

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 28 Upper Swaledale

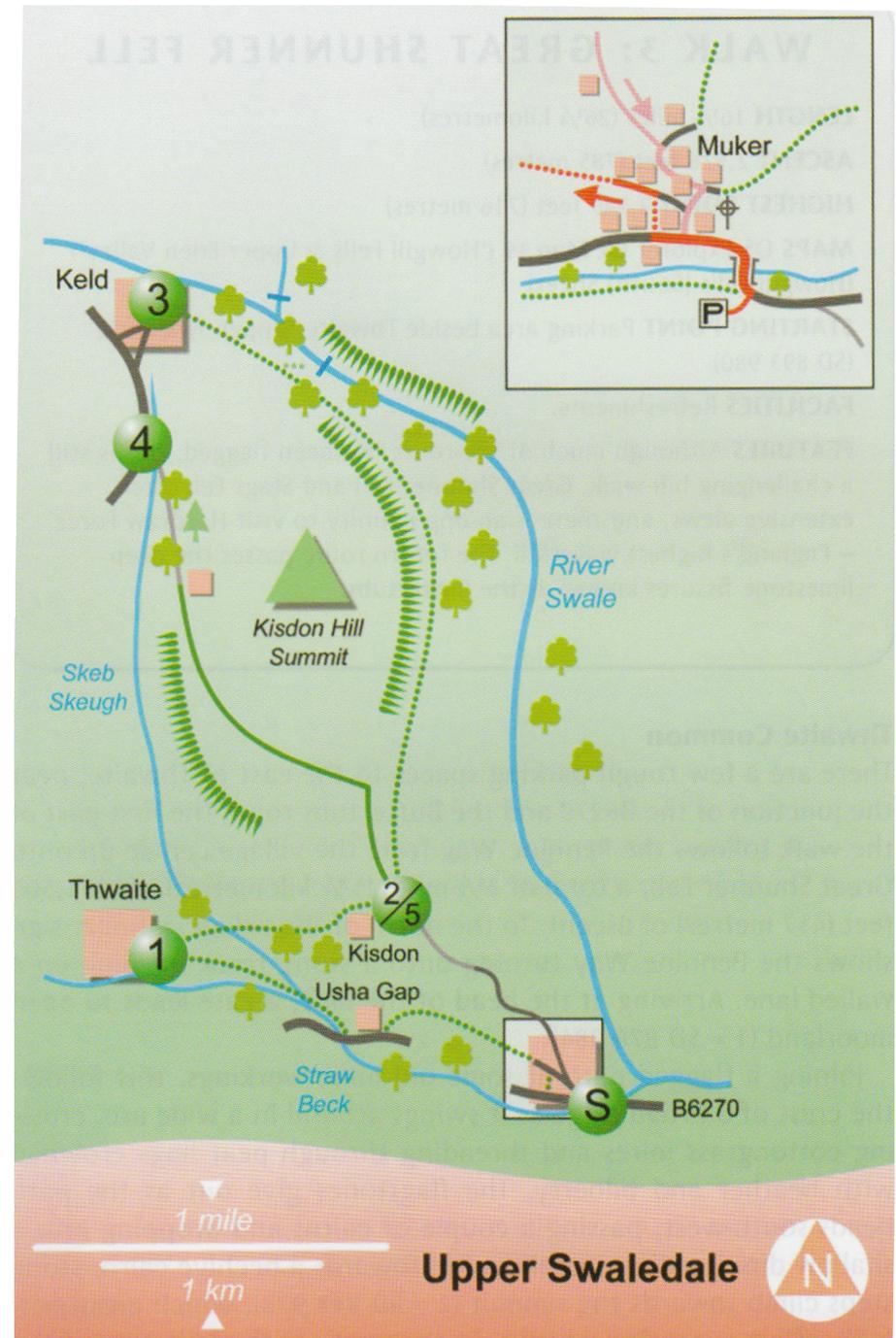
A short walk that visits the picturesque villages of Upper Swaledale as it criss-crosses the lovely Kisdon Hill. After a steeplechase across meadows and an awkward path running around the steep hillside, the return route follows a good track over the top of the hill, offering exceptional views.



- Length: 7 miles (11½ kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,247 feet (380 metres)
- Highest Point: 1,608 feet (490 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 30 ('Yorkshire Dales - Northern & Central Areas') (North Sheet)
- Starting Point: Muker car park, Upper Swaledale (SD 911 978)
- Facilities: Public toilets, inn and refreshments.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-28-upper-swaledale>

Usha Gap

Muker is located on the B6270 in Upper Swaledale. As well as a 'pay and display' car park, there is limited roadside parking to the west of the village. Opposite the public toilets, a ginnel runs up beside Swaledale Woollens to arrive at a back street. Turning left, just past a row of cottages a gate leads to a field. From here the route runs 1¼ miles (2 kilometres) over meadows towards Thwaite. Following the flagged path across fields, drystone walls are crossed by narrow gap stiles with spring-loaded gates that snap at you heels. Off to the left, beyond the tree-lined course of Straw Beck, pasture can be seen creeping up the steep valley side towards Muker Common. Passing through Usha Gap farm, turn along the B6270.



