

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 23 High and Low Force, Upper Teesdale

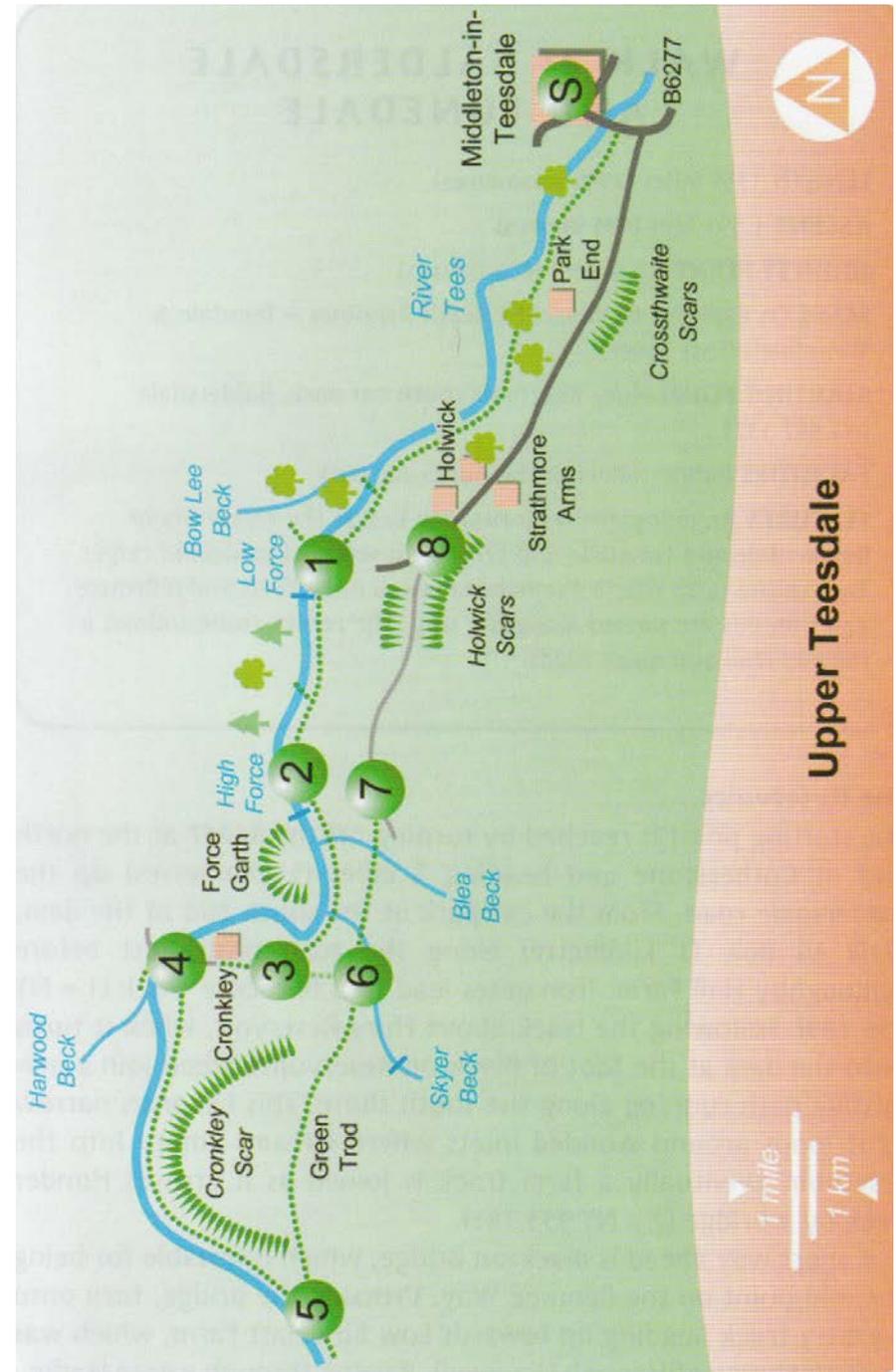


Starting at the lead-mining village of Middleton-in-Teesdale, this long walk follows the River Tees upstream, passing a pair of spectacular waterfalls (Low Force and the superlative High Force) and Cronkley Scar before returning by a droveway and a quiet road.

