

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 34 Fountains Fell and Malham Tarn from Arncliffe

Pennine Way

50 YEARS



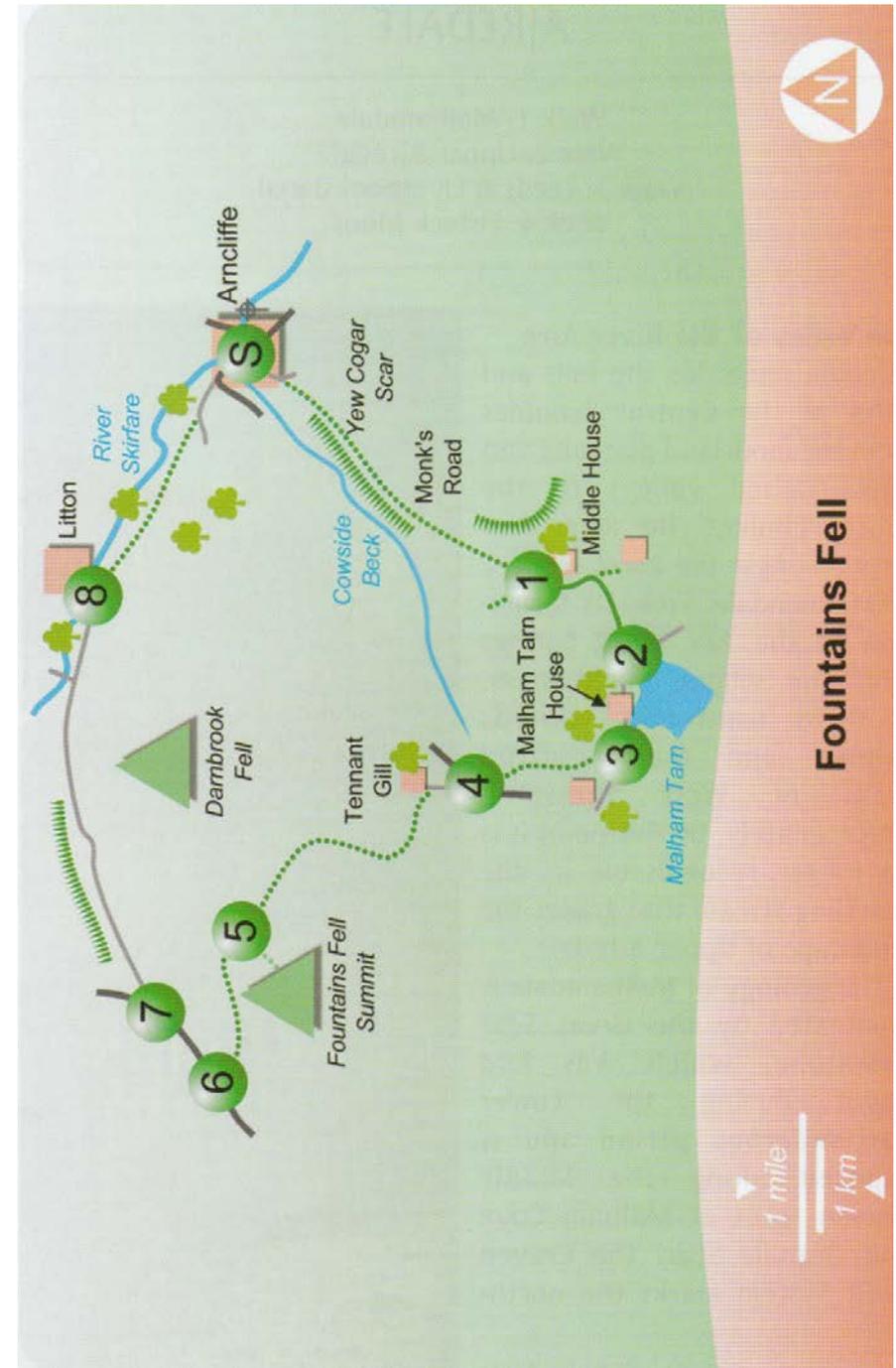
NATIONAL TRAIL

Starting at Arncliffe in Littondale - the original Emmerdale - this highly enjoyable walk follows a monastic way over limestone moors to Malham Tarn before crossing the rugged moorland terrain of Fountains Fell by miners' tracks. The return route follows a stony track and a riverside path.

