

# THE TEESDALE WAY

### About the author

Martin Collins is a freelance author, photo-journalist and cartographer, as well as a regular contributor to the UK outdoor media. First walking the GR5 in 1981 kindled a passion for the French Alps that remains as strong as ever. He has since written over twenty books for walkers embracing the coast, mountains and countryside of the UK and parts of Europe. He has three children, and lives in north Wales on the edge of the Snowdonia National Park.

I've wandered many a weary mile,  
And in strange countries been;  
I've dwelt in towns and on wild moors,  
And curious sights I've seen;  
But still my heart clings to the dale  
Where Tees rolls to the sea;  
Compared with what I've seen I'll say  
The Teesdale hills for me.

(Richard Watson, the 'Teesdale Poet' –  
born Middleton-in-Teesdale 1833,  
died there 1891)

## THE TEESDALE WAY

by

Martin Collins

**CICERONE**

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,  
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL  
[www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk)

© Martin Collins 2005  
 Second edition 2005  
 ISBN: 978 1 85284 461 5  
 Reprinted 2013 (with updates) and 2019  
 First edition 1995

Printed by KHL Printing, Singapore.  
 A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.  
 Photographs © Paddy Dillon



© Crown copyright 2005 OS PU100012932

For Sarah, Rosie and Paul

### Acknowledgements

For their invaluable help, advice and knowledge shared, I would like to thank members of both County Durham's and Cleveland's Countryside Teams. I am especially grateful to Durham's Countryside Access Officer; Cleveland's Senior Project Officer for the Tees Valley; and Cleveland's River Tees Wardens. All have generously given their time to explain the development and the practical intricacies of the Teesdale Way. By kindly checking my manuscript they and their colleagues have ensured the accuracy of the route directions contained in this guidebook.

As always, I am indebted to my partner Diana for her encouragement and tolerance during my trips away from home researching this book and over the months of desk work which followed.

Thanks are due to Paddy Dillon for his expert help in checking the route for this fully updated edition and for contributing new photographic illustrations.

*Martin Collins*

This book has been compiled in accordance with the Guidelines for Writers of Path Guides produced by the Outdoor Writers' Guild.

*Front cover:* Whitewashed farmsteads of the Raby Estate are a feature of Upper Teesdale

## CONTENTS

Overview map.....	6-7
Map key.....	7
Preface to the Second Edition .....	8

<b>Introduction</b> .....	9
Some Notes on Teesdale .....	9
About the Teesdale Way.....	13
How to use this Guidebook.....	18

### The Teesdale Way

Stage 1: Dufton to Langdon Beck.....	20
Stage 2: Langdon Beck to Middleton-in-Teesdale .....	31
Stage 3: Middleton-in-Teesdale to Barnard Castle.....	39
Stage 4: Barnard Castle to Gainford .....	56
Stage 5: Gainford to Hurworth-on-Tees .....	68
Stage 6: Hurworth-on-Tees to Yarm.....	80
Stage 7: Yarm to Middlesbrough Centre.....	90
Stage 8: Middlesbrough to South Gare Breakwater .....	102

<b>Circular Walks</b> .....	111
Walk 1: Langdon Beck .....	111
Walk 2: Cow Green.....	113
Walk 3: Bowlees Picnic Area.....	116
Walk 4: Cotherstone via Eggleston Bridge.....	119
Walk 5: Cotherstone via Barnard Castle.....	122
Walk 6: Greta Bridge.....	125
Walk 7: Barnard Castle.....	129
Walk 8: Winston .....	133
Walk 9: Middleton One Row.....	138
Walk 10: Yarm Bridge .....	141

<b>Appendix 1</b> Mileage Chart.....	144
<b>Appendix 2</b> Useful Addresses .....	145
<b>Appendix 3</b> Further Reading.....	148
<b>Appendix 4</b> Teesdale Way Accommodation List.....	149

# The Teesdale Way



## Route symbols on OS map extracts



start point



finish point



start/finish point



route



alternative route



direction of walk

For OS symbols key see OS maps



## Preface to the Second Edition

In order to update the first edition of this guide I have undertaken the very enjoyable task of walking the Teesdale Way in its entirety. The guide now includes details of some minor re-routing in a couple of places, and I can report some very welcome resurfacing has been done on muddy stretches. Signposting and waymarking remain clear, and stiles and gates are in good order.

