

Crossing the Pennines - the Yorkshire Colne Valley

Walk length: approximately 5 - 8 miles

Grade: Mostly easy with some moderate gradients up rough cobbled tracks; some roads. Not suitable for mobility-impaired.

Slaithwaite car park: OS Grid Reference: SE 07850 13963 Postcode: HD7 5AR

Marsden car park: OS Grid Reference: 109:SE047117 Postcode: HD7 6DH

Bus 183/184/185 from Huddersfield to Oldham calls at Slaithwaite, Marsden and Diggle, Dobcross, Uppermill.

Rail: Slaithwaite and Marsden both have Rail stations.

1. From the Old Bank car-park, behind the 1842 Free School, follow the path from the north-west corner beside our information panel, to the private parking behind the Elizabethan Manor House. On the lawn, you will find a large cylindrical stone, reputedly a milestone from the Roman road from Chester to York which passed through the valley. In the far left hand corner of the garden is the tiny lock-up or jail.
2. Turn back up the cobbled drive to the road, Nabbs Lane, and turn left towards the 1840s railway viaduct, passing the 'Silent Woman', The Skelthwaite Arms in the TV series 'Where the Heart Is' and noting the weavers' cottages on the right, with narrow mullion windows and a take-in door.
3. Continue up Holme Lane under the viaduct and turn right along the side of Slaithwaite reservoir, one of ten built in the 1790s to supply the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. At the end of the walkway, turn left along the side of the reservoir and continue straight ahead on the path sloping up through the woods.
4. You may wish to detour briefly (50m) to the left when you reach a mill pond, to see the waterfall that bypasses it. The textile Mill built in 1790 was demolished in 1977.
5. Returning to the path, continue upwards to Clough House Lane; as you pass some cottages on your right, note their privies and coal houses on your left.
6. Follow the lane, bearing leftwards downhill to where the lane makes a sharp U-turn; look over the wall on your right to the stream. Here was a Roman ford, part of the Roman road to York.
7. Our walk continues through Merrydale: go through a gap on your right at the bridge and follow the footpath along the stream up this pretty clough, listening to the different sounds of the water as it passes over various types of stream bed.

Along the way, you will see some stone footprints, carved by Kirklees College students and community groups tutored by Melanie Wilks.

After about half a mile, you will reach a wall, a T-junction with more footprints; the White Rose Forest walk is to the left, an easier route to Cop Hill, but our walk turns right. Look upwards on your right to see the remains of an earlier mill dam breached by a violent storm.

8. Climb the path around Merrydale Fold. This was the home of a flamboyant Victorian herbalist called Richard Horsfall, nicknamed Merrydale Dick, who delighted in annoying the medical profession putting the letters 'MD' after his signature.

Pass the other millpond on your left, climb the narrow stone steps and follow the fence and stream, turning right on the tarmac drive.



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9. You will reach Tyas Lane which was the pack-horse route from Halifax to Oldham; turn left down this lane, taking care because the setts can be slippery when wet.
10. Crossing the stream, over a double bridge, you will begin to climb the old track, with its causeway stones, some of considerable size. This packhorse track (Scout Lane) has been in use since the Middle Ages.
11. As you follow the track uphill, you may imagine hearing the bells of the packhorses. There is little room here for passing if two packhorse trains, perhaps laden with panniers of wool or salt, were to meet.

Eventually you will reach Marsden Lane; follow this upwards to the Rose and Crown, at the summit of Cop Hill.

At the junction with Holme Lane, find a new Guide stone or stoop, echoing the vernacular style. Because travellers often lost their ways on the moors, sometimes with fatal consequences, a law was passed in 1697 requiring the Justices of the Peace (the local Authorities) to erect markers on paths and where highways crossed.

The views from here are extensive and rewarding after the fairly arduous climb.

The walk continues down Marsden Lane, with views across the Colne Valley opening up. If you wish to avoid a stretch of tarmac, you can detour up Cop Hill Lane, a track to the right and turn left down Deep Gate to rejoin Marsden Lane lower down.