- Length: 16 miles (25¾ kilometres)
Ascent: 1,903 feet (580 kilometres)
Highest Point: 2,139 feet (652 metres)
Map(s): OS Explorer OL Maps 2 ('Yorkshire Dales - Southern & Western Areas') (South Sheet) and 30 ('Yorkshire Dales - Northern & Central Areas') (Central Sheet)
Starting Point: Arncliffe village centre, Littondale (SD 932 718)
Facilities: Inn and refreshments.
Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-34-fountains-fell-malham-tarn-arncliffe>

The Monk's Road

Arncliffe is reached by turning off the B6160 a short way to the north of Kilnsey Crag, then following a narrow road running up Littondale for 3 miles (5 kilometres). There is roadside parking around the village green. The first part of the walk follows an old monastic way south-west over beautiful limestone moors to Malham Tarn, a total of 4¼ miles (6¾ kilometres). This was the Monk's Road, which was originally used to access the sheep runs held by Fountains Abbey. Beside the Falcon Inn, a finger sign points along a lane. Following this out of the village, just after the point where a small stream crosses the track, another finger sign marks a right turn through a gap stile, joining a path heading steeply uphill.



Littondale

Down the glacial 'U'-shaped valley of Littondale runs the River Skirfare - a tributary of the Wharfe. The steep valley sides are embellished with limestone scars and hanging woods, while the valley floor is patterned with riverside meadows. The Normans established a hunting chase here (Litton Forest), before the grazing rights were awarded to Fountains Abbey during the 13th century. The old name for the valley was 'Amerdale', recalling the fact that it was the model for 'Emmerdale Farm'. Arncliffe ('eagle cliff') is an unspoilt place of stone-built cottages arranged around a village green, beside which is an inn (the Falcon, not the Woolpack!).

The steep slopes above Cowside Beck are carpeted in lush grass, dotted with brightly coloured flowers. The path becomes somewhat exposed as it runs above Yew Cogar Scar, but it soon veers away from the valley side to pass through an area of limestone outcrops. Crossing a ladder stile, a National Trust sign marks the boundary of its land holding. To the right are views towards Fountains Fell and Darnbrook Fell, the latter being identified by the unsightly conifer blocks high up on its flanks. The path weaves through an area of low hillocks, with limestone features everywhere. Heading towards a clump of mature sycamore trees sheltering a ruin, ignore a finger sign indicating a turn for Darnbrook (1 = SD 907 684). Passing to the right of the abandoned farm (Middle House), a stony track is joined. Over a ladder stile, instead of continuing down towards a working farm, follow a grassy track as it contours around a bluff. To the left is the dome of Great Close Hill. Crossing a fence stile, the track continues south-west over pasture studded with erratics until Malham Tarn suddenly comes into view. Zigzagging down towards the lake, mature beech trees in walled folds provide an opportunity to rest in the shade. Joining a lakeside track, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way heading into woodland (2 = SD 897 671).

Malham Tarn

Following the tree-shaded track around the north side of the lake, bird

song completes a most idyllic scene. Passing to the right of Malham Tarn House, the track runs through a limestone cutting that was originally dug as part of a job-creation scheme. Occasionally the lake comes into view through the trees, and at one point a path leads down to a bird hide that is well worth a visit. Eventually a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning through a gate on the right (3 = SD 888 673).

Malham Tarn House

Malham Tarn House was built around 1850 by Walter Morrison, a wealthy industrialist and Liberal MP. It had previously been the site of a hunting lodge owned by Lord Ribblesdale (who was responsible for planting the surrounding woodland), and before that a sheep-farm under Fountains Abbey. Notable guests entertained at the hall included Charles Darwin and Charles Kingsley - the latter drawing inspiration for his novel 'The Water Babies' during his visit. Today it operates as a field studies centre.

Passing a row of mature sycamore trees, the path runs along the bottom of a dry gully. Crossing a ladder stile, continue north over pasture, with views over the broad valley of Cowside Beck towards Fountains Fell. A finger sign marks a left turn onto a rough track heading down towards a step stile, from where it continues over a meadow. Arriving at an unclassified road, cross straight over to join a farm access (4 = SD 884 691).

