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Malham Tarn Walk

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Free car park by Malham Tarn (SD 894658)
Ordnance Survey map	OL2 Yorkshire Dales – Southern & Western areas
Distance	8 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: To most people, a Malham Tarn walk involves some combination which including Malham Village and/or Gordale Scar and indeed, such walks are listed elsewhere on Happy Hiker. As a result, this neglected but very pleasant and easy walk to the north is much quieter and there is a very good chance you will meet few other walkers. There is a stretch of road walking for about 1¼ miles but it is a very quiet, scenic lane with little traffic – I think three cars passed me. The walk is mostly very straightforward with only short moderate ascents of less than ¼ mile above Cowside Beck about half way round the walk and Great Close Hill, should you follow this option. I have included a yellow “traffic light” for the ascent above Cowside Beck but it is a marginal yellow/green.

Malham Tarn is originally a natural lake originally created by glaciers and is the highest lake in England. Its level was raised just over a metre in the 18th century by the building of a dam.

There are some scenic limestone outcrops on view during the walk and it ends with an optional extra, the opportunity to climb the fairly low (465m) Great Close Hill, which provides a great 360° view and one of the best of Malham Tarn itself. The summit is (or was) a stone cairn and a Scheduled Ancient Monument but the origin of the circular structure there now is uncertain.

The walk starts from the free car park close to Malham Tarn. To get there, turn off the A65 between Gargrave and Hellifield at Coniston Cold, signposted Bell Busk and Malham. In the centre of the village of Malham, turn right where signposted Malham Tarn then left, also signposted Malham Tarn. Go left at the next junction and the car park is on the right after about ½ mile.

Public toilets and refreshments are available in Malham.

Start: Leave from the car park (SD 894658) following the fingerpost for the Pennine Way and Malham Tarn ¼ mile on the path immediately behind the car park and bearing off slightly to the right.

Two copses of trees come into view, head between them initially. The path then moves across to the left hand copse and a third copse appears ahead of you. Join the broad stony track and turn left on the Pennine Way.

Ignore a path off to the right at the cattle grid for Middlehouse.

You enter the Malham Tarn Estate and when you get to the Field centre, go to its right and stay on the stony drive – do not turn right on to a tarmac drive.

Stay on the drive until you reach a three way fingerpost (SD 889674). Turn right for the "Pennine Way and Tennant Gill 1½ miles". Go through a short grassy valley with a scattering of rocks, then follow the wall on your left, passing a barn.

Go through a kissing gate where the path goes slightly left. At a corner of the wall, turn left, still following a Pennine Way fingerpost and at the end of the field, go over a stone step stile to follow the obvious track to the road (SD 885690) where you turn right.

Stay on the road for approximately 1¼ miles until the barns belonging to Darnbrook House (SD 899705). Here, turn right following the fingerpost for "Middlehouse 2 miles". Walk down the right hand side of the field and over the stile at the end.

Once over the stile, walk to the right of the small barn ahead, then slightly left to reach a step stile at the bottom of the field. Over this and a small clapper bridge and the path rises straight ahead indicated by a fingerpost for "Middlehouse 1½ miles", following the line of a collapsed wall. Although the "official" footpath diverts right after about 250 yards, this is access land and it is worth following the line of the wall as far as the limestone pavement for a good view along the Cowside Beck valley with its limestone scars.

Turn right then, to follow the limestone pavement along. When it ends, drop down a few feet and turn left. At a dilapidated wall, follow it along to the right until you reach the old gateway (SD 900697) and turn left on a clearer grassy path, heading for the low point on the near horizon.

As the path reaches the crest and levels out, head for the gate ahead with the stile alongside. Go over the stile and bear left. The path then starts to bend gently right heading towards some limestone cliffs. It stops short of the cliffs before reaching a wall and continues to bear right to an abandoned farm amongst trees. You reach a two way fingerpost with directions to Arncliffe and Darnbrook, neither of which are of use to us on this walk but passing it confirms you are on the intended route.

The footpath passes to the right of the farm and becomes a clear stony path. Follow this alongside the wall but as the wall bends left, go straight on. After 100 yards or so the path curves left to a ladder stile. Cross this, bearing right as the path forks but almost immediately, head down the field to the stile in the fence about half way along its bottom edge.

Cross the stile and turn right along the farm track (SD 908675)

As you walk along the track, the nearby hill on the right is Great Close Hill. It is worth the optional diversion to its top (SD 903668), for the 360° views and probably the best view of Malham Tarn. There is no specific path to its summit but this is access land so make your own way there, returning to the farm track afterwards.

Follow the farm track to a cattle grid (SD 905663) and after crossing this, turn sharp right passing to the rear of a copse of trees. The paths now are not particularly distinct because this is access land and people tend to wander but as you draw level with another copse on the left, make your way gradually to about 50 yards from its right hand corner and cross the broad stony track, keeping straight ahead.

On meeting a clearer grassy track, turn left. There is a low mound to the right with a scattering of rocks. Head towards its top and from there, the car park where you started comes into view.

