

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 41 | Hebden Bridge, Hardcastle Crags and Upper Calderdale

This walk offers an unequalled combination of beautiful countryside and industrial heritage. The varied route includes narrow lanes and open moorland, as well as a beautiful wooded valley (Hebden Dale), a visit to the centre of Hebden Bridge and the towpath beside the Rochdale Canal.

Pennine Way

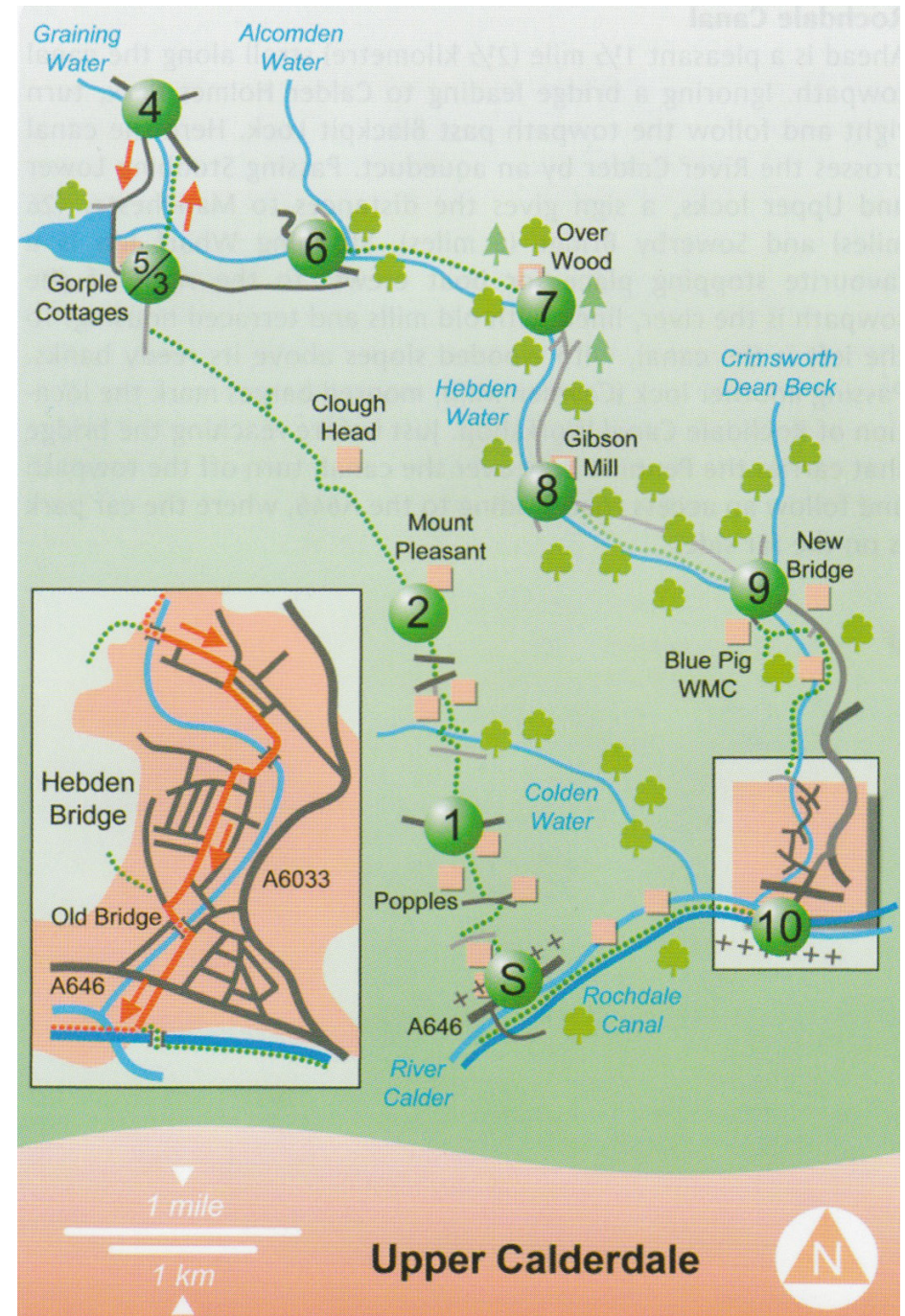
50 YEARS



- Length: 13½ miles (21¾ kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,952 feet (595 metres)
- Highest Point: 373 metres (1,224 feet)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 21 ('South Pennines') (North & South Sheets)
- Starting Point: Pennine Way car park, near Charlestown (SD 972 265)
- Facilities: Full range of services at Hebden Bridge.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-41-hebden-bridge-hardcastle-crags-and-upper-calderdale>

Colden Clough

The starting point is on the north side of the A646, 1½ miles (2½ kilometres) west of Hebden Bridge, opposite the Rochdale Canal workshop (a street sign marks the access for Underbank Avenue). The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way up and down steep causeys, heading north for 2 miles (3¼ kilometres). Passing through a tunnel under a railway embankment, climb a steep alleyway on slippery cobbles to arrive at an access road. Turning left, the height already gained affords good views across the deep valley, with Stoodley Pike visible beyond steep, wooded slopes.