Apart from the odd village shop and post office closing, facilities remain good, and there are plenty of opportunities for obtaining of food and drink along the way. An accommodation list has been added to this new edition of the guide, though it is always a good idea to check current listings with tourist information offices.

Public transport has generally improved along the route – a fact borne out by my experiences over a bank holiday weekend, when even the reduced services were more than adequate.

Perhaps the greatest changes have been entirely cosmetic, especially downstream from Stockton and Middlesbrough, where industry is in decline and nature is slowly greening the landscape.

The Teesdale Way is dramatic and scenic in places, redolent with history and heritage in other parts, and well worth taking the time to discover.

*Paddy Dillon*

## Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/461/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/461/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

**Register your book:** To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

## INTRODUCTION

### SOME NOTES ON TEESDALE

Tyne, Wear, Tees: the North-East of England owes much to its great rivers. They have shaped the region's history, none more so than the Tees whose valley once formed the northern boundary of the Danish Kingdom of Jorvik (York).

We know that the Viking invasion of Britain began during AD793 at Lindisfarne on the Northumbrian coast only 50 miles (80km) from Teesdale. A century later large tracts of Britain were under Norse and Danish control. Likening the invasion to a sinister raven, Sir Walter Scott wrote in his epic poem *Rokeby*, published in 1813:

... And the broad shadow of her wing  
Blackened each cataract and spring,  
Where Tees in tumult leaves his  
source,  
Thundering o'er Cauldron and High  
Force ...

The Viking identity lives on in place names ending with '-by', the Old Danish for farm or village, and in names for natural features such as 'thwaite' and 'gill' – a legacy from second generation Norsemen who came over from Ireland.

It does seem that Viking influence was generally far weaker north of the River Tees, perhaps because the

land was poorer or perhaps because the new settlers were deterred by the threat of raiding Scots. Of course no such territorial limit is clear-cut and there was appreciable intermingling of the Viking and Angle cultures along the Tees valley.

Following the Norman invasion of 1066, many settlements on both the north and south flanks of Teesdale were laid waste by a combination of Scottish incursions and the Normans' own push northwards. At the Domesday census in 1086, villages on Teesdale's south side were all but derelict. Land to the north had belonged to the Church since the days of King Alfred but now the Bishopric of Durham began to attain great power. The Palatine or Prince Bishops raised their own revenue, minted coin, enforced the rule of law and enlisted troops. In return the King of England was assured of the North's allegiance and an effective defence against the Scots.

Over the ensuing centuries Norman earls founded manors in and around Teesdale and castles were built, notably at Raby and Barnard Castle; both had passed to the Crown by the sixteenth century. A hundred years later most Teesdale villages had become manors with Lords in their own right. Patterns of land ownership in Britain tend to

change slowly: today in the upper dale the River Tees separates the Earl of Strathmore's estate to the south from the Raby Estate of Lord Barnard with its white-painted farms and cottages to the north.

Ever since the twelfth century, the navigable waters of the Tees have acted as a focus for trade and industry. As ships of ever greater displacement were built, trading ports well upstream were forced to give way to new ones closer to the sea. In the river's lower reaches, centres of population grew up where labour was in greatest demand – for coal mining, iron and steel production, shipbuilding and later for chemical manufacture.

*Remains of a Roman bridge that carried Dere Street over the Tees at Piercebridge (Stage 5)*



Lead mining – while it lasted – brought a few decades of relative prosperity to the upper dale in the nineteenth century but to this day agriculture remains the predominant way of life above the Stockton/Billingham/Middlesbrough conurbation. Lowland arable, beef and dairy farms to the east give way further west to sheep farming with flocks of hardy Swaledales able to withstand the severe winter climate.

Being sparsely populated and subject to heavy rainfall, the Tees' vast gathering grounds totalling some 745 square miles (1930 km<sup>2</sup>) have always yielded copious quantities of good clean water. Indeed, according to the nineteenth-century writer Augustus Grimbale, no fewer than 10,000 salmon were netted in the Tees during the 1867 season – a tribute to the river's purity then.

Salmon, however, are migratory fish and in common with many other species their numbers had dwindled by the early twentieth century. During the 1940s the central estuary at Teesside had become so grossly polluted that it was unable to sustain any form of life at all. Encouragingly, a long-term strategy evolved in the 1970s for cutting pollution loads is currently being implemented by the National Rivers Authority and already salmon and sea trout have returned to the Tees.