12. Follow the road downhill for about half a mile; to your right you can see Slaithwaite Hall on its promontory. The manorial home of the Tyas family, it had an unrivalled view of the trade routes passing through the valley. Continue straight down Marsden Lane.
13. The original packhorse track bears right at the U-bend where Marsden Lane becomes Crow Trees Road. The track is steep and has been authentically restored with funding from the Big Lottery People's Millions. It leads to Netherwood Lane and under the railway bridge to Park Gate Road; for a tarmac route, follow Crow Trees Road under the railway bridge on Kettle Lane, and turn immediately right into Park Gate Road.

At the foot of the packhorse track, admire the sculpture of a laden packhorse by Melanie Wilks, a reminder of the trade route between Halifax and Marsden, and onwards to Oldham and Manchester.

If you look in the undergrowth at the end of the slabbed way, you will see another stone, either a guide stone or a boundary marker for the Slaithwaite Hall estate.

14. From Park Gate Road ('gate' means a 'way' not a barrier), take the footpath on the left leading to Sandhills Cottages and Sparth Reservoir. PigTail Bridge is a pleasant picnic stop. 53 d 36' 34.10 n 1 d 54' 59.39 w
15. To extend your walk to Marsden, continue west along the towpath; you will pass a canal milestone.
16. Explore Marsden! There's the Marsden Mechanics Institute and Tourist Information, Riverside Brewery, other pubs, cafes and ice-cream shops, as well as Auntie Wainwright's Shop (Last of the Summerwine).
17. On Towngate are the stocks and the tomb of Enoch Taylor the ironfounder.



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18. The Marsden Moor National Trust Exhibition is between the Railway Station and the Old Goods Yard car-park. The towpath to the Standedge Tunnel joins the Boat Lane.
19. To return to Slaithwaite, the route continues east joining the canal towpath. Climb over the footbridge; you can view an old mill with its dam on your right hand side.

You can climb the steps to view the dam.

20. Continue along the towpath as far as the turning circle for the barges; just before the Dartmouth Estate worker's cottage and lock no. 31E, take the footpath on your right signed to the Olive Branch restaurant.
21. Cross the field (often with cattle), keeping the tumbled wall on your left and cross the narrow bridge over the River Colne. Continue straight ahead, through a beech grove and cross the goit which served Lingards Mill dam.
22. Climb a flight of worn stone steps and walk across the field following the path to the left of the Olive Branch restaurant, noticing a date stone 'I H 1769' on the rear wall which came from the original inn. A trade route between Liverpool and Hull passed this way; the inn's name comes from a settlement with America made by Lord Lewisham, who owned the Dartmouth Estate which covers much of the area. After being Prime Minister during the Napoleonic wars, he was Home Secretary at the time of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819.
23. Cross the Manchester Road, the third Wakefield to Austerlands Turnpike and turn right. By the bus-stop, you can see a milestone. 600 of this type were manufactured at Brayshaw & Booth's foundry at Liversedge in 1893, for the West Riding County Council. It gives the distance to Huddersfield as 6 miles; you will find more of its in Marsden and at Slaithwaite. You can also see a toll-house, now a bike shop, on the Manchester Road at Linthwaite, at the junction with Bargate.
24. Continue in the direction of Marsden to the end of the houses, Old Bank Bottom Terrace; you will see another information panel. Turn left here and follow Footpath 126/7 "The Hare Path" as it winds its way between stone walls steeply up to Meltham Road, the Chain Road (there was a chain instead of a toll bar).

As you begin to climb the footpath, look out for the dancing waymarking Hare, carved by Melanie Wilks, on your left. Continue to where the footpath crosses the Colne Valley Circular Way and bear right around the Witches Castle farmhouse, formerly called The Hill; there is another ancient date-stone on the barn to the right hand side of the footpath.

25. Turning left, pass Badger Gate – 'Pedlars Way'. The original highway ran alongside the lower wall and in front of the BG farmhouse; Blind Jack built the First Turnpike, the Chain Road, higher up the hillside.

