

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 18 The High Pennine Fells

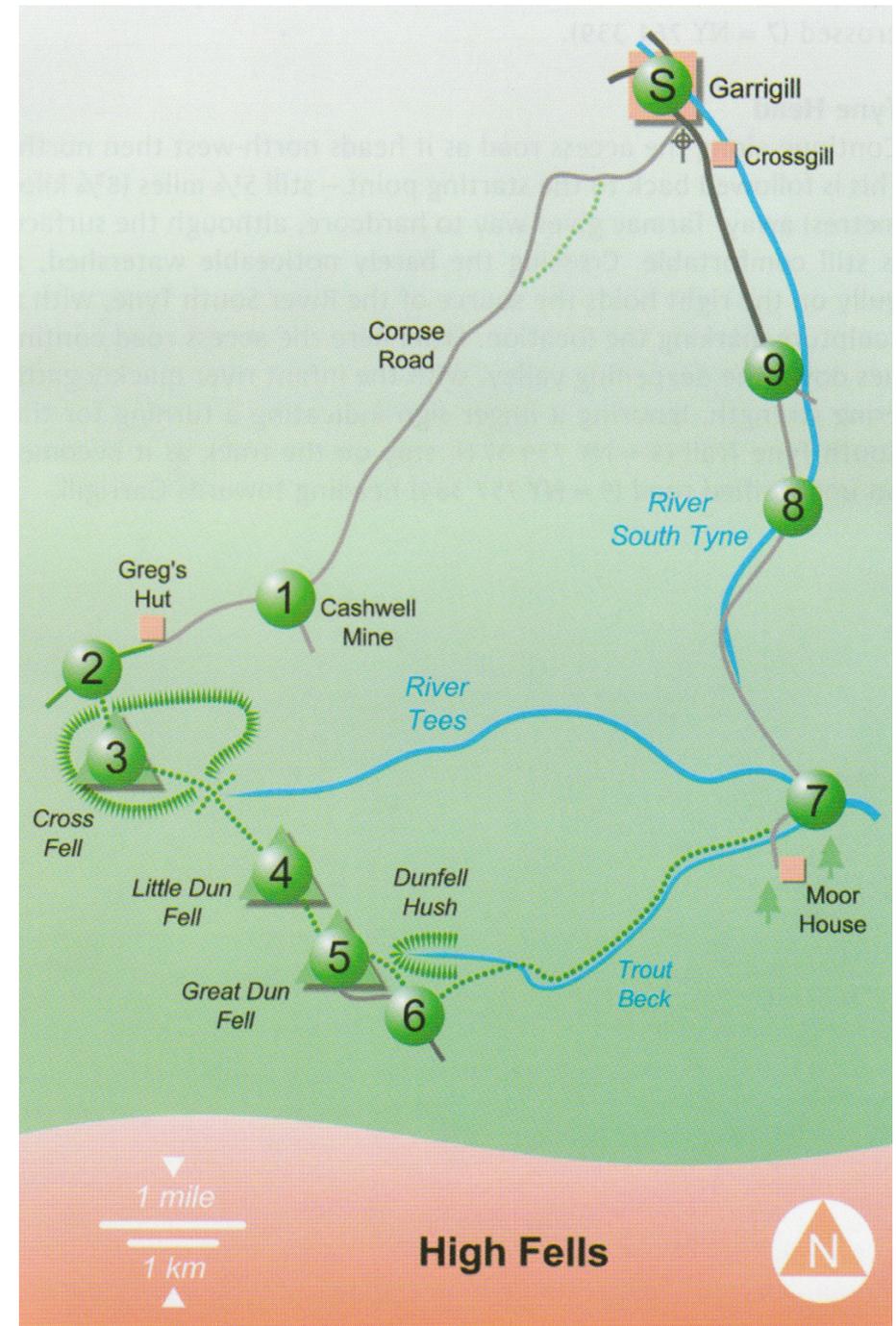
A long and challenging hill-walk visiting the highest of the Pennine fells (Cross Fell, Little Dun Fell and Great Dun Fell). Navigation is fairly straightforward and fair weather reveals wonderful views, although in poor conditions the high fells can be hazardous.

Length: 19 miles (30¾ kilometres)
Ascent: 2,707 feet (825 metres)
Highest Point: 2,930 feet (893 metres)
Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 31 ('North Pennines - Teesdale & Weardale') (West Sheet)
Starting Point: Garrigill village centre, South Tynedale (NY 745 415)
Facilities: Public toilets, inn and refreshments.
Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-18-high-pennine-fells>



The Corpse Road

Garrigill is more than 1,100 feet (335 metres) above sea level, so an ascent of the high fells from this direction offers an easy start. Moreover, the first part of the walk follows an old corpse road up onto the ridge, with 7 miles (11½ kilometres) of gentle ascent. From the Methodist Chapel at the south end of the village, the Pennine Way starts its long climb over the moors, heading south-west up a walled lane. At one point a faint path - once the official route - cuts the corner, although it is better to stay in the lane. Through a gate, the stony track runs over open moorland, with views across the broad valley of Black Burn towards Cross Fell. Ignoring a track on the right heading towards some old workings, continue towards Cashwell Mine. Here a marker stone shows a bridleway turning left, although the Pennine Way heads up through spoil heaps beside a boulder-



choked hush (1 = NY 715 360).