It goes without saying that the Tees is a vital source of industrial and drinking water for the North-East.



A reservoir system starting at Cow Green in the wild uplands below Cross Fell is supplemented by reservoirs on tributary rivers: Selsat and Grassholme reservoirs on the River Lune; Blackton, Hury and Balderhead reservoirs on the River Balder; and Hurworth Burn reservoir on the River Skerne.

The main water abstraction point on the Tees is at Broken Scar on the outskirts of Darlington, with others at Blackwell and Low Worsall. Controlled release of water from Cow Green reservoir ensures a minimum flow over Broken Scar Weir of 127.3 megalitres per day. Interestingly, it takes water approximately two days to travel from Cow Green to Teesside.

With a recorded history of inundations dating back to 1753, the fast-flowing Tees poses a threat to low-lying land and property, especially in its middle reaches around Yarm. As well as providing comprehensive flood warnings, the NRA also carries out flood prevention and defence work.

Upper Teesdale lies within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, dubbed 'England's Last Wilderness'. This vulnerable upland landscape is protected by a 14,000 hectare Site of Special Scientific Interest, the very large Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, the 4000 hectare Moor House Nature Reserve and several Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

The main reason for these protective designations is the area's flora. A combination of soil from limestone metamorphosed by volcanic heat (so-called 'Sugar Limestone') and the cold upland climate has enabled plant communities existing at the end of the last Ice Age to survive to the present day.

Upper Teesdale's geology is dominated by dark basalt formations of the Whin Sill outcropping as low cliffs and producing dramatic waterfalls such as Cauldron Snout and High Force. Further downstream are found beds of 'Teesdale Marble' as the river enters a more settled countryside. Here the river's often steep banks sustain ancient woodlands rich



*Spring Gentians are among the arctic/alpine species flourishing in Upper Teesdale (Stage 2)*

in wildlife; among bird species to be seen are grey wagtail, goosander and kingfisher.

With moorland left behind and gradients levelling off, the Tees dawdles east in great lazy meanders through its middle section past historic sites, pretty villages, woods and rolling farmland. Further east still, approaching the North Sea and impinged upon by the structures and activities of an industrial society, the river finally loses its innocence. Yet despite the intimidating presence of Teesside's processing and manufacturing complexes, salt-marshes and mudflats in the estuary remain rich in invertebrates – a vital staging post for migratory and overwintering waders and wildfowl. These invaluable wetlands at the river mouth are protected by four SSSIs.

Not least of the Tees' many roles these days is that of a leisure resource. Coarse fishing is immensely popular, confirmed by innumerable anglers and club signs along the riverbank. All the Teesdale reservoirs except Balderhead are stocked with rainbow trout, while Cow Green is operated as an unstocked brown trout fishery.

Historically, the scope for watersports has been constrained by the tidal nature of suitable locations. However, following the construction of the Tees Barrage at Portrack Marshes, river levels can now be maintained at or near the high-water mark and a boom in all manner of water-based pursuits is taking place.

Ever since the Tees Valley Railway opened in 1868 (sadly it closed in 1964), the beautiful

countryside of Teesdale has attracted visitors. With an increase in leisure time and improving transport links, escape from the bleak surroundings of nearby industrial towns became a growing reality for thousands earlier this century. Today, perhaps because of its relative remoteness, the dale seems to have been spared the worst excesses of visitor pressure, though the local economy welcomes income from tourism.

Each season of the year holds its own advantage for visiting Teesdale: summer for its long daylight hours and abundant wildlife; autumn for stunning colours, frosts and atmospheric mists; winter for foliage-free views, unfrequented paths and a river often in angry mood; and springtime for wildflowers and sparkling light.

### ABOUT THE TEESDALE WAY

The River Tees rises on the eastern slopes of Cross Fell, at 2930ft (893m) England's highest summit outside the Lake District. Although the Pennine Way itself crosses Tees Head, close to the river's birthplace, there are no public rights-of-way downstream until you reach Cow Green reservoir. True, a track from Alston via Tyne Head to Moor House Field Station does meet the Tees and one of its tributaries, Trout Beck. But the better part of this forbidding upland landscape is a protected Nature Reserve of almost 10,000 acres (4000 hectares) created to encourage research into the management of high moorland. It is quite appropriately the domain of curlew, dunlin and lapwing, not humans.



