

# Walks West Witton and Penhill

## Walk information

**Distance:** 8.75 km (5.5 miles)

**Time:** 3 hours

**Maps:** Ordnance Survey Explorer OL30

**Start / Parking:** Limited on-street parking throughout West Witton or lay-by along A684 towards Leyburn just outside the village; please park considerately.

**Refreshments:** Pubs and shop at West Witton. No facilities en route.

**How to get there:** From Leyburn, follow the A684 heading up through Wensleydale to reach West Witton.

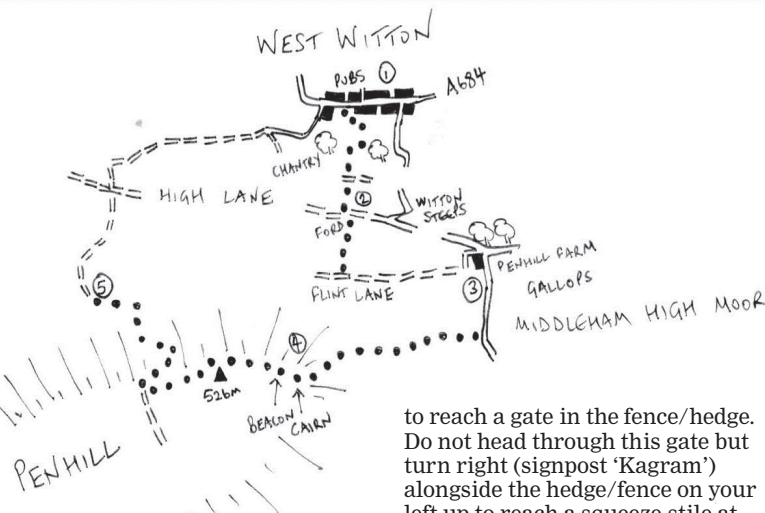
**Terrain:** Field paths, enclosed tracks, moorland road and rough grassy / heather moorland. There are some boggy sections and several steep slopes.

**Open Access Land:** The walk heads across a short section of Access Land between Penhill Beacon and Black Scar along a well-sed path. NB: dogs are not permitted.

**Caution:** This walk climbs to the summit of Penhill (526 metres) with steep paths, exposed moorland and boggy ground. There are cliffs and crags on the northern edge of this plateau – keep away from the edge. OS map and compass essential. Do not attempt in poor weather. Limestone is slippery when wet.

## Points of interest

**P**ENHILL guards the entrance to Wensleydale, its distinctive 'flat-top' profile rising high above the village of West Witton. Its name is derived from the Celtic word 'pen' meaning hill, so it is actually called 'hill hill'! Its flat summit, characteristic of many hills in this part of the Yorkshire Dales, is due to the underlying Yoredale Series of rocks. This rock strata is comprised of layers of limestone, shales and grits which are sandwiched together, each type of rock eroding at different rates resulting in the stepped appearance of the valley sides as well as many waterfalls and the flat-topped hills. The climb up to its broad summit plateau reveals an ever-increasing



panorama across Wensleydale and then Coverdale, although the views from the Bronze Age burial mound of Pencil Beacon are superb with Wensleydale spread out before you from Leyburn to the hills around Hawes. Penhill Beacon has also been used as a signalling site for centuries, more recently during the Napoleonic Wars and to celebrate special Royal occasions.

This walk crosses and re-crosses a rough track known as High Lane (also known as Morpeth Gate). This old road was once a busy route between West Burton and the important market town of Middleham. It is possible that this was originally a Roman road from the fort at Bainbridge and was later used by the Lords of Middleham Castle as a quick route to their hunting forest in Bishopdale.

## The walk

**1** From the Wensleydale Heifer in the centre of West Witton, cross the main road (take care) and walk along the footpath across the left-hand side of the village green directly opposite (signpost 'Capple Bank') to quickly reach a small pond where you take the enclosed footpath to the left passing between the houses to emerge out onto a field through a small gate. After the gate, head left across the field and through a squeeze-stile in the wall on the opposite side of the field then head across the next field bearing very slightly to the right

to reach a gate in the fence/hedge. Do not head through this gate but turn right (signpost 'Kagram') alongside the hedge/fence on your left up to reach a squeeze-stile at the foot of a steep wooded bank in the top corner of the field. After the squeeze-stile, follow the path slanting quite steeply up to the right across the wooded bank to reach a path junction at the top of the bank where you head left to quickly reach a squeeze-stile (signpost 'Watery Lane, High Lane') in a wall corner. After this squeeze-stile, head straight on across the flat field with an overgrown hedge and fence on your right to reach the enclosed grassy track of Watery Lane. Cross this old track and walk across the next field alongside the wall on your right and through a squeeze-stile in the top right-hand corner at the foot of another steep grassy bank. Head through the squeeze-stile and walk up the steep bank with the stream on your left to reach a small wall-gate that leads onto the enclosed track of High Lane.

**2** At the track, take the footpath opposite to the left just over the small ford (signpost 'Flint Lane') after which follow the path straight up the hillside alongside a small gully on your left, climbing steeply up to reach the top right corner of this field and a wall across your path, where you carry straight on across the narrow flat shelf of land (wall on your right), before climbing up another bank to join another enclosed track (Flint Lane). Turn left along this track and follow it for 1 km to join the road at the top of Witton Steeps beside Pencil Farm.

