

# Lunedale and Harter Fell

FROM MIDDLETON-IN-TEESDALE – 8¼ MILES (13.3KM)



Grassholme Reservoir from Harter Fell

**This scenic hill walk samples the delights of Lunedale. It begins with a gentle stroll across meadows and pastures. Then, a steep ascent onto Harter Fell reveals excellent views across the valleys of the Tees and Lune. Beware, the unsettled spirit of Caryn stalks these hills!**

Revered as the capital of Upper Teesdale, Middleton lies in the very heart of the most beautiful and enchanting scenery imaginable. The first record for the village is c.1030, when King Canute granted it, as part of a much larger estate, to the monks of St Cuthbert at Durham. However, it only grew significantly in the nineteenth century, when it became a busy lead mining centre.

In 1815, the Quaker-owned London Lead Company established its northern headquarters at Middleton. The company built houses, schools and libraries for workers, and it was the first British business to introduce the five-day working week. Every home had a vegetable garden; some even boasted a

purpose-built pigsty. Furthermore, a pipeline carried water to convenient points around the village; some of the original tap housings remain fixed to the walls.

Leaving the village, we follow the road over County Bridge, so named because the river Tees was formerly the boundary between Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire. The first County Bridge collapsed shortly before its completion in 1811. Richard Attee, a local butcher, had often predicted the bridge's fate. Unfortunately, he was underneath the bridge, pointing out the defects to his wife, when the structure finally gave way, causing fatal injuries to both of them. The current bridge dates from c.1813 and consists of a single arch with a span of about 80 feet (24m). The original design incorporated circular holes, known as spandrel piercings; these reduced the weight of the masonry that the arch had to support. During repairs in 1984, the piercings were infilled, and only the decorative circles remain today.

The route follows the riverside to Step Ends Farm and continues across the fields to Lonton, where we join the Tees Railway Walk. The track crosses the Lune Viaduct, whose five impressive arches straddle the deep gorge of the river Lune. The Tees Valley Railway opened in 1868, and the original plan was to continue the line to Alston to join with the South Tyne Valley Railway. However, construction ended at Middleton-in-Teesdale, apart from a short extension to a stone quarry at Holwick. The line closed in 1964.

From the viaduct, we follow a quiet lane for a short distance before favouring a path across the fields. After returning to the road, the Grassholme Reservoir comes into view, and within a few minutes, we are enjoying the views from its shoreline.

Grassholme Reservoir occupies a beautiful setting, surrounded by lush meadows criss-crossed by dry stone walls and dotted with traditional stone barns. The reservoir opened in 1915 and covers an area of 140 acres (57ha), reaching a depth of 120 feet (37m) at the dam. The lake is stocked with rainbow and brown trout; fishing permits are available from the lodge. Other facilities include a Dark Sky Observatory, which allows one to gaze into the vastness and beauty of the universe. The excellent dark skies of Upper Teesdale enable astronomers to view and understand the wonders of planets, stars, galaxies and beyond. The Observatory holds up to six weekly events, offering late-night sessions on the weekends; bookings are essential.

To the west of the lake, above Grassholme Bridge, a nature reserve provides a sanctuary for many species of birds. Several hundred pairs of black-headed gulls nest on the wetlands near the main inflow during the breeding season. Furthermore, a 'clattering' of jackdaw's nest in disused rabbit burrows near the bridge. The jackdaw is notorious for its thieving habits, often taking bright or shiny objects, and in Thomas Ingoldsby's tale *The Jackdaw of Rheims*, the Cardinal curses the bird for stealing his ring. Other birds to look out for include lapwing, oystercatcher, snipe, wigeon and teal. The reserve also supports a variety of small mammals, including rabbits, water voles and short-tailed voles, while the shallows at the water's edge encourage the common toad to breed.

Leaving the reservoir behind, we continue along the road to Grassholme Farm and join the Pennine Way, which leads to the Brough-Middleton road. The lane opposite leads to the remote Wythes Hill Farm and ascends onto rough pasture. Look back for a beautiful view of Lunedale, with Grassholme and Selsel Reservoirs stretching along the valley below. A distinctive clump of Scots pines along the ridge to the right marks the site of a large Bronze Age tumulus known as Kirkcarrion or Caryn's Castle (see *Miscellanea* on page 59).

After crossing the shoulder of Harter Fell, Middleton materialises like an oasis in the desert. And a glorious panorama of the valley unfolds, enticing us to explore it more intimately on another day!