Upper Calderdale

The River Calder rises on the moors above Todmorden, from where it flows eastward down a deep, incised valley, passing Hebden Bridge and continuing on towards Halifax (confusingly, a nearby tributary of the River Ribble has the same name). John Wesley visited Upper Calderdale in 1747, and compared it to the Garden of Eden. Today it is a place of stark contrasts, where beautiful countryside is juxtaposed with the remains of the industrial revolution. Until the 18th century, wool from the sheep that grazed the surrounding moors was turned into rough cloth on domestic hand looms, then transported to market by pack-horse. During the first half of the 19th century the cotton industry spilled over from Lancashire, bringing industry to the valley floor. Water-powered, then steam-powered mills were built, eventually transforming Upper Calderdale into the world centre for fustian production. To serve the rapidly growing textiles industry, the Rochdale Canal and the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway were driven up the valley during the first half of the 19th century.

Arriving at a retaining wall, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning hard right. Ignoring an alternative route heading up beside an overgrown graveyard, follow a narrow path running along the steep, bracken-covered valley side. Climbing steps beside a tree-shaded gully, a stone privy stands perched above a small waterfall. Turning left onto another access road, then left again along a lane, a finger sign marks a right turn over a stile, joining a path running across meadows towards an unclassified road (1 = SD 967 275).

This is Badger Lane, part of a medieval route running over the Pennines known as the Long Causeway. Crossing straight over the road, a path heads north along the edge of a field. Following an overgrown causey towards Colden Clough, at the bottom of the wooded valley a narrow pack-horse bridge leads to a muddy path. Here a marker post indicates a left turn onto another path, climbing out of the clough and heading over fields towards a tidy farmhouse. Arriving at an unclassified road, cross straight over and join a gravel path leading to another road. Here a finger sign

shows the route heading up a steep path to arrive at a waymarked gate (2 = SD 966 289).

Heptonstall Moor

For the next 3 miles (5 kilometres) the Pennine Way runs north-west across Heptonstall Moor. Following a track beside a drystone wall, a cairn soon marks a turn onto a path running through the heather. Crossing a gully at the head of a clough, continue north-west, with a few slabs providing passage of boggy ground. Contouring around the side of Standing Stone Hill (named for the guide stones that mark a pack-horse route running over its summit), Gorple Lower Reservoir comes into view ahead. Arriving at a broken wall, turn left along a corridorised path. A finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning north, along a stony track, passing through a set of iron gates to arrive at a crossroads of routes beside Gorple Cottages (3 = SD 947 312).

Continuing straight ahead (we will return to this place later), join a path signed for Clough Foot. Stone slabs embedded in the grass recall the origins of this path as a pack-horse route. Care is needed as the stepped path drops into a rugged clough, where Reaps Water and Graining Water are crossed by footbridges. Heading up the far side of the clough, ignore a fence stile on the right (this provides access to the Pack Horse Inn). Arriving at an unclassified road, turn left and head towards the parking area for the Gorple & Walshaw Dean reservoirs, where we leave the Pennine Way (4 = SD 947 323).

Hebden Dale

The first part of the return route connects with Hebden Dale. Opposite the parking area, a finger sign marks the start of a concrete track following Graining Water south before swinging towards the dam at the foot of Gorple Lower Reservoir. Crossing over the dam, the track turns towards Gorple Cottages and the crossroads of routes passed earlier (5 = SD 947 312). During the 1960s, a reservoir keeper who lived at the cottages perished in a blizzard on the surrounding moors.

Continuing straight ahead (east), follow an access road signed as a permissive route to Blake Dean. To the right of the tarmac track is a drain, while off to the left Millstone Grit outcrops mark the edge of the deep clough of Graining Water. A marker post shows a path turning off the access road, heading steeply downhill to arrive at an unclassified road. A short way to the left the stream is crossed by a stone bridge (6 = SD 958 313).

Ignoring a track turning off the road, instead pass through a narrow gate and head down a few steps to join a tree-shaded path running beside the stream. Arriving at a confluence, Alcomden Water is crossed by a footbridge. This lovely place is Black Dean, at the head of Hebden Dale. Heading up the steep valley side, cross an old track-bed before continuing over rough pasture. Passing through a gate, the path runs under tree cover, above an overgrown quarry. Emerging into the open, follow the narrow path as it runs down heather-clad slopes towards a ruined cottage (Over Wood) (7 = SD 973 310).

