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Burley-in-Wharfedale to Ilkley and the Swastika Stone

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Train station car park at Burley-in-Wharfedale (SE 164457)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer 297 Lower Wharfedale & Washburn Valley
Distance	7.8 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: There is a common misconception that all the moors above Burley-in-Wharfedale and Ilkley are “Ilkley Moor”, a belief no doubt encouraged by the “On Ilkley Moor Baht ‘at” song. In fact the collective name is Rombalds Moor and this easy walk crosses the Burley and Ilkley Moor sections of it. It is a useful walk in that it can be accomplished by getting a train to Burley from Leeds or Bradford and a return train from Ilkley afterwards. Buses are also available but if you arrive in Burley by bus, you need to make your way up Station Road to the train station where the walk starts. If you come by car, parking in the vicinity of the station is limited and other than on a Saturday or Sunday, the station car park will be full of commuters. There are various choices for food and drink en route ranging from the pub/hotel at the Cow and calf Hotel, a refreshment kiosk and multiple choices in Ilkley itself.

I have chosen the scenic route out of Burley but quicker ways to the moors are via Hag Farm Road behind the station (picking up the walk at SE 159446) or simply straight up Station Road (which becomes Moor Lane) (picking up the walk at (SE 150451) but my route is more interesting.

The path follow the edge of the moor with good views across lower Wharfedale, takes in the famous Cow and calf rocks, goes to White Wells, a bath house built by Squire Middleton in the 18th century for the local people and finally the Swastika Stone so named because of the ancient swastika type design on it. As far as I know, no-one has ever deciphered what it means. The design closest to the path is actually a Victorian copy of the fainter ancient original behind. The bath house is open irregularly to the public sometimes but you will need to check opening in advance if you want to see it.

Start: Leave Burley-in-Wharfedale railway station via platform 2 (the platform you arrive on from Leeds or Bradford) (SE 164457). Go straight across the car park and down the ginnel/snicket/alleyway (depending on where you come from!) into Prospect Road. Turn right and first right again into Rose Bank. Walk along Rose Bank and turn right after about 400 yards along here, into Heather Rise. As this road bends to the right, keep straight on along the footpath between the gardens.

Do not go under the railway bridge but instead as you approach it, climb the steep steps on the left (SE 165455). At the top, turn left along the disused railway line.

Continue until you pass (but ignore) a footpath on the left down some steps. The path forks. Take the right fork and descend to a stile. Immediately after crossing the stile, turn right over a second stile and follow the path through the woods to the current railway tracks and cross carefully via the walkway (SE 166452). The footpath descends to a stile which you cross.

Bear left and after going through a walkers gate, cross the small bridge and turn right. Go through a gateway (or cross the stile alongside) and follow the left hand bank of the little stream (Carr Beck). At the end of this field, the path crosses the stream and turns left now following the right hand bank.

As you pass through a metal walkers' gate and go over a wooden stile, Hag Farm comes into view. Continue following the course of the beck.

The beck disappears underground and at the end of the field where this happens, go through a squeeze stile. After the next squeeze stile, the beck reappears. Continue following the right hand bank. After the next squeeze stile, the path exits into a broader track with a post with various yellow footpath arrows. Go straight on here.

Continue following the course of the beck ignoring any turns left or right and go through an unusual three stoned stile. Follow the footpath until you come to a group of cottages, cross the beck once again via the stile and bridge and go up the drive between the houses. The drive exits into the road (SE 156444). Take great care here as there are blind bends and speeding cars. Cross the road and follow the track immediately opposite.

Remain on this main track ignoring any turns off as it rises to the open moors and after crossing the cattle grid, turn right and follow the broad track (SE 149447). You pass in front of a large stone house bearing the date 1861 and an old quarry on the left. The track descends gently to another farm at which point you come to another well used footpath on the left and start to ascend it (SE 150451). At a fork, keep right then ignore the immediate right turn and continue climbing gently.

At the next junction, turn right heading to the valley/ravine with the stream at the bottom (Coldstone Beck). Cross the stream and climb the other side and stay on the left of the stone wall. Stay on the main path as it follows the edge of the moors until you reach the unmistakable Cow and Calf Rocks.

Avoid the obvious tracks going down to the road.

As you pass above the Cow and Calf Hotel, look out for the large rocks on the right which is where the Cow and Calf Rocks are (SE 130467). There is a right fork here which you may wish to use to get a closer look at the rocks. There is a kiosk below where refreshments can be obtained. Return to this fork and turn right passing behind the old quarry area behind the rocks.

Another old quarry appears with a copse of fir trees growing in it. Walk round the back of this old quarry. You come to a small valley on the left with a stream and part way down this, just after passing an outcrop of rocks, descend the steep footpath to the stream and up the other side heading for another copse of trees ahead.

As you enter the copse of trees, you will see the white buildings of White Wells ahead which is your next destination. Go straight ahead through the trees.

It is now a case of heading towards White Wells via whatever is the easiest path. I say this because in the summer, the bracken grows quite high and picking out any path in particular can be difficult. The one I used started off curving right then swinging left but as long as you keep heading roughly in the direction of the buildings, you will get there eventually, probably passing a tarn (which may be a mass of reeds in summer) with a wooden post with "F20" written on it.

At White Wells (SE 118468), refreshments may be available and there are picnic tables. It is usually open at weekends 2pm - 5pm during school holidays, particularly the summer holidays and flies flags to indicate when it is open. A limited facility public toilet is situated in the small separate white building. When White Wells is open, it is worth having a look at the old public bath through the doorway next to the cottage (signed).

Walk across the front of White Wells and follow the main track downhill. After crossing a cobbled ford and turning the corner, take the footpath on the left (SE 116468). At a fork, take the right fork.

On reaching the tarmac road, turn left. After about 150 yards, turn right on to a footpath indicated by a green fingerpost. Follow this broad footpath as it passes along the rear boundary of houses. You pass a reservoir.

Go over a footbridge crossing Hebers Ghyll where there is a finger post indicating it. Ignore this and carry straight on to see the Swastika Stone but remember it as this is your eventual way into Ilkley.

Go through a metal gate and ignore the steeply descending path to the right, go straight across the dip and where the path forks go left and follow this round to the Swastika Stone which is inside the railed enclosure which you can see ahead (SE 096470).

After seeing the Swastika Stone, retrace your steps to the Hebers Ghyll finger post (SE 099469) and follow it down. By a bench in a walled enclosure, turn right and follow the path down the ghyll over a series of bridges, ignoring any minor turns off here and there.

The path exits into Hebers Ghyll Drive. Turn right and follow this along to Grove Road. Go right on Grove Road which becomes The Grove, the main shopping street

through Ilkley. Walk along here and across the roundabout to reach the bus/train stations.

