

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 40 Top Withins and Walshaw Dene

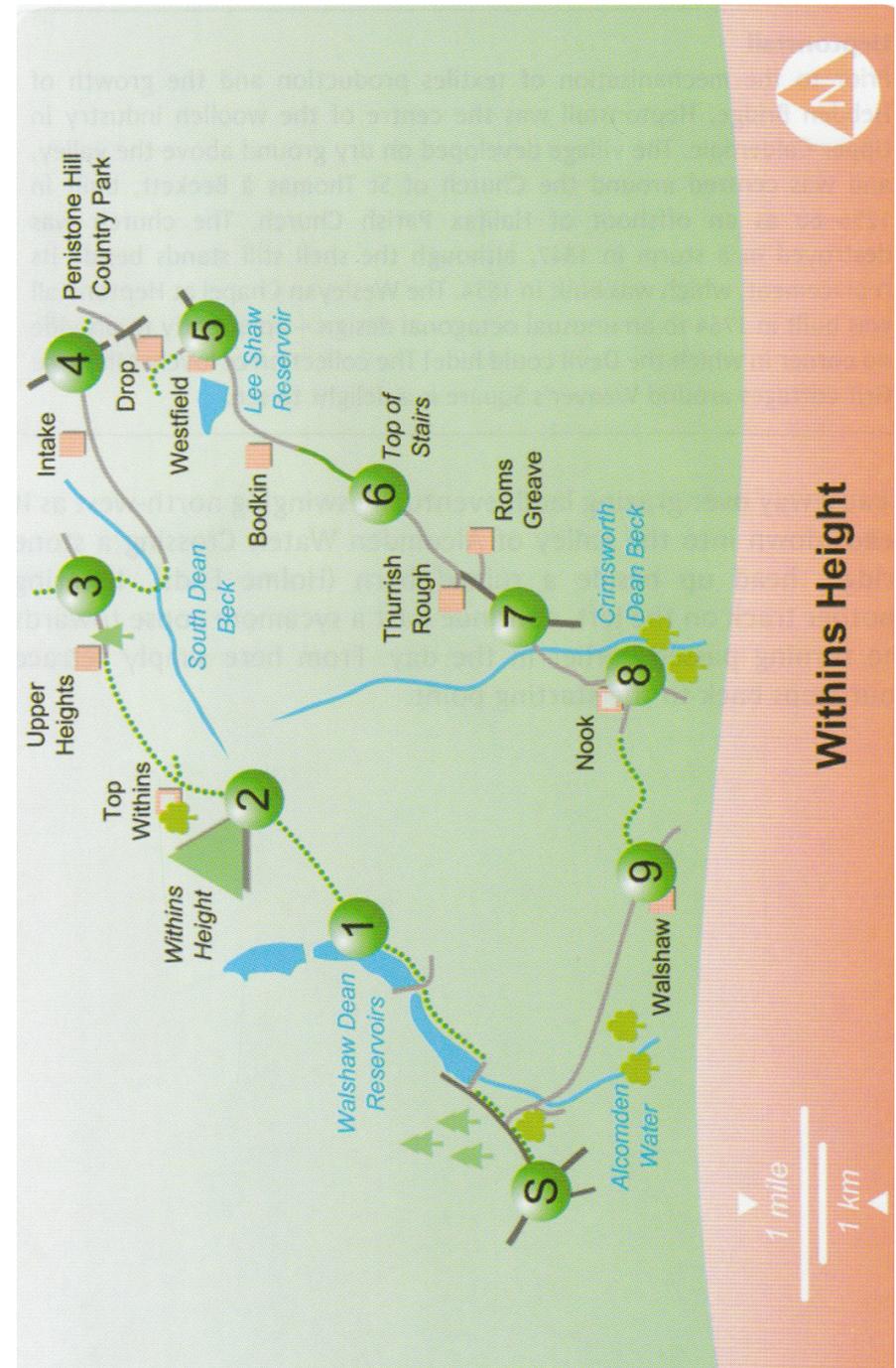
An enjoyable walk following the Pennine Way beside reservoirs and over moorland, returning by an old pack-horse route. Among the many features associated with the Brontë sisters is the isolated ruin of Top Withins (the inspiration for the Earnshaw residence in 'Wuthering Heights').



- Length: 13¾ miles (22 kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,985 feet (605 metres)
- Highest Point: 448 metres (1,470 feet)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 21 ('South Pennines') (North Sheet)
- Starting Point: Gorple & Walshaw Dean reservoirs parking area, above Hebden Dale (SD 947 323)
- Facilities: Inn nearby.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-40-top-withins-and-walshaw-dene>

Walshaw Dean Reservoirs

The starting point is located 5 miles (8 kilometres) north-west of Hebden Bridge, close to the Pack Horse Inn on the Colne road. The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way for 2 miles (3¼ kilometres) around the Walshaw Dean reservoirs. A finger sign points up a stony path, joining an access road heading north-east towards the reservoirs. The Pennine Way actually follows a corridorised path beside the tarmac track, although the latter is preferred by many walkers. Ignoring another track leading off to the right, continue towards the lower reservoir, where a finger sign marks a right turn over the dam. Following a gravel path above the eastern shore, ignore a hardcore track starting at the middle dam and instead continue along a narrow strip of land between the reservoir and a drain. A short way along a track, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning onto a



moorland path (1 = SD 969 339).

Hebden Water Reservoirs

The six reservoirs in this area were built to supply Halifax. The oldest and largest is Widdop, built 1871-78. A horse-drawn tramway 5½ miles (9 kilometres) long carried materials to site, running up Hebden Dale and Walshaw Dean. The engineer, Edward La Trobe Bateman, had attended the Suez Canal opening in 1869, and the design of the valve house shows Egyptian influence. When the three reservoirs in Walshaw Dean were constructed during 1900-13, a stone circle was submerged. The two Gorple reservoirs were built during 1927-34, with 14 narrow gauge locomotives used on the site.