*Tees Head is the true source of the River Tees on Cross Fell, seen here in summer*





Artistic stiles inscribed 'Sail to the Sea' are a feature of the route through Cleveland (Stage 6)

Twisting and turning in a 'V' shaped valley, the infant Tees forms miniature waterfalls and deep, peaty pools, soon becoming a sizeable beck. Its banks and islets provide habitats for numerous species of bird, plant and small mammal. Various mining ventures dating mostly from the nineteenth century have left their mark and in more recent times the area was used for grouse shooting. Today, however, this remote and inhospitable region of the Pennines, its tracts of bog and heather almost devoid of footpaths and human habitation, holds botanical riches rivalled by few other places in Britain. Here too, as cloud shadows chase across the tucks and folds of rolling moorland, one senses true solitude.

The River Tees can be paralleled at a distance for a couple of miles upstream from Cow Green on an old lead miners' track contouring Herdship Fell; there is road access at both ends. Additionally, a Nature Trail (in reality a tarmac lane) descends from Cow Green's Wheelhead Sike car park to the reservoir's east shore and passes the dam to reach Cauldron Snout. Technically it is here, at the county boundary between Cumbria and Durham, that a Teesdale Way proper begins, with riverside footpaths available all the way to the North Sea at Teesmouth some 90 miles (145km) distant. However, only below Middleton-in-Teesdale does the Teesdale Way possess its own designation and waymarking: upstream

from there it runs in tandem with the Pennine Way.

Any self-respecting long distance trail should set off from somewhere offering accommodation and, ideally, a pub. Dufton qualifies as a clear favourite. Although it sits beneath the Pennine escarpment on the wrong side of the watershed, the village already caters for walkers' needs, being on the Pennine Way. By reversing the 'normal' Pennine Way direction you set off through the wonderful scenery of High Cup soon to follow Maize Beck, a major tributary of the Tees, over the moors to Cauldron Snout.

Some readers may question my assumption that the Tees should be explored downstream from source to mouth rather than the other way round. Ultimately it depends upon personal inclination and for me the scales were tipped by having prevailing winds and gradients in one's favour. There is the attractive analogy too of tracing the river from birth to maturity – of seeing it grow, develop and survive the adversities, so to speak, of a journey through life. But I will happily concede that an upstream trek would reveal equally intriguing facets of this great watercourse.

As well as being an invigorating walk through unmatched river scenery, the Teesdale Way also presents a cross-section of the region's social, cultural and economic life; this it does from both present-day and historical perspectives.

## STAGE 1

*Dufton to Langdon Beck*

14 miles (22.5km)

The first stage is the hardest of any on the Teesdale Way. It is also the loneliest, with no chance of refreshments until the day is done. Yet scenically this is one of the most rewarding stretches – a stirring introduction to the high Pennine moorlands whose countless becks and burns give life to the infant Tees.

Climbing to High Cup and traversing the south-eastern flanks of Dufton Fell involve a total height gain of about 1400ft (430m). The rest of the stage is slightly downhill. Depending on the day of the week, the season and the weather, you may or may not encounter fellow walkers. To those without previous hill-walking experience, these vast Pennine uplands can seem quite intimidating. Indeed, this stage deserves to be taken seriously by everyone, especially in rough or misty conditions. Make sure you obtain a weather forecast and are properly equipped for a hill day with waterproofs, adequate warm clothing, emergency energy rations, food, drink and of course a map and compass.

Even though you are on the Pennine Way, in mist the moorland section from High Cup towards Dufton Fell requires careful navigation for the path remains surprisingly indistinct in places. However, it should be a simple matter to locate and follow Maize Beck downstream, crossing it at a footbridge.

Although undoubtedly more challenging than easier country downstream, crossing the Pennine watershed is by far the best introduction to the Tees. And if Langdon Beck is a step too distant to manage, you can arrange to be picked up by car at Cow Green, or by the

Upper Teesdale Bus Link, provided you give at least an hour's notice and tie in with one of their scheduled runs. You could miss out the high moors altogether by starting at Langdon Beck and completing Circular Walk No.1.

An early start will increase your enjoyment of this wild walking and will allow for some possibly slow going here and there. Your senses will be filled with the sights, sounds and smells of an environment accessible only to those who enter it on foot – an environment quite unlike that to which most of us are accustomed in our daily lives.