**3** Turn right along the road and follow it bending sharply round to the right (take care) passing in front of Pen Hill Farm (towards 'Melmerby, Carlton'). Continue along the road (horse gallops to your left) climbing steadily up across Middleham High Moor for 500 metres then, just before the cattle grid across the road, take the path to the right through a gate (signpost 'Penhill'). Head straight on up across the field heading across the top of the slight 'ridge' of land to reach a gate in a wall across your path – the stone cairn on Penhill End now comes into view ahead. The path now becomes a much clearer grassy track that leads across several rough pastures through a succession of gates until you come to the final gate in a wall just before the steep summit slopes of Penhill (stone cairn on Penhill End just up ahead). Follow the clear path straight on climbing steeply up the hillside the reach the stone-built cairn (wind-break) on Penhill End.

**4** As you reach the wind-break, follow the grassy path bearing to the right following the top of the escarpment of Penhill for 140 metres to reach the Bronze Age burial mound of Pencil Beacon. Continue straight on along the clear path along the top of the escarpment (take care – cliffs) for 150 metres to reach a stile through a wall across your path. Cross the stile and follow the clear path straight on along the top of the escarpment of Penhill Scar (caution: cliffs) for 350 metres (wall across to your left) to reach another stile across your path, where the wall on your left comes in to almost meet the escarpment and cliffs on your right. Immediately after this stile, head left through a gap in this wall to cross onto the left-hand side of the wall, after which carry straight on with the wall now on your right heading across heather moorland for 400 metres to reach a gate in this wall on your right and a small pond and shooters' track heading off to the left (SE 046 866). Head to the right through this gate and follow the clear sunken path

slanting quite steeply down to the right across the steep summit slopes. About three-quarters of the way down this steep slope, the sunken path bends sharply to the left and continues to slant down to reach some old overgrown quarry spoil heaps at the foot of the steep summit slope. Walk straight on (heading away from the steep slope) passing to the left side of these spoil heaps then alongside a clear grassy track just before the intact wall at the bottom of this large field (SE 046 872). Head to the left along this grassy track, with the wall on your right and the steep slopes of Penhill some distance across to your left, and follow this on to reach a new wooden gate in this wall on your right, just before the corner of the field (SE 043 873).

**5** Head through this gate and follow the grassy track ahead bearing slightly to the left down across the hillside to join a wall on your left (signpost). Continue along the grassy track with the wall on your left for a while (heading down towards Wensleydale) then bear to the right away from the wall down across a steeper slope to reach a gate in a 'dog-leg' in the wall at the bottom of this slope. Head through the gate and follow the grassy track to the left down across the hillside (wall on your left) to reach a ladder stile beside a gate that leads onto High Lane at a T-junction of tracks. At the T-junction head straight on along the walled track ahead (ignore tracks to left and right) and follow this meandering across the shelf of land before it gradually drops down and becomes a metalled lane just before the entrance to Chantry caravan park. Continue down this road back to join the main road through West Witton. Turn right back into the centre of the village.

Mark Reid  
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## Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

**T**HE welcome arrival of more summer visitors has continued along with the appearance of other species merely passing through the region for breeding grounds elsewhere in northern Europe.

Newly-arrived regular visitors have included a scattering of pied flycatchers, including a singing male in one of the region's regular breeding localities, the Derwent Gorge, where wood warblers have also appeared. The pristine oak-covered slopes of the gorge are one of the few remaining regular sites for this beautiful little warbler, now in terminal decline across the region where it was

once reasonably widespread in suitable deciduous woodlands.

Two species which have also declined sharply, almost to the verge of local extinction, were also reported. These were a turtle dove at Filey and three corn buntings around Castle Lake at Bishop Middleham. That area of Durham seems to be one of the last local refuges of this plump bunting, once common enough as a farmland species which has now vanished from most of Britain.

An osprey passed over Saltburn and a firecrest was at Filey. Among other rarer arrivals, the first roseate terns were back near their only east coast breeding

site at Coquet Island. Migrant waders included wood sandpipers at Bishop Middleham, Lamesley and Saltholme. There was also a small but obvious passage of black terns. These small dark marsh terns were at Hetton Lyons and Scaling Dam and also at a few wetland sites in Northumberland. The most intriguing rarity report involved a possible white-tailed eagle in the Stanhope and Derwent Reservoir areas.

A few early cuckoos appeared. I was lucky enough on Sunday to hear my first of the spring while visiting one of my favourite stretches of moorland. Like me, it must have wondered what it was

doing there as the air was cold, a strong wind was blowing and it was anything but spring-like.

The weather wasn't putting off the local nesting waders. In the moor-edge fields, lapwings were up chasing off passing crows and gulls, a sure sign that they had eggs or young hidden below and on the higher ground curlews were alarm calling.

Snipe were particularly prominent. Everywhere I went males were displaying, diving in flight with their "drumming" display, created by the air rushing through stiff outspread tail feathers. Others were perching on stone walls giving their

continual chipping notes. In one small valley, a displaying cock wheatear and a ring ouzel used a power line. To the human eye the line looked an intrusion on the upland landscape. To these birds it was just another prominent song perch.