Fountains Fell

The track passes close to the limestone outcrops of Great Hill Scar as it runs towards Tennant Gill farm. Passing around the farm buildings, a quad track heads up the middle of a field towards a drystone wall. Over a step stile, a finger sign a short way to the left shows a path heading north-west, up beside an overgrown dyke. Turning north, the Pennine Way follows a track created in late 18th century to access the coal mines on the fell. Crossing a deep gully by stone steps, the route turns north-west as it starts to climb. Reaching the plateau, the track runs over heather moorland and cottongrass mires towards a tall cairn standing among stony heaps raised by the miners (5 = SD 868 720).

At 2,139 feet (652 metres), this is the highest point on the walk. The actual summit can be visited by a relatively short 'there and back' detour, following a quad track heading south-west across the plateau. However, in poor visibility do not be tempted to deviate from the Pennine Way - there are many deep mine shafts hereabouts. The quad track passes a fenced shaft and a coke oven before arriving at a sizeable cairn marking the summit. Unlike the false top visited by the Pennine Way, this wonderfully remote place offers fine views of the surrounding fells, Pen-y-ghent being particularly prominent.

Fountains Fell

Fountains Fell and its joined top, Darnbrook Fell, reach 2,192 feet (668 metres) and 2,047 feet (624 metres) respectively. It takes its name from Fountains Abbey, recalling the monastic sheep-runs that once covered the area. The stony heaps and mine shafts on the plateau are relics of the mining operations that took place here from the early 18th century, working a thin coal seam at the base of the Millstone Grit cap.

Retracing your steps to the Pennine Way, cross a drystone wall by a step stile. Here it is necessary to switch maps, from Sheet 2 to Sheet 30. Passing a cairn, turn onto a stony path - another old miners' track - heading steeply downhill. There is momentarily a sense of exposure as it hooks around bare rock and is over-washed by a stream, before continuing diagonally down the hillside. Eventually the path swings around from west to north-west, following a drystone wall over boggy ground. Arriving at an unclassified road, it is here that we leave the Pennine Way (6 = SD 853 723).

Darnbrook Fell

The first part of the return route follows a short section of quiet road, then a good track running around the northern flanks of Darnbrook Fell - a total of 3¾ miles (6 kilometres). Turning right, head along the unfenced road, looking out for a finger sign marking the start of a bridle road to Litton

(7 = SD 855 729). The hardcore track heads north-east, with fine views across the deep valley of Pen-y-ghent Gill towards limestone terraces and the distinctive ridge of Pen-y-ghent itself. The map reveals a series of potholes along the valley side, below the track. Forging a stony stream and crossing a normally dry gully by a flat bridge, continue around the flanks of Darnbrook Fell. Entering a walled lane, the stony track heads downhill, with splendid views across Littondale. Arriving at the valley floor, the lane continues between meadow and pasture, with a stone bridge off to the left providing an escape route onto a quiet road if daylight is failing. Passing a farm, ignore a finger sign showing a path to Litton and instead turn through a gate on the right. Following a tree-shaded track running alongside a drystone wall, when this fords a side stream beware of slippery stones. Continuing past some old farm buildings, once again turn through a gate on the right, with a finger sign marking the start of a path to Arncliffe (8 = SD 905 739).

Littondale

The final part of the walk follows the River Skirfare for 2¼ miles (3¾ kilometres) back to the starting point. Crossing a couple of fields, a gate leads to a stony path running along the tree-lined riverbank. In times of drought the river runs underground, its stony bed becoming a place of stagnant rock pools. Through another gate, the path continues over meadows, with ruined barns dotted about the valley floor. The waymarking is good, and the path is easy-going as it cuts across a broad meander in the course of the river. Crossing a wall by a gated gap stile, an English Nature sign provides information about Scoska Wood, which climbs the steep slopes off to the right (this is apparently the largest ash and rowan wood in the Yorkshire Dales). The path continues along the foot of a bluff, then across fields, with clumps of sycamore and ash trees providing shade for sheep. Eventually a few flagstones lead to a ladder stile, where a muddy lane is joined. This soon meets an unclassified road running back into the village centre.

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