**Dufton** (B&Bs, youth hostel, campsite; pub. Nearest railway station is Appleby on the Settle-Carlisle line. Bus from Appleby on Friday mornings. JVR Taxis – tel (017683) 52382. Dufton is approximately 3½ miles (5.5km) walk from Appleby on country lanes.)

Dufton's red sandstone houses sit comfortably either side of a tree-shaded village green. The fountain near the Stag Inn was installed by the 'Quaker Company', a philanthropic organisation based at Middleton-in-Teesdale

*Looking over the Pennine foothills while following the Pennine Way from Dufton*

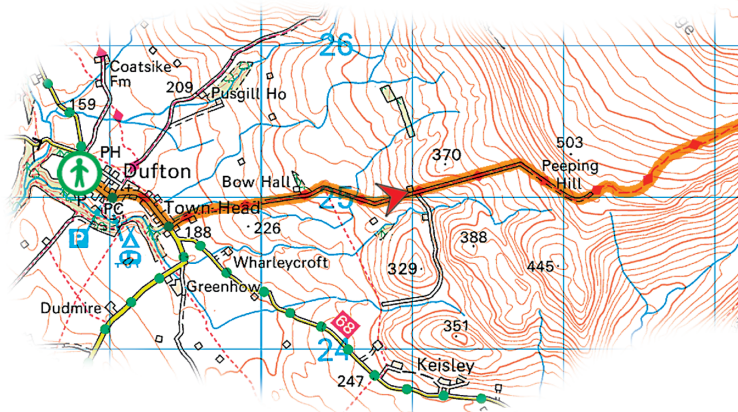




during the nineteenth century and dedicated to the well-being of lead miners and their families. Indeed, wealth from local lead mining certainly enhanced Dufton's importance at the time, though the impressive pile of Dufton Hall pre-dates that era by almost 300 years.

Walk south-east from Dufton's village green and turn left on a lane signposted High Cup Nick. This heads straight for the hills, past Bow Hall, becoming a walled track higher up then a well-cairned path round the edge of Peeping Hill.

Exciting prospects ahead tend to spur you on so that the effort of gaining height is barely noticed! Many consider High Cup to be the North Pennines' *tour de force*. The rim of this classic 'U' shaped, glaciated valley

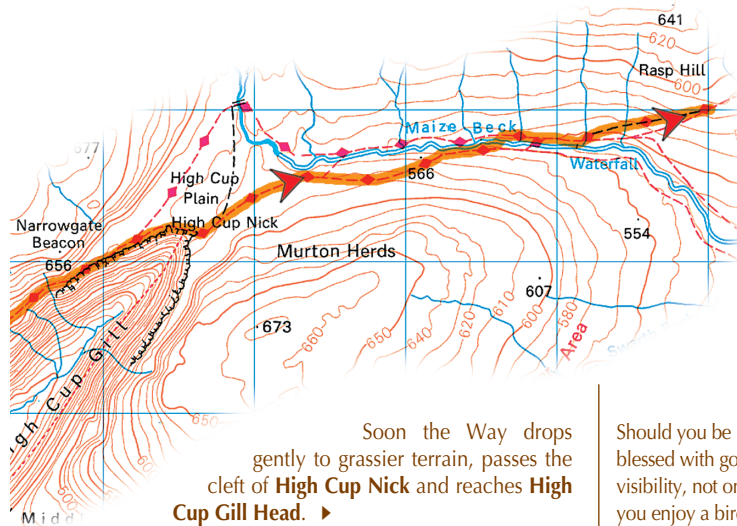


is formed from the Whin Sill, an intrusion of weather-resistant basalt that will reveal itself again and again on our journey along the upper reaches of the Tees. Here the dramatic, ruler-straight lip of columnar basalt encloses a steep-sided dale through whose shadowy depths – far down amidst barren rocks and grass – runs the silvery thread of High Cup Gill.

The path grows increasingly rocky as it approaches **Narrowgate**. It's more of a ledge really and you will need to watch your footing (rather than the view!) where surface water is causing erosion.

You pass Hannah's Well, a clear spring by the path, then below you rises a slender pinnacle known as Nichol's Chair, after a Dufton cobbler reputed to have soled and heeled a pair of boots on top!