Black Dean

Black Dean marks the point at which Hebden Water is formed through the confluence of two streams. It is a beautiful place, with a scattering of rowan and birch beneath steep slopes covered in bracken and heather. Not surprisingly, it is a favourite spot for picnickers. A short way downstream are the remains of a pitch pine trestle bridge, built in 1900 to carry a narrow gauge railway from Dawson City (a shanty town near Heptonstall) to the reservoir construction sites in Walshaw Dean. This was 105 feet (32 metres) high and 700 feet (213 metres) long.

Here the route enters Hebden Dale proper, with the tree-shaded track covered in oak leaves and pine needles. Arriving at a fork, take the left-hand track, heading uphill (south). Soon another track joins from the left - part of the Haworth to Hebden Bridge Walk. Some rock outcrops among the trees off to the right gave the valley its popular name - Hardcastle Crag. When an abandoned mill comes into view ahead, it is possible to

turn off the track and walk along the top of the millpond dam. Otherwise, continue along the track until it arrives at Gibson Mill (8 = SD 973 298).

Hebden Dale

Hebden Dale, or Hardcastle Crag as it is popularly known, is a beautiful wooded valley owned by the National Trust. It was formed by glacial meltwater at the end of the last Ice Age, and together with the tributary Crimsworth Dean, it reaches up into the moorland plateau to the north of Hebden Bridge. Much of the woodland was planted during the 19th century to provide fuel for charcoal burners. Today the valley is home to every kind of broadleaf tree, as well as a scattering of scots pine. On three occasions it has been threatened with being flooded to create a reservoir, but its future now seems secure. The National Trust maintains visitor facilities and a network of paths. Swiss residents of Britain visit Hebden Dale for their open air forum, giving it the title 'Little Switzerland'.

A quaint hump-back bridge behind the mill is worth investigating, before rejoining the track as it runs down the wooded valley towards New Bridge (note that there is also a riverside path, if there is plenty of time). Passing the National Trust car park at the head of an unclassified road (and close to some public toilets), an access road turns down a lane on the right (9 = SD 988 291).

Gibson Mill

Gibson Mill was built as a water-powered cotton mill by the second Abraham Gibson, around 1800. It was powered by a water-wheel fed from a millpond. During summer the flow became inadequate, and in winter the pond often froze, so a steam engine was installed in the 1860s. The mill closed at the end of the 1890s due to competition from larger mills downstream. Afterwards it was used as a dining saloon, a roller-skating rink and a dance hall (complete with boating on the pond). The last Abraham Gibson died in 1956, leaving the mill to the National Trust.

Hebden Bridge

From here it is also possible to reach the centre of Hebden Bridge by following Midgehole Road then the pavement beside the A6033. However, the next part of the return route proper follows a riverside path for 2 miles (3¼ kilometres). Heading down the access road, cross the river by a stone bridge and turn through the Blue Pig WMC car park. Ignoring an alleyway heading steeply uphill on the right (part of the Calderdale Way), a finger sign marks the start of the riverside path. Crossing back over the river by a footbridge, head over a meadow then up a farm access to rejoin the road.

Turning onto a tree-shaded alleyway running parallel to the road, a marker post eventually points down a stepped path. Passing some houses at the bottom of the slope, cross another footbridge. Turning left, follow the riverside path as it runs beside sports fields before crossing a charming little pack-horse bridge. From here the route weaves through a maze of back streets. Heading along Windsor Road, then Victoria Road, re-cross the river by a road bridge and turn right, off Valley Road, to join Hangingroyd Lane. This is followed towards the Old Bridge and the town centre. Once over the A646 by a signal controlled crossing, head along Holme Street to arrive at the Rochdale Canal (10 = SD 941 271).

Hebden Bridge

Hebden (formerly Hepton) Bridge is a product of the industrial revolution, and is in many respects the archetypal South Pennines mill town. As early as the 15th century, settlement began spilling into valley, focussed around river-crossings on the pack-horse routes. Indeed, the town is named after the Old Bridge, which has provided a crossing on Hebden Water since around 1510. However, it was not until the first half of the 18th century that Hebden Bridge achieved dominance over its forerunner, Heptonstall. Industrialisation brought about the rapid growth of the town, and due to a shortage of flat land, homes for the mill workers were built on the steep valley sides in the form of four-storey terraced housing.

Rochdale Canal

Ahead is a pleasant 1½ mile (2½ kilometre) stroll along the canal towpath. Ignoring a bridge leading to Calder Holmes Park, turn right and follow the towpath past Blackpit Lock. Here the canal crosses the River Calder by an aqueduct. Passing Stubbing Lower and Upper locks, a sign gives the distances to Manchester (26 miles) and Sowerby Bridge (6 miles). Stubbing Wharf Inn is a favourite stopping place for boat crews. To the right of the towpath is the river, lined with old mills and terraced housing. To the left is the canal, with wooded slopes above its reedy banks. Passing another lock (Cawden Mill), moored barges mark the location of Rochdale Canal Workshop. Just before reaching the bridge that carries the Pennine Way over the canal, turn off the towpath and follow an access road leading to the A646, where the car park is on the far side.

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