Length:	18¾ miles (30¼ kilometres)
Ascent:	1,526 feet (465 metres)
Highest Point:	1,788 feet (545 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Maps 19 ('Howgill Fells & Upper Eden Valley') (Upper Eden Valley [North] Sheet) and 31 ('North Pennines - Teesdale & Weardale') (East Sheet)
Starting Point:	Middleton-in-Teesdale village centre (NY 947 254)
Facilities:	Full range of services.
Website:	http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-23-high-and-low-force-upper-teesdale

The River Tees

The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way along the south bank of the River Tees for 7½ miles (12 kilometres). Heading south out of the village on the B6277, the river is crossed by a stone bridge. Just past the auction mart, a finger sign on the right shows the Pennine Way turning through a gate onto a hardcore track. This ends at a barn, from where a path continues along the edge of fields, crossing drystone walls by step stiles. At times the river comes into view as it meanders about the valley floor. A finger sign shows the route diverging from a drystone wall, heading diagonally across a couple of fields.



Middleton-in-Teesdale

Middleton-in-Teesdale owes its fortunes to lead-mining. It became the northern headquarters of the London Lead Company in 1880, which provided houses, a school and a reading room. The company was the first to introduce a five day working week, allowing its employees to devote time to other activities, including study and chapel. The water fountain in the village centre was placed here in 1877 as a memorial to the company's retiring superintendent, Robert Bainbridge (there is an identical fountain at Nenthead). The parish church is notable for its detached bell-tower, which dates from 1557. Today the village serves the surrounding population and acts as a base for tourists. There is a car park in the village centre.

The path runs above the steep, tree-covered riverbank before dropping to cross a side stream by a footbridge. Over another stream by stepping stones, the route continues along the riverbank. The character of the narrowing valley starts to change, with birch and rowan replacing sycamore and oak. Ignoring steps leading down to Scoberry Bridge, continue beside the river, passing some overgrown mine entrances. Ahead the river rushes through a gorge of vertically jointed dolerite. An unusual rock promontory beside the river provides a good vantage point (note that the rock can be slippery). Passing the Wynch Bridge, Low Force comes into view (1 = NY 903 279).

The Wynch Bridge and Low Force

The Wynch Bridge (or 'Two Inch Bridge') is an elegant suspension footbridge, built in 1830 by the Duke of Cleveland, a short way downstream from Low Force. It replaced an earlier construction of 1704, which was the first suspension bridge in Europe (this collapsed in 1802, killing one of the men crossing at the time). Low Force is more evocatively known as the 'Salmon Leap'. Anywhere else in the country it would be the main feature, but so close to the superlative High Force it is merely a warm-up act. Here the course of the River Tees divides as it cascades over the Great Whin Sill, forming a tree-covered islet called Stable Crag.

Passing through a grove of birch trees, a stagnant pool has formed where a dolerite wall holds back the river. Passing the turn for Holwick Head Bridge, head steeply uphill on a made path and continue through an area of juniper bushes. A narrow path heads through the bushes on the right, a short way to the best viewing point for High Force (be wary of the cliff edge). Returning to the path, the top of the waterfall is soon reached (2 = NY 880 284).

High Force

At High Force the River Tees drops 69 feet (21 metres) over the Great Whin Sill to a plunge pool. This is not the highest waterfall in England, but it is certainly the most spectacular. There are actually two falls, separated by a central buttress, although that to the north is often dormant. In 1880, a man was drowned after being stranded in the middle by a sudden surge. Such spates are less common today, with Cow Green Reservoir regulating the flow. The river above the falls is inhabited by sandpipers, redshanks and oystercatchers. The surrounding area is Britain's largest juniper wood. Until the end of the 19th century, juniper was cut for firewood and fencing. The berries were used to flavour bread and cakes, as well as gin. When boiled, the steam was inhaled as a treatment for bronchitis.

Continuing along the riverside path, the landscape is blighted by an active whinstone quarry. Crossing a couple of side streams by footbridges, the view over the river improves, with the outcrops of Dine Holm Scar inhabited by a pleasing mix of scree, heather and juniper. Another stream is crossed by stepping stones before the path heads uphill on flagstones and continues along a broad ridge. To the right are extensive views over Upper Teesdale, with whitewashed farms dotted about the landscape. Soon a pair of marker stones is reached (3 = NY 861 283).