Map continues p24



Soon the Way drops gently to grassier terrain, passes the cleft of **High Cup Nick** and reaches **High Cup Gill Head**. ▶

There is the added satisfaction of having almost reached the main Pennine watershed. Within a short while you will be entering the gathering grounds of the River Tees itself – a significant physical and psychological moment.

Immediately ahead the terrain is rather featureless and although a path sets off confidently enough, it is easy to lose it over the soft, undulating ground. For half a mile (800m) a compass bearing of east-north-east gradually veering east will deliver you safely to **Maize Beck**.

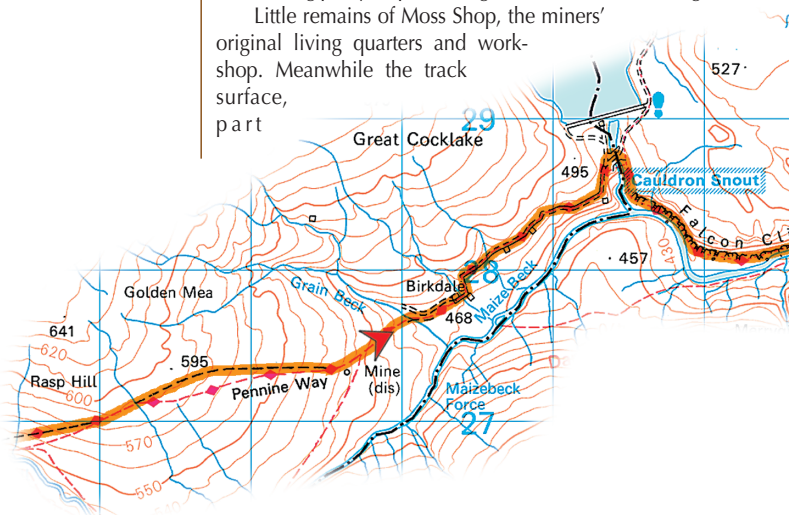
Should you be blessed with good visibility, not only will you enjoy a bird's-eye view down this extraordinary dale but also the corrugated silhouettes of Lakeland fells will be seen ranged along the horizon beyond the pastoral Vale of Eden. This is one of the walk's great scenic highlights – a spot to savour.

Simply follow the river downstream and cross it using a footbridge. For a time there are tremendous views north-west towards the Tees' headwaters below Cross Fell. Beyond a tall cairn the south bank path descends to cross the beck which here is wide and stony and it is a simple matter to pick your way over. Low limestone outcrops fringe Maize Beck but within half a mile (800m) or so you leave its company to climb over the lower slopes of Dufton Fell.

Stone flags have been laid on this boggy moorside, with stout timbers bridging pools and channels. The result is a path much easier to follow than it used to be; even in mist it would be hard to lose the way. Signs at regular intervals over to the right declare Danger – Military Firing Range, Keep Out – part of the Warcop Training Range boundary which encompasses a sizeable tract of land to the south, including much of lofty Murton Fell.

As you gain the crest of the moor at around 1900ft (575m), an exciting view unfolds ahead to the dam at Cow Green and the Falcon Clints escarpment. Intermittent flagstones finally give way to a broad and stony track descending peaty slopes through old lead mine workings.

Little remains of Moss Shop, the miners' original living quarters and workshop. Meanwhile the track surface, part

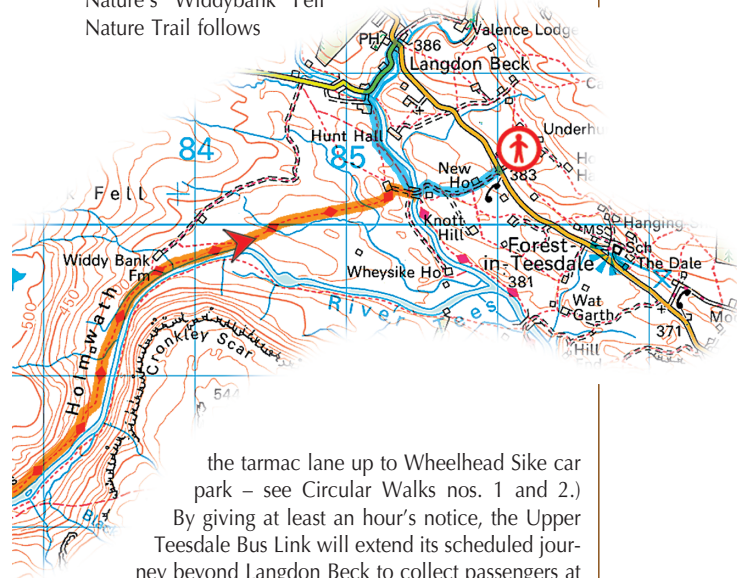


of a new strategy for combating erosion, is none too comfortable to walk on and will take time to bed in. The same can be said of flagstones, though few would dispute the need for such robust, long-term remedies.

