

Walks Fewston and Swinsty reservoir

Walk information

Distance: Roughly 7.5 miles (includes additional 1 mile at Swinsty).

Height to Climb: 100m (330 feet)

Start: SE 170552. There is a car park at the west end of Fewston Reservoir.

Difficulty: Easy walking on good paths throughout.

Refreshments: The Hopper Lane at Blubberhouses is half a mile from the car park but there is plenty of choice on the A59.

Be Prepared: The route description and sketch map only provide a guide to the walk. You must take out and be able to read a map and in cloudy/misty conditions a compass. You must also wear the correct clothing and footwear for the outdoors. Whilst every effort is made to provide accurate information, walkers head out at their own risk.

Please observe the Countryside Code and park sensibly.

The walk

BOTH Fewston and Swinsty Reservoirs are owned by Yorkshire Water, were built in the 1870s and supply some of the water for Leeds (they have been for nearly 150 years). In fact, Fewston flows in to Swinsty so they are really just an extension of each other and no harm in that. However, it does make me want to complete a circuit around both reservoirs making for a very pleasant three or four hours walk. The paths are excellent and the views lovely, even though much of the walk is through woodland. If, like me, you have driven the Harrogate Skipton A59 umpteen times, but never stopped now is the time, you will not be disappointed.

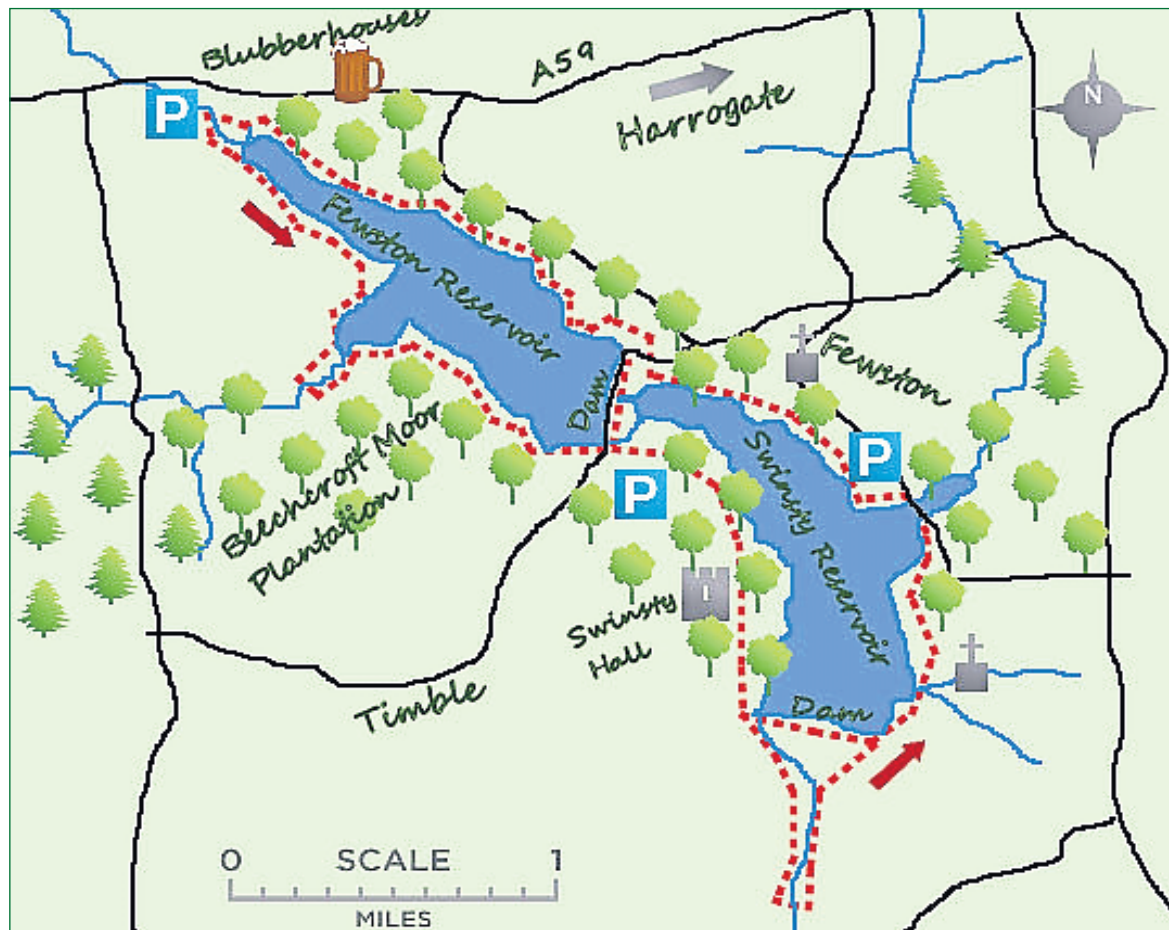
I start the walk at the car park to the west end of Fewston Reservoir. I joined the excellent footpath/cycleway to the south of Fewston,

part of the Six Trails National Trail that heads up from Otley to Middleham in Wensleydale via the full length of Nidderdale. The path meets the reservoir immediately and straight away it is clear that birds, flowers and the forces of nature will dominate the walk. One of the pleasures is that there are small beaches on the waterside from where you can enjoy the sights and sounds of nature. On the water the popular wildfowl of Canadian geese, mallards, coots and greylag geese predominate but look closer (particularly as spring approaches) for swans and cormorants.

