

Keld to Muker meadows

We start at Keld, which is on the B6270 between Reeth and Kirby Stephen, although if you are travelling from Bentham (and you should be), the best route is via Hawes and then the Butter Tubs Pass. From the B6270, look for signs that say “Keld Only” and follow the road down into this small and very attractive village. As you approach what appears to be a dead end you will find parking – and toilets – on the left at Park Lodge farm – where an honesty box system is in operation. Satnav users can enter the postcode of the camp site behind the car park – DL11 6LJ. If you prefer paper maps the grid reference is SD66566936, and for fans of what-3words, the tag for the car park is **troll.fail.strongly**.

Having paid for parking, we set off back past the cottages we passed on the way into the car park to head downstream along the Swale with the River on our left at this point. Initially, we are on a well-made track and the route is clearly way marked as Swale Trail and Coast to Coast bridleways.

As we follow the track down toward the Swale, we see a steep roadway with a staircase built into the midline between cart tracks. This is part of our return route, but despite it being so tempting, we leave that until later and head up the track on the right keeping the drystone wall on our right hand side – we are now on the Pennine Way.

The next landmark is a clear, but unsigned split in the path. The Pennine way heads uphill and to the right, whilst the smaller path to the left heads down to Kisdon Force – feel free to add that diversion to the walk, before returning to the Pennine Way path. Very soon the path forks again, although this time it is signed. We again take the higher, right hand option, which is the Pennine Way – the lower route follows the Swale downstream through flat meadows and does go to Muker, so if you wanted a gentler version of this walk feel free go that way.

Our route now climbs quite significantly and goes above the woodland that hugs the side of Kisdon Hill – known as Rukin Wood. At the end of the woodland, we arrive at a drystone wall and cross into more open land, turning left at the signpost to follow the contours around the side of Kisdon Hill heading Southeast.

The Pennine Way path continues to climb as it comes round Kisdon Hill, and we find ourselves heading South through slightly difficult rocky terrain that is largely the spoil from lead mining – we are on what is referred to as the North Gang Scar.

Although this section can be hard work, it's worth persevering, because we soon clear the spoil and enter a flatter easier section with stunning views down Swaledale with Muker in the distance.

The route now gets easier as we pass through several meadows bounded by drystone walls before heading downhill toward Muker. At this point on our right is the settlement of Kisdon that gives the hill its name – it is a small collection of farmsteads.

We can now see Muker in the valley below, and we follow the track down into the village centre, which is worth taking some time to explore. Our route back goes via the wildflower meadows located between Muker and the Swale – this is part of the Pennine Journey path.

You will notice that as you walk through the four large meadows (in single file please and keeping to the stone flagged path), the balance of species is different between meadows, and to a lesser extent even within them.

Beyond the meadows, we meet the Swale and have a choice. The route described here crosses the bridge which we see to the right and takes a higher level return to Keld. If a shorter and easier option is required than head left and up the base of the river valley keeping the Swale on your right.

Having crossed the river, we climb a few steps and then head left up the river valley on a clear track. We stay on this track for a long while now, so navigation is easy.

Our next significant landmark is Swinner Gill, where we find ruins of the Beldi smelting mill. If you look carefully, you can see a flue from the smelt mill which ran up the hillside to take away the poisonous fumes – similar in design to the flues on our Yarnbury walk. Swinner Gill itself is a small but powerful beck that tumbles down off the back of Gunnerside Moor. Just behind the ruined buildings is a waterfall, that is easily missed but well worth seeing, and the rocks to the left of the waterfall are a good place to find fossils.

We cross Swinner Gill either at the ford, or if it's in spate via the footbridge, and continue up the track toward Crackpot Hall – which requires us to backtrack up a clear and obvious access path off the track we are following.

Crackpot Hall is not, and never was a grand mansion as the name suggests - it was originally built as a humble farmhouse. The unusual name Crackpot has Scandinavian origins dating from the Viking occupation of the Dale. The Norse word "Pot" means deep hole and there are plenty of caves nearby where the limestone has been eroded by rain and underwater streams flowing through cracks in the rock. This is combined with the word Crack which has Old English origins and translates as Crow. So, in effect, the pothole where crows are found.

From Crackpot Hall, we return back down to the main path and continue back to Keld, taking care to leave the track at East Stonesdale and the waterfalls rather than continuing on to Stonesdale Moor.

From here we cross the Swale at the wooden footbridge and climb the cart track back to Keld where the walk ends.

- **Total distance 11.2 km (6.9 miles)**
- **Total ascent 408 m**
- **Easy walk**