East Gill Force.

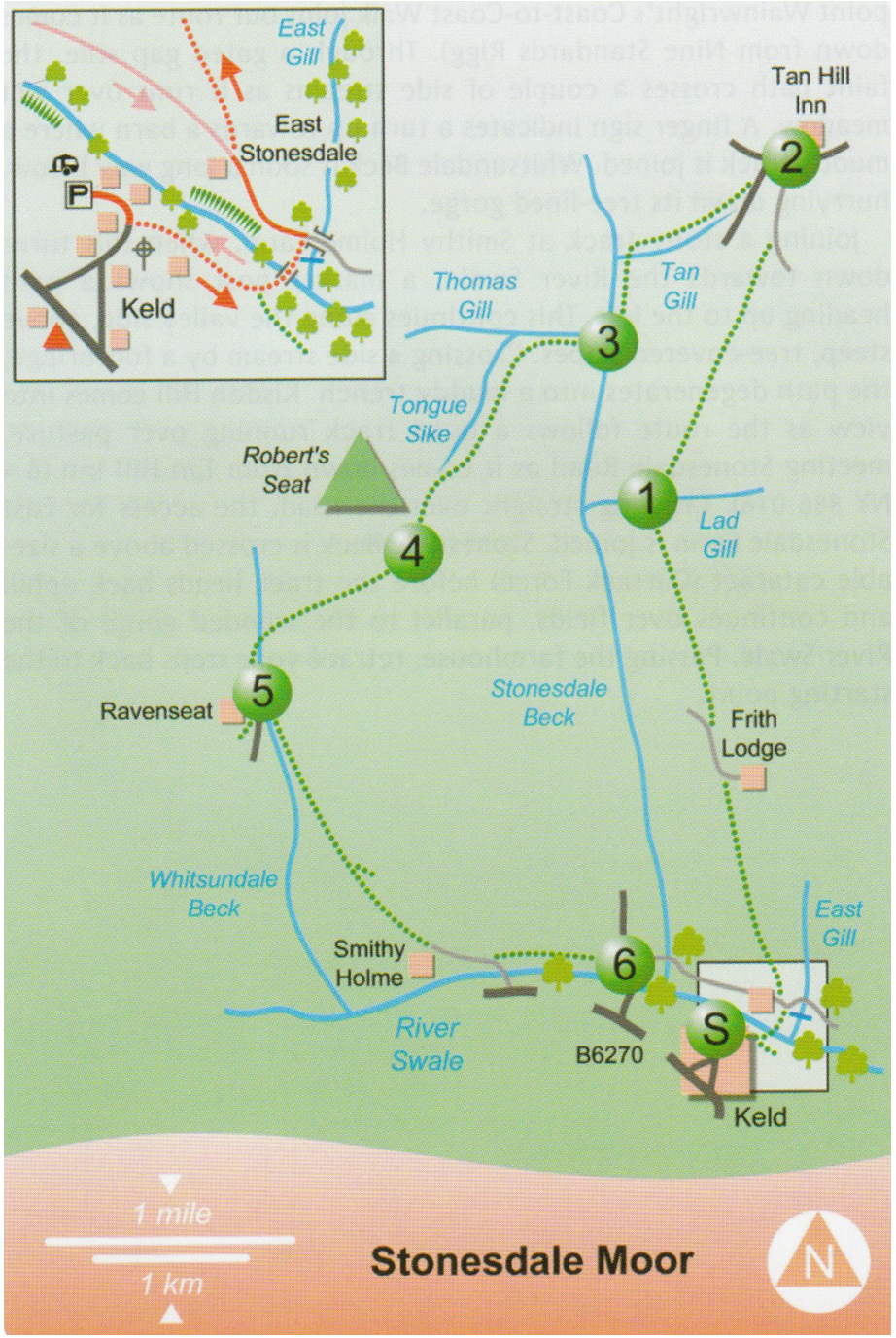
Length:	11 miles (17½ kilometres)
Ascent:	1,608 feet (490 metres)
Highest Point:	1,782 feet (543 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Map 30 ('Yorkshire Dales - Northern & Central Areas') (North Sheet)
Starting Point:	Keld village centre, Upper Swaledale (NY 892 012)
Facilities:	Public toilets and refreshments.
Website:	http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-27-keld-tan-hill-inn

East Stonesdale

Keld is located just off the B6270 at the head of Swaledale. Park Lodge farm in the village centre provides car parking for a modest charge. Following a link-path running south-east, the Pennine Way is joined as it heads down into the wooded gorge of the River Swale. Crossing a footbridge, the route climbs to the left of the charming East Gill Force before turning up a stony track leading to East Stonesdale farm.