After a mile and a half Fewston ends and a small outflow stream leads in to Swinsty Reservoir. The walk is now in woodland but with access points to the reservoirs. On the right is Swinsty Hall, difficult to see through the beech, conifer and oak, but once owned by the present (as we speak) football manager Gareth Southgate. The track is still excellent and as it approaches the dam at the east end of Swinsty it becomes the domain of anglers; both fly and coarse fishermen patiently waiting for their chosen fish (brown/rainbow trout and perch are most popular). 6,500 brown trout have been recently added to the reservoir so maybe they do not have to be too patient!

A few hundred metres beyond the hall the track emerges from the woodland at the dam. Turn right and a short sharp climb will take you to the pretty village of Timble (complete with pub) but it is too early for me so I either cross the dam or explore a little further (my favourite option). For an extra mile drop down the path next to the outflow of Swinsty, cross the river and then return up the west bank to the reservoir. You are less likely to meet anyone and this is unusual because at the weekends this can be a very popular walk.

Now turn north and follow the east banks of both reservoirs back to the car park. The east banks do feel a little different from the west, the views are still superb, but there are pleasant surprises at every corner. The track sticks close to the shore



for one mile before crossing a road bridge and a lovely area on a bit of promontory, perfect for a picnic and a survey of the scenes across the reservoir. Detour inland to the cluster of houses which make up Fewston, the highlight being the beautiful church of St Michael and St Lawrence.

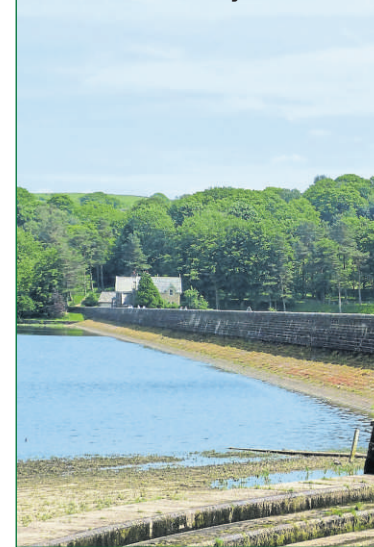
Back to the shoreline and the path (complete with small beaches) crosses a road between the reservoirs before following the wide path through some more woodland. It is not a quiet place as spring approaches, the woodland alive with song birds, mainly warblers and finches. The best path sticks to the shoreline but towards the car park end a path leads diagonally up towards the A59. If you are keen for a pint of beer or cup of coffee, as the end of the walk approaches, then this is the most direct

line to the Hopper Lane Hotel. Alternatively complete the walk and drive the half a mile.

A final word of congratulations to Yorkshire Water who have made this an excellent walk, safe and enjoyable at all times of the year.

*** Jonathan Smith runs Where2walk, a walking company in the Yorkshire Dales: Jonathan has written his own book, the "Dales 30" which describes the highest mountains in the Dales. He also runs 1 Day Navigation Courses for Beginners and Intermediates. Join his Learn a Skill, Climb a Hill Weekend in the Dales. To find out more details on any of the above and details of many more walks in the area visit his popular website, Where2walk.co.uk.**

Swinsty reservoir



Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

SIGNS of spring are everywhere at the moment but with a return to lower temperatures and generally wintry conditions being forecast for next week it could all come to a temporary halt.

More familiar garden and farmland species are now getting into breeding mode with song and display. In sunny conditions last Sunday, I heard my first singing skylarks of the year and watched a couple of pairs of lapwings in rolling display over arable coastal fields. I'm sure other birders will have had similar experiences.

A few black-headed gulls

now have their dark heads and cormorants are showing their breeding season white thigh patches, always visible at vast distance as they flying along the coast. On the same coastal trip, I noticed my first gannets of spring, two pristine adults which came inshore to join a brief feeding frenzy, mainly involving herring and common gulls. Each made a couple of dives into the seething mass of gulls but the shoal they were preying on must have gone deep and the whole thing was quickly over.

Gannets, their black-tipped wing spanning six feet, are our largest and most spectacular seabirds.

The pure whiteness of the bodies of adults makes gulls look dull by comparison.

A few winter in the North Sea but most move down off West Africa and around the Mediterranean before returning back in early spring to breeding territories. Over the next month or so we should be seeing increasing numbers offshore, moving in long and low lines over the wave-tops.

We're lucky in being sandwiched between two big breeding colonies, Bempton in Yorkshire and the Bass Rock off the Firth of Forth which now has the

distinction of being the world's largest colony with over 150,000 present in summer. It means that gannets are on show just about everywhere along the coast during their long-distance feeding trips from the breeding colonies. They're a bird I never get tired of seeing.

There was a flurry of excitement last weekend over reports of a probable female Siberian rubythroat which had apparently been visiting to a bird table at Barnby Dun in South Yorkshire for several days. Unfortunately, no sooner had word got out than it vanished and hasn't been seen since.

There are fewer than a dozen British sightings of this species, only one in the north east. This was a female identified in a garden at Roker, Sunderland, in late October 2006. It also vanished the very day it was confirmed. It seems us local birders will just have to wait for another opportunity.