The Corpse Road

The dead of Garrigill were carried over the Pennine ridge to Kirkland Church by a 'corpse road' reaching 2,576 feet (785 metres). Whilst there was consecrated ground at Allenheads, it seems that the people of Garrigill had a special affinity for Kirkland. On one occasion - probably in the mid-16th century - a burial party was overtaken by a snowstorm and had to abandon the coffin for a fortnight. After a church was built at Garrigill the track continued to provide access to the lead-mines.

Cashwell Mine

A verse by the 'Pennine poet', Wystan Hugh Auden, recalls an encounter with the pumping engine at Cashwell Mine: "...as it groans at each stroke like a heart in trouble, it seems to me something in toil most noble." Old photographs show a three-storey, whitewashed shop at the mine, although only bare ruins remain. Beware of old mine shafts in this area.

Note the pieces of brightly-coloured fluorspar embedded in the track. Crossing a shallow stream, the route contours around the northern flanks of Cross Fell. A stream on the left can be seen disappearing into a limestone fissure, while further along is a line of shake holes - deep depressions created by water erosion. Passing an old bothy (Greg's Hut), as the track climbs towards the ridge it becomes rutted and boggy. Nearing the watershed, a marker stone beside a stone shelter shows the Pennine Way turning off the track and heading south-east, up towards the plateau (2 = NY 684 352).

Greg's Hut

Located at 2,297 feet (700 metres) on the northern flanks of Cross Fell (NY 691 354), Greg's Hut provides emergency refuge and a welcome resting place for long distance walkers on the Pennine Way. It was opened by the Mountain Bothy Association in 1972, and is dedicated to John Gregory (1928-68), a member of a local ski club.

Cross Fell, Little Dun Fell and Great Dun Fell

The next part of the walk follows the crest of the ridge for 3¼ miles (5 kilometres). Initially the path is hard-going, it being difficult to distinguish between boggy grass and mossy stream. Climbing up through the garland of scree wrapping around the flanks of Cross Fell, a beehive cairn marks the edge of the plateau. Heading south-south-east towards the summit, this is marked by a cross-shaped stone shelter and an OS pillar (3 = NY 687 343). In fair weather this would be a good place to stop for lunch, with fine views across the Upper Eden Valley towards the Lakeland Fells.

Cross Fell

Cross Fell reaches 2,930 feet (893 metres), and was once known as Fiends Fell, recalling its ominous appearance and extreme weather. This in turn is related to the infamous Helm Wind, which wreaths the ridge in an eerie bank of cloud. St. Augustine of Canterbury is credited with exorcising Fiends Fell, although it is more likely that the name was changed during the early 1500s when a cross was erected at the summit. During the 1830s, the plateau was the scene of a political rally, complete with brass band.

Heading east-south-east towards a cone-shaped cairn, Cow Green Reservoir comes into view, although it is to the radar dome on Great Dun Fell that the attention is drawn. From a tall cairn, a rough path picks its way down through the scree belt, following a stream towards the saddle with Little Dun Fell. Passing a marker stone showing a bridleway crossing the route, the area to the left holds the source of the River Tees and is home to the starry saxifrage. Continuing south-east, the flagged path crosses a peaty mire before climbing the steep slopes of Little Dun Fell. Here the summit - standing at 2,763 feet (842 metres) - is marked by a stone shelter (4 = NY 704 330).

Continuing across the flat top, head steeply downhill towards the saddle with Great Dun Fell. There are distant views of the Central Pennines, while the Cheviot Hills can be seen on the northern horizon. The flagged path

crosses boggy terrain before heading back uphill, contouring around the side of Great Dun Fell (5 = NY 710 321). Here there is a choice of ways. The easiest option is to follow the radar station access road, which is surely the highest stretch of tarmac in the country. However, the literal route cuts across rough terrain, following a path heading south-east towards the head of Dunfell Hush. Crossing the gully, a few small cairns lead to the point where a gated track leaves the access road (6 = NY 716 316).

Great Dun Fell Radar Station

The civilian radar station on Great Dun Fell became operational in 1988, replacing an earlier installation. It stands at 2,782 feet (848 metres), and the 66 feet (20 metre) diameter dome is one of the principal landmarks of the North Pennines. The highest recorded gust of wind in England and Wales occurred here, reaching 133 mph (214 km/h) on 17 January 1993.

Trout Beck

The next part of the walk follows an old miners' track running beside Trout Beck to its confluence with the River Tees, 3½ miles (5½ kilometres) away. The stony track converges with the hush, which is now a deep gash in the ridge. Continuing down the track, ahead are views across a daunting expanse of bleak moorland. Following the beck east then north-east, in places the track has been washed away and it is necessary to take to higher ground. The beck skips over rocky outcrops in its course, and at one point runs in a shallow gorge. An array of instruments show that the track is nearing Moor House. This was once a shooting lodge, but it is now a site for monitoring climate change. Ignoring a bridge leading to the station, stay on the track as it passes the remains of a lead-mine at Troutbeck Foot. Arriving at the confluence of Trout Beck and the River Tees, the latter is crossed (7 = NY 761 339).

Tyne Head

Continuing along the access road as it heads north-west then north, this

is followed back to the starting point - still 5¼ miles (8¾ kilometres) away. Tarmac gives way to hardcore, although the surface is still comfortable. Crossing the barely noticeable watershed, a gully on the right holds the source of the River South Tyne, with a sculpture marking the location. From here the access road continues down the deepening valley, with the infant river quickly gathering strength. Ignoring a finger sign indicating a turning for the South Tyne Trail (8 = NY 759 371), stay on the track as it becomes an unclassified road (9 = NY 757 384) heading towards Garrigill.