Force Garth Quarry

At Force Garth, the Great Whin Sill is plundered for roadstone, desecrating a beautiful part of Upper Teesdale. Whilst the quarries on Hadrian's Wall are now closed, Force Garth is likely to remain active for many years. When blasting takes place it is necessary

for walkers on the Pennine Way to pause for a short while (this is indicated by a siren).

The stone on the left shows a path connecting to the Green Trod, providing an opportunity to shorten the walk by 5½ miles (9 kilometres). However, the delights of Cronkley Fell should not lightly be foregone. Turning north, continue along the Pennine Way as it heads gently downhill. Crossing a gated gap stile, the route drops through a nick in a juniper-covered ridge, weaving through a jumble of boulders. Turning through a gate, head up to Cronkley farm, from where a hardcore track runs down towards Cronkley Bridge. Just before reaching the bridge, turn through a gate on the left (4 = NY 862 294).

Cronkley Scar

Here we leave the Pennine Way, continuing along the south bank of the river for another 2¾ miles (4½ kilometres). Following a rough track towards a byre, pass through a gate and head around the rear of the building to join a riverside path. This runs across a heather-covered plain, with Widdy Bank farm appearing on the far side of the river. Heading into the valley between Cronkley Fell and Widdybank Fell, scree fingers reach down from the dolerite cliffs of Cronkley Scar, with juniper bushes dotted about the hillside.

For a time there is some clambering over boulders - recalling the path beneath Falcon Clints - as well as some boggy ground to negotiate. Crossing a side stream, there is one more difficult section before the riverbank broadens-out and the route switches to the Green Trod (5 = NY 827 282).

The Green Trod

The former droveway is followed east for 5 miles (8 kilometres). Climbing the steep slopes of Cronkley Fell, the name of the route accurately describes its appearance, with a ribbon of lush grass running through the heather. Looking back, there are good views towards Falcon Clints. As the

path levels-out, a chain of cairns leads across the plateau. Arriving at a small pool, Fox Earth Gill can be seen rising from beneath a slab of sugar limestone - creating a pleasant spot for a break.

Running alongside an erosion control enclosure, the path soon diverges from the fence to head downhill beside a feeder of Skyer Beck. Ahead are good views over Upper Teesdale, with the skyline notched by Coldberry Gutter - a hush cutting through the ridge north of Middleton-in-Teesdale. Off to the right is White Force, which itself can be a significant waterfall after heavy rainfall. Arriving at the bottom of the slope, the 'short-cut' route joins from the left (6 = NY 860 280).

The Green Trod

The Green Trod is part of a droveway that ran from Scotland to Yorkshire. For the most part it used Roman roads, with the forts at Bewcastle, Birdoswald and Whitley Castle serving as stances. It then followed the River South Tyne upstream, before crossing the River Tees close to where Moor House now stands. Running around the side of Meldon Hill, Maize Beck was forded near Birkdale. Arriving at Holwick, it turned south across the moors to God's Bridge, continuing on into Yorkshire.

Crossing a couple of broad streams, the route heads up a steep slope towards a cairn before continuing east over heather moorland. As the path founders in a rushy mire, Blea Beck is crossed by stepping stones. This can be difficult when the beck is in spate, and it is worth noting that there is a bridge on a grouse-shooters' track a short way upstream.

The path eventually joins the hardcore track at a cairn (7 = NY 880 276). Following the track as it heads down between scree-covered slopes, a marker post indicates a right turn over a stile flanked by carved sheep sculptures. From here a stony track runs down a deep trough, on either side of which are Holwick Scars - another outcrop of the Great Whin Sill. Continuing down towards Holwick, a gate leads to an unclassified road (8 = NY 903 270).

Crossthwaite

The final part of the walk follows the quiet road for 3 miles (5 kilometres) back to the starting point. Holwick was once a resting place for drovers, and still boasts a pub - the Strathmore Arms Inn. The road runs through a pastoral scene of tidy farms and tree-lined fields, offering an enjoyable end to the walk. Passing the abandoned Crossthwaite Quarry, this was an important source of ironstone during the 19th century. Arriving at the junction with the B6277, turn left and follow the pavement back to the village.

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