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Leighton Reservoir and Ilton Moor

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Leighton Reservoir. Lay-by next to the reservoir (SE 156787)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer 298 Nidderdale
Distance	8.6 miles
Date of Walk	29 May 2020
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This is a varied walk, starting off by Leighton Reservoir and circling over Ilton Moor before returning via farmland and a pleasant stream to the start. It is a walk on clear tracks and is very easy to navigate. I did the walk after a very long dry spell and there were still a couple of boggy sections so, if you are doing the walk after a wet spell, you might be advised to take gaiters.

Leighton Reservoir and the adjacent Roundhill Reservoir were built in the early 20th Century. It was officially opened in 1911. The work, including construction of a magnificent stone dam, needed a railway to transport goods from Masham railway station some six miles away. Its waters are used to compensate for abstraction from the River Ure and to provide a popular trout fishing lake.

As you climb up to the moor, you will notice on the skyline a strange tower. This is one of the “Colsterdale Towers”, used for sightings in the construction of the reservoirs and associated pipelines. You can cross the moor to see it, though I did not bother having seen one before – see my Greygarth Circular walk. The view along the valley containing the reservoirs is particularly attractive.

Ilton Moor itself is a fairly bleak place but will be attractive when the heather is blooming. It is crossed by a wide track, used for grouse shooting.

Finally, the walk circles via Ilton, a tiny hamlet and Leighton to reach the road where there is a short section of very quiet road walking back to the car. On the way, the route passes the entrance to the Druids Temple, an interesting folly. I had seen it before so did not visit on this occasion but it is worth a look. More information is given on my Masham to Druids Temple walk.

The walk starts from Leighton reservoir. To get there, turn left off the B6267, just west of Masham (signposted). Pass through Fearby and Healy before forking left to the reservoir. There is a car park here but a sign indicates this is for fishermen only. Just beyond it is a long lay-by where you can park.

Start: Facing the reservoir, turn right and walk along the road, alongside the reservoir. Stay on the road until it turns right away from the reservoir. At this point, turn left over a cattle grid, to follow a tarmac lane (SE 156783). A Yorkshire Water sign tells you there is no access for unauthorised vehicles.

Follow the track to the dam for Roundhill Reservoir and cross the dam. As you cross, you can see the Colsterdale sighting tower on the horizon. Once over the dam, go

through the left of the two gates, then turn immediately right to follow the public footpath fingerpost (SE 153773).

Follow the path parallel with the wall on the right as far as the corner and go through a gate then turn left to follow the obvious path, indicated by the yellow footpath arrow, as it climbs the hill.

The path leads to a gate which looks as though it is permanently padlocked but there is an ingenious stile built into the gate. Once over it, follow the path as it curves right.

As SE 155756, pass some shooting butts and less than a quarter of a mile after them, join a broad track (SE 155754). A public footpath sign pointing back the way you have come for "Roundhill Reservoir 1¼ miles" confirms your position. Turn left along the broad track for 1¼ miles.

At SE 164758, a track branches off to the trig. point which you can see, should you wish to "bag" it. Return to and continue along the broad track. There are good views of Wensleydale along here.

The track divides (SE 174761). Turn left.

Eventually, after passing through a gate, the stony track gradually turns into rough tarmac before connecting with a proper tarmac road at a junction. The road goes right but you go left on a gently descending stony track (SE 188780). Follow this as it curves right until you join the road. Turn left here.

The road descends quite steeply and after three sharp bends and just after crossing the site of a ford, with a footbridge alongside, turn left off the road, following a public footpath fingerpost for "Ripon Rowell" and "Knowle Lane ½ mile" (SE 186787).

Follow the path along the edge of the plantation until you come to a gate. Go through the gate and turn right to follow the wall up the hill, following the yellow arrow. At the farm, cross the stile. The path circles clockwise around the farm.

Arrive at a road junction (SE 179788). The left turn takes you to the Druid's Temple, after about a quarter of a mile, should you wish to visit. Otherwise, cross straight over the road and through the walkers' gate and follow the fingerpost for "Ripon Rowell" and "Burgess Bank 1 mile". The path across the field is in the same direction as the power lines.

You arrive at a gate in a wall comprising mainly large boulders. Once through the gate, turn left to follow the trees.

At the end of the trees, turn left indicated by the yellow arrow. Go through the gate and turn immediately right. Follow the obvious path as it dinks left then right.

Go through a walkers' gate into the corner of a field (SE 173793). Head roughly for the diagonally opposite corner of the field to begin with but your target is a gate about a hundred and fifty yards to the left of it, to the left of a small copse of trees. Go through a walkers' gate to the left of this copse and head roughly for the left hand side of the buildings ahead of you. Look out for a post in the field with an arrow

pointing back the way you have come. This indicates a local walk but the post is a useful aiming point.

When you get to the post, downhill there are some gates and you will probably make out a three way fingerpost. Follow the public bridleway fingerpost, leaving the Ripon Rowell Way.

Descent a short distance to join a broad track. Turn right.

At a junction, turn left, almost back on yourself to follow the stream to a stone bridge. Cross this and follow the obvious track at the other side.

Go through a gate and follow the public bridleway sign but bear away from the wall on the right, at about 45°. Head for the old barn. The gate you require is a few yards to the left of this.

Once through the gate, head for the far left hand corner of the next field. Go through a gate and immediately left through another. Turn right at the farm access track to the road, then turn left along the road to return to the parking area.

