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Goredale Scar and Malham Cove

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Roadside parking at Malham (SD 900625)
Ordnance Survey map	OL2 Yorkshire Dales – Southern and Western
Distance	7 Miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This is the classic circular walk that many people do when visiting the Malham area. It combines the attractive waterfall of Janet's Foss, the dramatic gorge of Gordale Scar and the truly magnificent Malham Cove. Above the cove you walk (carefully to avoid breaking ankles!) across the famous limestone pavement with its "clints" (the limestone blocks) and "grikes" (the fissures between the blocks).

The walk as described involves scrambling up the waterfall at Gordale Scar. Whether you are up to this depends on you and the amount of water coming over the fall. If in doubt, follow the alternative route described below.

The walk starts from the village of Malham (SD 900625). To get there, turn off the A65 between Gargrave and Hellifield at Coniston Cold, signposted Bell Busk and Malham. There is a pay and display car park at Malham but outside of peak times, you can park for free on the road as you approach Malham. Public toilets and refreshments are available in Malham.

Start: Start the walk by crossing the small stone clapper bridge behind the old smithy building. Turn right and follow the stream until you reach a finger post pointing left "Janet's Foss 1 mile" (SD902624). Turn left here and follow the obvious path which soon runs alongside the stream. The waterfall Janet's Foss is on the right in a shady dell which it is believed originates from the last ice age. A notice at the site gives information.

Continue to follow the path until it exits into a road (SD 912634). Turn right and note the lay-by on the left as this is your reference point for the alternative path should you need it.

Continue along the road for about 150 yards and turn left at a gate signed to Gordale Scar. Follow the track up the gorge to the see the waterfall.

The waterfall is best climbed up the left hand side. After heavy rain or if you do not feel up to the climb, return to the lay-by mentioned above at the back of which is a kissing gate. Go through this and as you walk along the path for 300/400 yards look out for a path ascending the hillside on the right hand side (New Close Knotts). There is no path shown on the OS map for this but it is a fairly obvious path with access gate. This is a steep climb and at the top, bear right to the edge of the gorge and follow it along to connect with the path from the waterfall at SD 914643.

Assuming you have climbed the waterfall, the path then climbs the left hand side of the steep valley (SD 914643).

You arrive at a stone stile and a finger post to Malham Tarn 2 miles.

Follow the obvious track until it exits into a road (SD 906653). Turn right then immediately bear right again off the road and on to a track. At the crossroads, keep straight ahead. After about 200 yards, start to bear left across the grass towards a clump of trees (SD 901662). Turn left at the trees and follow the wall round and head for a second group of trees down by the water.

Enjoy the sight of Malham Tarn and any bird life before turning left to follow the track which parallels the stream to the road. Turn right to cross the stream via the road bridge then go left where the finger post indicates Malham Cove 1½ miles (SD 893658).

Bear right and on reaching the wall, follow it, ignoring a stile which crosses it. After rounding a bluff, looking down over a dry valley, you arrive at a double stile with a finger post indicating the Pennine Way and Malham Cove ½ mile to the left (SD 891649). This is your route, along the dry valley.

The extensive limestone pavement with its “clints” and “grikes” indicates you have reached the top of Malham Cove. The pavement was scraped bare by the glaciers during the ice age and has been steadily eroded by rainwater ever since. It is worth cautiously approaching the edge for the best of the view. Do not go too close however as it is a long way down! Also be careful in wet weather as the limestone gets slippery. You may see peregrine falcons which live on the rock face.

With the precipice in front of you, head right across the limestone pavement, bearing left until you reach a wall at the end of it. Turn left here and follow the stepped path down to the valley floor. When you get to the bottom, there are often RSPB representatives who will let you look through powerful binoculars at the peregrine falcons. Turn left for a close up view of the cove but otherwise turn right and follow the path back to Malham.

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