Keld

Keld is perhaps best known as the place where the Pennine Way crosses Alfred Wainwright's Coast-to-Coast Walk. The name is Old Norse, recalling the Viking origins of the villages around Upper Swaledale, and was originally Appletre Kelde ('apple tree spring').



The grave of Susan Peacock, landlady of Tan Hill Inn, is in the churchyard at the URC chapel. Hers was the largest funeral ever held in Upper Swaledale, with a procession of more than 40 cars making its way down Stonesdale Road.

From here the Pennine Way is followed for 4 miles (6¼ kilometres) to Tan Hill Inn. The path - an old pack-horse route - crosses rough pasture and open moorland as it heads north along the valley side, parallel to Stonesdale Beck. These routes were the vital arteries of the dales, with trains of ponies carrying wool, meat, limestone and coal to market, returning with commodities such as salt. After negotiating a rushy mire, a lively stream (Lad Gill) is crossed by a clapper bridge (1 = NY 887 045). Heading up beside a deep gully, the path continues over rough moorland. The general direction is north-east, with the remains of a stony track showing through the peat in places. Arriving at the inn, we leave the Pennine Way (2 = NY 897 067).

Coal Mining at Tan Hill

Stonesdale Moor was the scene of extensive coal mining, with poor quality 'crow' coal being dug here from the 13th century. Locally it was used for smelting lead and burning limestone. A row of miners' cottages near Tan Hill Inn was demolished after the last mine closed in 1929.

Robert's Seat

Nearby is a junction, with a road signed for Keld heading down Stonesdale. Following this a short way, a finger sign on the right marks the start of a path running 3¼ miles (5¼ kilometres) over Robert's Seat to Ravenseat farm (note that it is possible to follow the quiet road down the valley towards the turning for East Stonesdale farm, cutting 1¾ miles / 3 kilometres off the route). Heading south-west, the path runs downhill on grassy moorland. Crossing Tan Gill just before it enters Stonesdale Beck, follow the latter downstream until another finger sign marks the point at which it is forded (3 = NY 885 055).

From here the path heads west, climbing steeply beside the deep gully of Thomas Gill until a finger sign marks a turn onto a quad track heading south-south-west along Thomas Gill Rigg. The going is easy and the views are fine. As the track swings towards a fence between a pair of hillocks, look for a narrow path continuing south-south-west over tussocky grass (if this cannot be located, it is possible to follow the fence to the point where it is crossed). Running along a stony bluff marking the flank of Robert's Seat, the path eventually arrives at a fence stile (4 = NY 872 041).

Heading downhill, the direction is south-west. Ahead are fine views over Whitsun Dale, with a scattering of stone-built barns among walled pasture. Arriving at a fence stile, ignore a gate on the left (unless the stream below is in spate, in which case an emergency diversion might be in order). Crossing Hoods Bottom Beck by a ford, follow a hardcore track above the gorge, which is home to a small waterfall (Jenny Whalley Force). Passing through a couple of gates, Ravenseat farm is just ahead (5 = NY 863 034).

Wainwright's Coast-to-Coast Walk

The remainder of the return route follows Whitsundale Beck and the River Swale for a total of 3¼ miles (5¼ kilometres) back to the starting point. Crossing a narrow stone bridge and passing between a pair of barns, a finger sign marks the start of a path to Keld (at this point Wainwright's Coast-to-Coast Walk joins our route as it comes down from Nine Standards Rigg). Through a gated gap stile, the faint path crosses a couple of side streams as it runs over wet meadow. A finger sign indicates a turn up towards a barn where a muddy track is joined. Whitsundale Beck is soon a long way below, hurrying down its tree-lined gorge.

Hill Farming in Upper Swaledale

The hill farming methods encountered in Upper Swaledale can be traced back to the Vikings. They were a response to the harsh climate, which would normally have made cattle rearing impractical. Whilst the high ground is suitable only for grazing by hardy Swaledale sheep, the steep valley sides are used for pasture. Stone-built barns known as 'laithes', one in every second or third field, provide winter

quarters for cattle. Hay from the riverside meadows is cut and dried, then stored in the barns as winter feed. Manure collected from the barns is used to fertilise the meadows.

Joining a stony track at Smithy Holme farm, when this turns down towards the River Swale, a marker post shows a path heading up to the left. This continues along the valley side, above steep, tree-covered slopes. Crossing a side stream by a footbridge, the path degenerates into a muddy trench. Kisdon Hill comes into view as the route follows a quad track running over pasture, meeting Stonesdale Road as it comes down from Tan Hill Inn (6 = NY 886 016). Crossing straight over the road, the access for East Stonesdale farm is joined. Stonesdale Beck is crossed above a sizeable cataract (Currack Force) before the track heads back uphill and continues over fields, parallel to the wooded gorge of the River Swale. Passing the farmhouse, retrace your steps back to the starting point.

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