Withins Height

From here the Pennine Way runs north-east for 2¾ miles (4¼ kilometres) over the heather-clad slopes of Withins Height. The path is easy-going as it climbs gently, with flagged sections along the way. Arriving at the watershed (2 = SD 980 348), there are fine views towards the Worth Valley. Whilst this is the highest point on the walk, the actual summit of Withins Height (Round Hill) is a short way to the north-west (in fact, it is only marginally higher).

Ignoring a path heading east along the watershed, the Pennine Way turns north, with flagstones providing easy passage of the rough grass. The ruin of Top Withins - the highest of a chain of abandoned farmsteads - is now just a short way ahead. To the right is the valley of South Dean Beck, separating Stanbury Moor and Haworth Moor. Arriving at the ruin, it is not hard to see how its remote location might have inspired Emily Brontë. Continuing past another ruined farm building, a hardcore track is eventually joined. A white-washed farm (Upper Heights) dates from 1761 and is famed for the bearded head sculpture adorning the wall. Just past Lower Heights farm, a crossroads of routes marks the point at which we leave the Pennine Way (3 = SD 998 364).

Haworth Moor

The first part of the return route follows the Brontë Way to Penistone Hill Country Park, before joining the Haworth to Hebden Bridge Walk. Turning onto a path heading south through heather, cross straight over a hardcore track. A finger sign shows the path heading steeply down into the valley of South Dean Beck, which is crossed by a slab bridge (the 'Brontë Bridge'). This sheltered clough - a favourite haunt of the Brontë sisters - might make a good place to stop for lunch. Following a narrow path up the steep, bracken-covered valley side, the route broadens into a hardcore track. Ruined farm buildings punctuate the slopes of the broadening valley, and Lower Laithe Reservoir can be seen downstream. Ahead are the heather-clad mounds of Penistone Hill - a former quarry and now a country park. Eventually the track arrives at an unclassified road (Moor Side Lane) (4 = SE 016 365).

Brontë Bridge

The current Brontë Bridge was built after the original was washed away during a flash flood in 1989. A small waterfall on a side stream is identified as Emily Brontë's falls, while a nearby rock is named the Brontë Chair (it was here that Charlotte often sat while she wrote). It seems that every feature hereabouts, no matter how insignificant, is branded for the benefit of visitors. Indeed, many of the signs hereabouts are written in English and Japanese - the Brontë sisters' novels being particularly popular in Japan.

Crossing straight over the road, a gravel path runs towards the overgrown spoil heaps. Joining a hardcore track (part of the Haworth to Hebden Bridge Walk), head through a car park and back to the road. Here a finger sign points along the access road leading to Drop farm, which is home to some popular tea rooms. Passing the farmhouse, climb over a fence stile and turn left, heading south-east down the edge of a field. Joining a track at Westfield farm, this leads to an unclassified road (Lee Lane) (5 = SE 018 353).

Stairs Lane

From here the walk follows an old pack-horse route running south-west

for 3¼ miles (5½ kilometres) over a moorland ridge. The road becomes a stony track as it hooks around Lee Shaw Reservoir and heads up a walled lane. The track deteriorates as it passes Bodkin farm and climbs Stairs Lane towards the watershed (which is appropriately named 'Top of Stairs') (6 = SE 004 337). Looking across the valley on the left, the curious apparatus on Oxenhope Moor is a Bradford University field station. The wind turbines beyond are located on Ovenden Moor. The track improves as it heads steeply downhill, eventually becoming an unclassified road (Old Road) leading to Grainwater Bridge (7 = SD 996 324).

Here a finger sign shows the old pack-horse route turning off the road, following a stony track as it crosses a stream and continues along the steep valley side. The deepening valley is home to Crimsworth Dean Beck, with the charming Lumb Falls (although these unfortunately cannot be seen from the track). Arriving at the ruin of Nook farm, a marker post shows our route turning right, leaving the Haworth to Hebden Bridge Walk (8 = SD 990 313).

Walshaw

From here it is just 3 miles (4¾ kilometres) back to the starting point. A stony track heads west around a spur of Shackleton Moor, which forms the ridge between Crimsworth Dean and Hebden Dale. Heather climbs the steep slopes on the right, while to the left is walled pasture. Ahead are distant views of Heptonstall, with its prominent church tower. A finger sign shows the route turning through a gate in the drystone wall on the left, before continuing along the top of a field. Crossing cattle-churned pasture, a rough track leads towards Walshaw farm (9 = SD 974 313).

Heptonstall

Prior to the mechanisation of textiles production and the growth of Hebden Bridge, Heptonstall was the centre of the woollen industry in Upper Calderdale. The village developed on dry ground above the valley, and was centred around the Church of St. Thomas à Beckett, built 1256-60 as an offshoot of Halifax Parish Church. The church was destroyed in a storm in 1847, although the shell still stands

beside its replacement, which was built in 1854. The Wesleyan Chapel at Heptonstall was built in 1764 to an unusual octagonal design - apparently to provide no corner in which the Devil could hide! The collection of lovely Millstone Grit cottages around Weaver's Square is a delight to see.

Here a hardcore track threads between the farm buildings and continues west-north-west through pasture, parallel to the beautiful wooded valley of Hebden Dale. Passing a byre, the track follows a causeway over grazing land, eventually swinging north-west as it heads down into the valley of Alcomden Water. Crossing a stone bridge, head up beside a ruined barn (Holme Ends). Ignoring another track on the left, continue past a sycamore copse towards the turning passed earlier in the day. From here simply retrace your steps back to the starting point.

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