A footbridge over Grain Beck followed by a right turn brings you round past **Birkdale** farmhouse. It is easy to understand the occupants' reservations about walkers being routed so close to their front door: out of courtesy we should all slip by quietly.

Continue along Birkdale's access track but turn off right at a corner for an airy view over Cauldron Snout from a grassy bluff. You soon cross the bridge below the Cow Green dam, passing an information board. (English Nature's Widdybank Fell Nature Trail follows

Map continues p34



the tarmac lane up to Wheelhead Sike car park – see Circular Walks nos. 1 and 2.)

By giving at least an hour's notice, the Upper Teesdale Bus Link will extend its scheduled journey beyond Langdon Beck to collect passengers at the Wheelhead Sike car park at the top of the tarmac lane.

Next begins the 220ft (60m) descent beside **Cauldron Snout**. There are many rocky ledges, none



You have passed from Cumbria into County Durham.

In years past the confluence of Maize Beck with the Tees here marked the meeting point of three counties: Westmorland, Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire.

especially difficult, but over the years since this area became popularised the hands and feet of countless walkers have polished the rocks. They are slippery even when dry; in wet or icy conditions great care is required. ◀

Cauldron Snout represents the day's second scenic climax and this feature too owes its dramatic form to the Whin Sill. About 280 million years ago the region which would eventually become the British Isles was subjected to violent compressive forces. These buckled the Devonian and Carboniferous strata and the even older rocks upon which they rested. Under immense pressure, large quantities of molten rock were squeezed into newly created fractures. This volcanic upwelling produced a great seam of igneous dolerite running for almost 90 miles (300km) across northern Britain. We can trace its position in outcrops such as those along Hadrian's Wall and here in Upper Teesdale.

Before the construction of Cow Green reservoir, huge amounts of peat-stained water draining some 20 square miles (52sq.km) of moorland would thunder through the Snout in times of spate. Today, however, the flow is controlled to provide reliable levels far downstream at all times.

Increasing demand for water at Middlesbrough and ICI's Teesside complex led to the siting of a dam here during the late 1960s. The location was chosen for its large catchment area, firm foundations and a minimum of farmland. But the implications for wildlife were drastic. Opposition from conservationists and scientists was vehemently expressed for under threat were several species of rare alpine plants and a wealth of unique habitats. Despite the setting up of a Teesdale Defence Fund and a full parliamentary enquiry, the scheme went ahead. While the waters were rising, as many plant specimens as possible were dug up and relocated but even so about ten per cent of the most important grassland was lost for ever.

Although in a sense 'tamed', Cauldron Snout remains a memorable sight. As you scramble down beside the

*Cauldron Snout froths and foams in fury within the confines of a rocky cleft*





thrashing torrent, the noise and the spray and the movement are quite intoxicating. It is a fitting introduction to the River Tees, its waters youthfully exuberant again after temporary containment in the reservoir above. Many more animated, unfettered miles lie ahead before the river begins to feel the drag of accumulated volume, slowing down as gradients level off and the wild open spaces of its birthplace are left behind.

The Way now curves gently beside the Tees on a heathery, bracken terrace beneath the 100ft (30m) cliffs of **Falcon Clints**. Soon the slopes crowd in closer and the path is forced onto a skirt of boulders at the river's edge. Progress is slowed right down as every footstep needs to be chosen judiciously: this is prime ankle-twisting terrain! Before long there is space temporarily for the path to cross grassy levels before another, even more awkward, stretch of boulder-hopping threatens the unwary.

It will not have escaped your notice that long sections of boardwalk and flagstones have been installed in this

*A partially frozen River  
Tees curves round  
Falcon Clints towards  
Langdon Beck*



area. Such erosion-control measures are becoming commonplace on many of our well-known trails but their presence here is of special significance. In addition to falling within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the slopes of the surrounding moors, particularly Widdybank Fell, are of international renown for their rare and exquisite flora. Here you are in part of the large Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, a last refuge for arctic flora which covered Britain immediately after the last Ice Age. Communities of plants here are unique in western Europe, illuminating the moorlands each spring with their tiny pink, white, yellow and blue flowers. An identification book will add to your appreciation as you look out for such beautiful and delicate blooms as mountain pansy, bird's eye primrose and spring gentian.