Muker-in-Swaledale

Muker is another village with Viking origins, its name being derived from the Old Norse 'mjoer-aker' ('cultivated enclosure'). The focal point of the village is the Church of St. Mary the Virgin. Before this was built in 1580 the dead of Upper Swaledale were carried along the old corpse way that ran from Keld to Grinton - a distance of 12 miles (19 kilometres). The literary institute in the village centre recalls the fact that Upper Swaledale - including the tributary valley of Arkengarthdale - was an important lead-mining area. At its height Muker had 1,450 parishioners, although this waned after lead-mining went into decline in the 1880s. More recently the village has found a new role serving the many visitors to Upper Swaledale.

A short way along the road, before it crosses Usha Gap Bridge, a finger sign marks the start of a path to Thwaite. This initially runs beside the beck, then continues over meadows, with signs requesting walkers to travel in single file so as to avoid trampling the grass. Just before reaching Thwaite, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way heading towards a gate in a drystone wall (1 = SD 894 982). Before continuing, however, a visit to Thwaite and the famous Kearton Country Hotel for refreshments might be in order.

Upper Swaledale

The dramatic scenery of Upper Swaledale was fashioned during the last Ice Age. From its headwaters on Birkdale Common, the River Swale - the 'swirling river' - runs swiftly eastward through a deep, 'U'-shaped valley. The principal settlement in Upper Swaledale is Reeth. Downstream the River Swale flows through a beautiful wooded gorge en route to the Georgian market town of Richmond.

Kisdon Side

From here the Pennine Way is followed for 2¾ miles (4¼ kilometres) around the eastern flanks of Kisdon Hill. Heading over a couple of fields, cross a stream by a flat bridge and head up to a gated gap stile. At this point a finger sign marks the start of a stony path heading east up steep slopes clad in bracken and heather. Pausing to look back, Great Shunner

Fell and Lovely Seat dominate the view. Joining a grassy track at Kisdon House farm, head up beside a lime kiln. Arriving at a crossroads of tracks, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning north (2 = SD 904 986).

From here the route follows a path contouring around the side of the hill, picking its way awkwardly through belts of slippery scree. To the right are stunning views over the deep valley of the River Swale, with the gorge of Swinner Gill cutting down through the scarp of Ivelet Moor. The path runs above steep, wooded slopes, eventually passing through an overgrown quarry. A finger sign shows a muddy path heading down to Kisdon Force, offering an opportunity for a there-and-back detour. Continuing along our path, across the river are glimpses of towering limestone cliffs. When the Pennine Way turns down towards a footbridge, instead continue along the link path leading to the village centre at Keld (3 = NY 892 012). Heading up through the village, turn left along the B6270. Soon a finger sign beside an old barn marks the start of a bridleway to Muker (4 = NY 892 006).

Kisdon Hill

The final part of the walk runs 2½ miles (4¼ kilometres) over Kisdon Hill. Crossing a stream, a stony track heads steeply uphill towards an isolated farmhouse. The height gained affords good views over the valley, its steep slopes patterned with walled pasture. Looking ahead, the crumbling face of an abandoned quarry (Hooker Mill Scar) marks the hillside. Passing through a gate, a grassy track is followed over the broad crest of the hill. Turning sharply southward, the track heads downhill. Muker can be seen down in the valley, and beyond it the River Swale. Arriving back at the crossroads of tracks passed earlier, follow the route signed for Muker (5 = SD 904 986).

Kisdon Hill

The lovely island-hill of Kisdon is almost entirely surrounded by streams. It is the jewel in the crown of Upper Swaledale, itself arguably the finest of Yorkshire's dales. Whilst it is a hill of relatively modest height (1,637 feet / 499 metres), and the actual summit is seldom visited, its flanks provide a grandstand for views of the

surrounding fells and dales.

Following a stony track heading south-east down a walled lane, this becomes tarmac as it zigzags steeply downhill. Approaching the village, it runs along a tree-shaded lane. Passing the tiny post office, continue down towards the village centre. Since this is a short walk, there should be plenty of time to sample the refreshments available locally, or else to go exploring (the remains of lead-mining operations in Swinner Gill are well worth a visit).

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