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High Force Walk

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Car park at Bowlees – voluntary contribution (NY 908283)
Ordnance Survey map	OL31 North Pennines – Teesdale & Weardale
Distance	6.5 miles
Date of Walk	3 October 2014
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: Although I call this the High Force walk, it also includes Low Force waterfall and even if neither waterfall existed, the rest of the walk is worth doing for the views of Teesdale. This really is a beautiful valley.

In the north of England, mention of the “Whin Sill” crops up all over the place. It is a layer of a hard, dark rock called dolerite, also known as ‘whinstone’, formed from molten rock some 295 million years ago. It provides the edge over which the High Force waterfall falls. It has dubious claims to be the highest waterfall in England (which it is not) but its might is impressive enough nevertheless.

Low Force is more a series of cascades than a sheer drop but still a respectable display.

The walk starts from the Bowlees Visitors Centre car park with an unusual voluntary “Donate and Display” arrangement (NY 908283). The car park is on the north side of the B6277, about 3½ miles north west of Middleton-in-Teesdale.

There are no refreshment/toilet facilities on this walk.

Start: From the car park (NY 908283), follow the sign from its rear for the Visitors Centre itself and High Force. Pass the Centre and on reaching the road by a row of white painted cottages, turn right.

Follow the road to the ‘T’ junction with the B6277. Turn right for only a few yards then turn off left to follow the fingerpost for “Low Force and Pennine Way 300 yards” and “High Force 1¾ miles”. Shortly, go through a slit stile into the woods and follow the path to Wynch Bridge over the River Tees. This current bridge was built in 1831. Cross this suspension bridge. Note the sign - only one person should cross at once.

As you cross, there is a good view of Low Force to the right.

Once over Wynch Bridge, there is an information board about the falls. Turn right here to follow the fingerpost for “Pennine Way, Bridge 1 mile and High Force 1½ miles”.

Follow the path along the river, passing a sheep sculpture with the inscription “A Wonderful Place to be a Walker”. How true!

You also pass a sign which tells you are entering Moor House Upper Teesdale Nature Reserve.

At NY 889283, you pass Holwick Head footbridge, leading from a large car park and the main access route for tourists wanting to see High Force.

You will hear High Force long before you see it. Look out for a fork in the path with some black painted railings visible and turn right. This is the best viewing point for High Force.

Return to the main path and continue following the river.

At NY 873280, you pass High Force Quarry, across the river. The true scale of this becomes evident from high ground later. Not far past the quarry, the path starts to climb and turns away from the river. This is a beautiful stretch of the valley. There are a few rocks here which make a good picnic stop with a good view. Across the river is Dine Holm Scar, attractive despite the quarry next to it.

As the ground levels out, you can see the end of Cronkley/Green Hill scars. At NY 862283, you pass two Pennine Way marker stones. Leave the Pennine Way here and take the left hand path to the fence and turn left to follow it. Do not go through the gate.

At the bottom of the field, go through the kissing gate and then straight ahead for about 300 yards, to join another path at a 'T' junction, where there is a small cairn (NY 860280). Turn left here.

The path closes on a wall, virtually meeting at a stream. Cross the stream, then follow the right hand side of the wall up the hill. When the wall turns 90° left, keep straight on up the hill, away from the wall, to the top, passing a cairn. A few yards past the cairn, follow the path as it curves left (NY 869276).

As you walk along the ridge, you can appreciate the scale of the quarry.

The path passes through a line of grouse butts (NY 870276).

Continue along the path, passing another cairn (NY 873276). After crossing a stile, there is another stream to negotiate. There are rocks across which you can step.

On reaching a broad stony track, turn left, following a public bridleway fingerpost.

On the left, there is a fence line and you will eventually see where it turns left at 90°. A couple of hundred yards before this, there is a stile on the left which marks the Right of Way (NY 890275). Cross the stile and head downhill. Although clear at first, the route is not easy to follow as it weaves between the juniper bushes and some bushes are fenced off (see *footnote*). The best advice is to follow faint tracks towards the small boarded up stone cottage below as the route goes clockwise round this.

You emerge via a walkers' gate. Follow the track, crossing a couple of "planked" sections, to the old cottage.

Go through the gate by the cottage and clockwise round it.

Follow the track round the field, coming to a stony track leading to Held House (NY 895279). Turn right.

Keep on the track until, just as it starts to climb towards a copse of trees, there is another track off to the left between two large boulders. Turn left here.

Follow the track through a gate then head downhill towards the opposite corner of the field. From the corner, cross a short boardwalk, following the direction arrows, then drop down a little bank to another path and turn left.

You will soon find yourself back at Wynch Bridge. Retrace your steps to the car at Bowlees.

Footnote

When I crossed the stile at the fence, there was an empty notice board. When I got to the walkers' gate before the cottage there was a notice. Evidently the juniper bushes are suffering some dread disease and certainly some were clearly dead/dying. The notice asked that walkers help protect the bushes by walking around the entire fenced section, which would have meant not crossing the stile but walking along the fence and following it as it turned through 90°. Going through a gate would take you to the part of the track I describe as "planked". There is no suggestion that you cannot follow the ROW if you insist, merely a request that you help. I was unaware until it was too late and I describe the route actually followed.