There are several reasons why certain plants thrive here. One is the subsoil created in places by the extremely lime-rich, low-phosphorus 'sugar limestone'. This was formed when an intrusion of molten dolerite baked and metamorphosed the Melmerby Scar limestone with which it came into contact before cooling to become the Whin Sill.

Another reason is the extended and often severe winters experienced in Upper Teesdale. Haymaking is invariably late so that meadow flower species have time to cast their seeds before being cut. As well as being a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Upper Teesdale has been designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area, a government scheme under which farmers receive payment for managing meadowland with conservation in mind and for maintaining their walls and barns in good condition.

Much of this region was once swathed in forest and a few woodland species such as small birch, juniper bushes and ferns still survive in sheltered spots. You might even be fortunate enough to see a falcon around the 'clints' (after the Scandinavian 'klint' for rocky outcrop).

Easier walking ensues along Holmwath and a sense of spaciousness returns after the narrows just negotiated.

The isolated farmstead of **Widdybank** grows steadily nearer, apart from Birkdale the only human habitation encountered since leaving Dufton.

Over to the east, beyond the hiss and rattle of the Tees, looms **Cronkley Scar**, formed by the Whin Sill overlain with sugar limestone. You may well gaze back west to the moorland skyline with a certain sadness, for that kind of wild country lies behind you now. Ahead the Tees becomes increasingly entangled with the affairs of man.

Stay by the riverbank to continue towards Langdon Beck over rough pasture linked by white-painted stiles. You cross two small stream valleys then drop close to Saur Hill Farm, just beyond which you arrive at **Harwood Beck**, a major tributary of the Tees.

- 1) For Langdon Beck Hotel (B&B, coffees, bar lunches, teas and evening meals). Before the bridge turn left alongside Harwood Beck on a thin path, keeping below a bank. Over a wall stile you pass a caravan and cross a lawn and driveway, continuing along the beckside to a road ford (there is a bridge 200m to the left). Turn right and walk along the lane to the hotel at the junction with the B6277. The Langdon Beck Hotel, built in 1887, replaced an earlier hostelry known as the Sportsman's Rest or the Traveller's Rest on the other side of the road.
- 2) For Langdon Beck Youth Hostel. Cross the bridge over Harwood Beck and follow the farm lane up to the B6277 (telephone box). The youth hostel building stands opposite.
- 3) For The Dale B&B, turn right at the Youth Hostel and walk along the B6277 road. A turning on the left leads up to Forest-in-Teesdale School and the B&B lies further up the lane.

## STAGE 2

### *Langdon Beck to Middleton-in-Teesdale*

9 miles (14.5km)

During the mid-1800s almost ninety per cent of Upper Teesdale's inhabitants were employed in lead mining; even tiny Langdon Beck had its own mine and smelting mill. Apart from isolated farmsteads around Harwood, Langdon Beck is the highest and loneliest hamlet in the dale. Half a mile (800m) to the north-west a strip of tarmac, frequently impassable due to snow and ice in winter, snakes audaciously over the high moors to St John's Chapel in Weardale.

The Way (see map p.34) resumes from Saur Hill Bridge, setting off downstream from the stile on the north bank of Harwood Beck. You soon draw opposite Wheysike House, one of innumerable whitewashed farms and cottages on Lord Barnard's Raby Estate.

The whitewashing tradition dates back to a time when a member of the then Duke of Cleveland's family was lost in a storm and unable to find shelter, narrowly escaping death. The Duke decreed that from that day on, all the tenanted farmsteads on his estate be painted white to show up clearly to a traveller in need. In fact, many farms in Upper Teesdale began as small moorland enclosures – or 'intakes' – granted by landowners to lead miners who supplemented their meagre earnings by working the land.

Following the flowery, sometimes stony meadow path past the confluence of Harwood Beck with the Tees, there are wonderful views back to a dark moorland horizon. You cross the river bridge and walk up the track to **Cronkley Farm**, passing to the right of the buildings and down through a little rocky depression.