**Walk the Way in a Day**

**Walk 45  Black Hill from Standedge**

A challenging walk across open moorland, combining old and new Pennine Way routes. After following an easy path beside reservoirs and up onto Black Hill, the return route crosses dreadful terrain - including the infamous Saddleworth Moor - with difficult navigation making fair weather essential.

---

**Wessenden Moor**

The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way over Wessenden Moor, a total of 5½ miles (8¾ kilometres). At the parking area, a finger sign points to a path climbing above Standedge Cutting. Joining a track heading east-south-east, this follows the course of an old turnpike, constructed in 1815 and subsequently replaced by the alignment now used by the A62. Off to the left, beneath the shapely form of Pule Hill, is Redbrook Reservoir, built to supply the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. Looking ahead, the Holme Moss transmitter identifies the location of Black Hill. Arriving at an old marker stone, the Pennine Way turns onto a flagged path heading towards a pair of small reservoirs (Black Moss and Swellands) (1 = SE 031 089).
Holme Moss Transmitter
The BBC transmitter at Holme Moss is 750 feet (229 metres) high, with a base at 1,723 feet (585 metres) above sea level. When it was activated on 12th October 1951, it was the most powerful television transmitter in the world. The event was celebrated with a special programme appropriately entitled ‘Hello Up There’, hosted by Gracie Fields.

Crossing a low dam above the neck of land separating the two reservoirs, follow a flagged path over cottongrass mires. The path swings around to head north-east, following Blakely Clough gently downhill towards the deep valley of Wessenden Brook. Switching to the right-hand side of the clough, the path follows a narrow ledge around a bracken-covered bluff to enter the gully of Short Grain. Hooking around the head of the clough, the stream is crossed beneath a small waterfall. Joining a track heading down towards Wessenden Reservoir, cross over the dam (2 = SE 058 088).

Joining a track running south-east up the valley, this is home to a chain of reservoirs built to supply Huddersfield and the Colne Valley. Crossing a couple of side streams by footbridges, continue past Wessenden Head Reservoir to arrive at an unclassified road, which is followed towards its junction with the A635. Until the 1950s this was the location of the Isle of Skye Inn. Turning right, follow the grass verge beside the busy main road before crossing over to a finger sign pointing to a fence stile (3 = SE 075 072).

Black Hill
From here the Pennine Way runs over Wessenden Head Moor then up onto Black Hill, a total of 1¾ miles (2¾ kilometres). Joining a flagged path, this follows a dyke (Black Dike) running south-east across rough moorland. Stone steps lead in and out of Dean Clough, where the stream is usually easy to ford. The view ahead is dominated by Issue Edge, marking the steep scarp of Black Hill, with the Holme Moss transmitter beyond. Eventually the path turns south as it starts uphill. There is a stiff climb ahead, although the height gained affords good views back towards Holmfirth. As the path levels-out, a few cairns confirm the route across the plateau. Despite being flanked by peat hags, the path itself is easy going. As ground conditions start to deteriorate, flagstones lead to the OS pillar marking the summit (4 = SE 078 047).

When surveyors from the Corps of Royal Engineers set up a triangulation point on Black Hill in 1784, the theodolite soon sank into the sea of peat covering the plateau. The summit still bears the name Soldier’s Lump, although this may relate to another survey, undertaken in 1936. The hill seems higher than its 1,910 feet (582 metres), and although the official route of the Pennine Way has been improved with flagstones, the other approaches demand a significant degree of caution.

Wessenden Head Moor
The first part of the return route heads north-west off the hill, following the original line of the Pennine Way across 2 miles (3½ kilometres) of very difficult terrain. Even in good visibility, careful compass work is required in order to maintain a steady course while keeping to firm ground. The initial bearing is 310 degrees, with a few cairns providing guidance. Passing a ruined shelter that now serves as a cairn, the route heads downhill before continuing across rough moorland.

A number of gullies are crossed as the route runs against the grain of the terrain, and whilst there are one or two marker posts along the way, there is little trace of a path on what is a very remote expanse of open moorland. Here there is a taste of what the Pennine Way must have been like before it was tamed. However, as a fence line converges from the left, traffic can be seen moving on the A635 away to the right. Continuing north-west towards a fence stile, a hardcore track is joined. Upon reaching the road, turn left and head towards a parking area at the summit, which reaches 1,614 feet (492 metres) above sea level (5 = SE 051 063).
The final part of the return route continues north-west across the infamous Saddleworth Moor, with another 3¼ miles (5¼ kilometres) of very difficult terrain. Crossing a fence stile, a long section of flagstones provides passage of a cottongrass mire (Featherbed Moss). The flagstones give-out at the edge of a grough, with the route continuing straight ahead (north-west). Boot prints in the peat are now the only guide. At one point the route drops into a grough, following the sandy floor of the channel. Continuing over boggy ground, a couple of cairns are passed. Heading in and out of another couple of groughs, Pule Hill is now visible ahead. Arriving at Black Moss Reservoir, cross over the dam (6 = SE 031 089) and retrace your steps back to the starting point.

**Saddleworth Moor**

The Pennine ridge south of Standedge is covered by an expanse of open moorland and treacherous peat bog. To the east of the ill-defined watershed is Wessenden Moor, while to the west is Saddleworth Moor. The latter gained infamy during the mid-1960s through its association with the Moors Murders - a reputation which its bleak appearance has helped to reinforce. Beneath the scarp is the Saddleworth area of Oldham, with Uppermill at the centre of a cluster of villages, including the lyrically-named Diggle, Dobcross, Delph and Denshaw.

This walk is reproduced with permission from Circular Walks on the Pennine Way by Kevin Donkin, published by Frances Lincoln.