On the opposite side of the road is another uninscribed guide stone, on the edge of the National Trust's Holme Moor estate.

26. Continue eastwards along Meltham Road, passing Badger Gate Farm and two other groups of buildings, taking care on the narrow verge; across the road tucked in the vegetation by the corner of a fence, you will find an original 18th Century milestone, showing the distances to Austerlands and Huddersfield. This belongs to either the first turnpike 1767 (Blind Jack's) or the second turnpike of 1789.



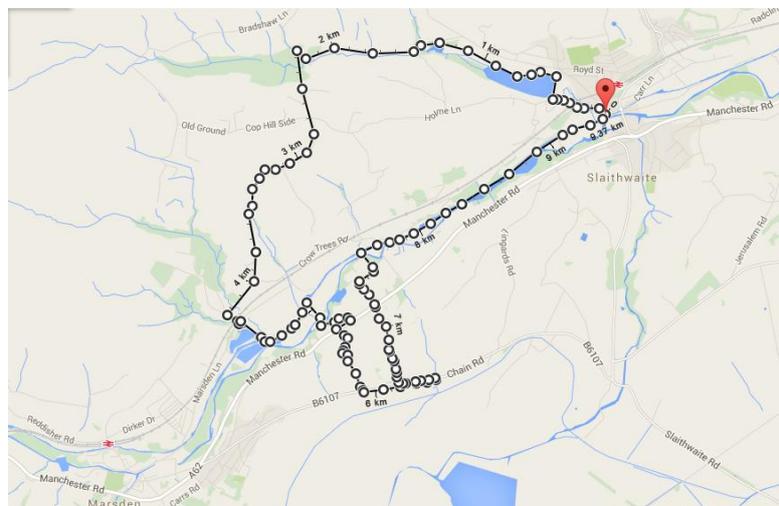
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27. Turn back to the previous set of buildings; immediately before, turn down footpath 127 to Manchester Road, a wide track past a horse trough that twists east around a derelict farmhouse (Rollinsons or Old Ash) and through the garden of Spring Grove. This path is very boggy after wet weather, so you may prefer to retrace your steps down the Hare Path,, or continue east along Meltham Road and walk down Lingards Road with its panoramic views, back to the Manchester Road.
28. Cross the Manchester Road and walk down School Lane, noticing the datestone of Lingards Wood Bottom Sunday School. Follow the tarmac road round to the right and past some industrial buildings; it turns left in front of Holme Mill. Continue forward over a bridge across the Colne and join the canal towpath, turning right towards Slaithwaite.

Our walk continues along the towpath towards Slaithwaite, about 1.25 miles. The tranquil water reflects the wooded banks, while the Colne bustles along on your right.
29. As you approach Slaithwaite, note the unusual Guillotine lock, used when there is insufficient space for a conventional one.
30. Continue past Upper Mills; behind the green railings by the Bakery, amongst the vegetation, you can spot a Canal Milestone, engraved '5 Miles', the distance to Huddersfield Aspley Basin.
31. The canal features in the 'Moonraker' folk tale. The canal barges could carry valuable items such as casks of spirits and the boatmen might be bribed to lose the odd cask overboard, to be dredged out under cover of darkness. One moonlit night, the Revenue Officers disturbed the locals, who then claimed they were "only trying to rake the moon out of the water"!
32. Turn left over the packhorse-style bridge by the lock, back to the car park. Slaithwaite has several pleasant cafes, pubs and an ice-cream parlour.

We hope you have enjoyed this historical stroll, compiled by the West Yorkshire Group of the Milestone Society. The Society was established in 2001 to campaign for the conservation of milestones and other waymarkers, which are endangered by neglect, by vandalism and by casual destruction.

You can find out more about our work plus details of the c 9000 milestones in the UK by visiting our website, www.MilestoneSociety.co.uk.



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The Milestone Society Highways Heritage Walks

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