Kirkcarrion

## LUNEDALE AND HARTER FELL

**Start/Parking:** Hill Terrace, Middleton-in-Teesdale, **DL12 0SH**. Car park by the memorial fountain. There is a second car park at the Working Men's Club near the bridge over Hudeshope Beck.

**Location:** Middleton-in-Teesdale is situated 10 miles (16.1km) north-west of Barnard Castle on the B6277 Alston Road.

**Grid Ref:** NY 94770 25395. **what3words:** ///readily.cold.retailing

**Distance:** 8¼ miles (13.3km) circular. Allow 4 hrs walking time.

**Total Ascent:** 951 feet (290m). **Maximum Elevation:** 1444 feet (440m).

**OS Maps:** Explorer OL31 (1:25,000) *North Pennines, Teesdale and Weardale*, or Landranger 91 (1:50,000), or Landranger 92 (1:50,000).

**Refreshments:** Middleton-in-Teesdale: Inns, cafes and fish shops.  
Grassholme Reservoir: Cafe.

**Public Toilets:** Middleton-in-Teesdale and Grassholme Reservoir.

- 1 **947253** From the car park entrance turn left. At the road junction, turn left (*SP Brough*) and follow the B6277 main road down to cross the bridge over the river Tees. **CAUTION: Busy road!**
- 2 **946252** Leave the road via a gate on the left and descend some steps (*SP Public Footpath*). Continue along the riverbank and join a tarmacked farm lane. Follow the lane past the farm, where a rougher track leads to a stone step-stile.
- 3 **950248** Cross the stile, bear half right and climb up to go through a gap-stile. Continue diagonally across two fields and return to the B6277 main road. **CAUTION: Busy road!**
- 4 **953245** Turn right and follow the road to the first bend. Leave the road via an enclosed track on the left (*Tees Railway Walk*). Follow this track for about half-a-mile (800m) and cross the Lune viaduct.
- 5 **959240** Turn right and follow the road to Westfield House. Leave the road via a gate on the left (*SP Public Footpath*). Continue along a rough farm track, climbing gradually to The Acres. Cross a wooden step-stile, follow the left wall past a barn and then go through a gap-stile.
- 6 **958236** Bear right and descend to a stile in the bottom right of the field. Go through the stile, bear left and go through another stile by a gate. Follow the right wall, climbing steeply, crossing two fences.
- 7 **956231** Go through a stile in the right wall, bear half left and continue climbing towards the far top corner of the field. Go through a gap-stile onto the road near a T-junction. Turn right and follow the road to Grassholme Reservoir.
- 8 **948225** Leave the service road and follow the road down to the right, take the second left turn, pass below the information centre/cafe and continue through the car park. Go through a gate and follow a clear path around the reservoir.
- 9 **930215** Turn right, follow the road across the bridge and ascend to Grassholme Farm.

- 10 **926216** Leave the road via a gate on the right (*SP Pennine Way*). Go straight across the farmyard and through a gate. Bear half right, and after a short descent, climb steeply to go through a gap-stile. Continue climbing towards the barn on the left. Go through a stile and descend to cross some stepping stones. Climb back up and continue through three more stiles to reach the B6276 main road. **CAUTION: Busy road!**
- 11 **924225** Cross the B6276 main road and follow a tarmacked farm lane uphill to Wythes Hill Farm. Pass to the left of the farm and continue climbing along a rough, enclosed track. Follow this round to the right and descend to cross a stream.
- 12 **922229** Go through the gate and begin climbing again. Head towards the top right corner and go through a stile. Continue climbing, diagonally left, across the next two pastures.
- 13 **924233** Go through the stile, bear right and follow a rough track to a gate/stile. Keep in line with the right wall through the next two pastures. Continue along a broad track, go through a gate and bear left, climbing more gradually to a broken wall.
- 14 **930235** Go through the broken wall and pass a cairn (*look back for a spectacular view across Grassholme Reservoir*). Continue towards the far right corner of the pasture and go through a gate. Follow the left boundary to another gate. Go through the gate and head to the far right corner of the field.
- 15 **932238** Go through the gate and begin the long descent to Middleton-in-Teesdale.
- 16 **941243** Cross a wooden step-stile (*doggie friendly*), continue descending and go through a gate in the bottom right of the field. Keep close to the right wall, descend to the right of the farm and go through a gate leading onto the service road.
- 17 **946248** Turn right, and at the road junction, turn left. **CAUTION: Busy road!** Follow the B6277 main road downhill, passing the Auction Mart, and return to the car park.

