

# Walks Around Keld and Muker

## Walk information

**Distance:** 9.3 km (5.8 miles)

**Time:** 2 - 3 hours

**Maps:** OS Explorer OL30 - always carry a map

**Parking:** Car Park at Park Lodge just off the small 'square' in the centre of Keld.

**Refreshments:** Pubs and cafes at Keld and Muker

**Terrain:** Clear paths and tracks all the way, with riverside, meadows, valleys and woodland. Some of the paths are quite steep and rough/rocky underfoot.

**How to get there:** From Richmond, follow the A6108 towards Leyburn then branch off along B6270 towards Reeth - continue along this road up through Swaledale to eventually reach Keld at the head of the valley.

**Caution:** Please walk in single file across the haymeadows around Muker, and do not pick any wild flowers. There are steep drops to the side of the path in places. Take care along the riverside paths after heavy rain.

## Points of interest

It is a joy to be out walking in the Yorkshire Dales on a sunny day in late spring, and there is nowhere better to walk than through the hay-meadows of Upper Swaledale. The finest hay-meadows in the Dales, arguably in England, can be found around the lovely village of Muker. Here, the small fields along the flat valley floor are a mass of bright yellow, blue, red and white flowers. A paved footpath leads through narrow squeeze-stiles across fields with an abundance of buttercup, forget-me-not, cow parsley, clover, common bird's-foot trefoil, meadow cranesbill, meadow rattle to name just a handful. Cut later than normal to allow the wild flowers and grasses time to seed, these meadows are at their best in mid to late June. Please keep to the footpath and under no circumstances pick any of the wild

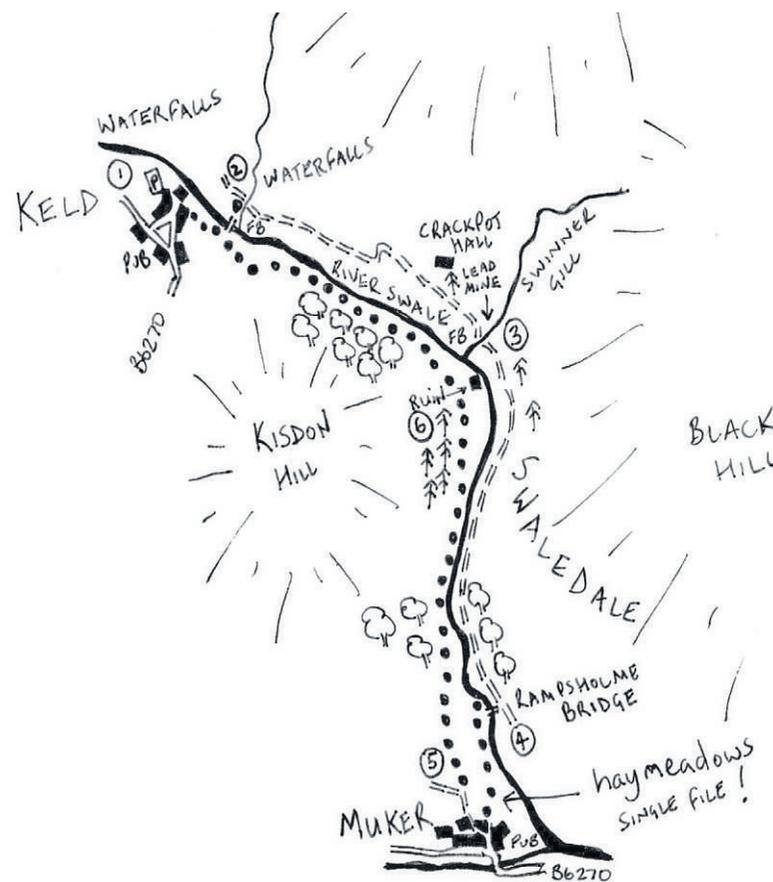
flowers. Interestingly, the word 'muker' means 'meadows' in Old Norse.

This is one of the finest walks in the Yorkshire Dales, a heady mix of beautiful views, waterfalls, ancient woodland, picturesque villages and haymeadows. The first part of this walk follows paths and tracks through the deep U-shaped valley of Swaledale into a narrow wooded gorge near Keld with numerous waterfalls all around, in particular Catrake Force, Kisdon Force and East Stonedale Force; 'keld' means 'springs' in Old Norse. The views from below Crackpot Hall are the finest I have seen.

## The walk

**1** From the small dead-end 'square' in the centre of Keld (facing up the road) take the track to the left (signpost 'Coast to Coast'), and follow this clear track/path straight on out of the village for 250 metres to reach a fork in the path. Follow the left-hand path (signpost 'Pennine Way') down to reach a footbridge across the River Swale. Cross the footbridge then follow the clear path to the left then up to the right (passing a waterfall across to your right along the side-stream of East Gill) to reach a T-junction with a track just above the waterfall (3-finger signpost and benches).

**2** At this T-junction turn right along the track, over a bridge across East Gill (above waterfall) and through a gate. After the gate, follow the clear stony track to the right then curving round to the left - continue along this track rising up with Swaledale falling away to your right. After 175 metres the track levels off - continue straight on along this track (steep drops to your right) for a further 500 metres before bending left then right around a barn (old lead mine workings up to your left). After the bends and barn, continue along the track for 150 metres to reach a fork in the track, just after the remains of a rusty tractor. Follow the right-hand track straight on



(left-hand track leads up to the ruins of Crackpot Hall) heading gently downhill for 500 metres (wall on your right) before zig-zagging steeply down to reach a footbridge across the side-stream of Swinner Gill beside the crumbling remains of old lead mines.

**3** Cross the footbridge then continue along the very clear track heading down through Swaledale, dropping down almost to river level (river on your right) for 2 km until the tracks begins to rise up again into woodland, where you branch off to the right along a clear path that soon leads to Rampsholme Bridge (footbridge) across the River Swale.

**4** Cross the footbridge then follow the path to the right (with the Swale just on your right) for a short distance then turn left through a wall gate (signpost 'Muker') and follow the clear flagged path across

several fields (haymeadows - walk in single file) all the way to Muker. As you enter Muker, head straight on along the lane between the houses then drop down to reach the main road where you turn right to reach the cafe and pub. From the cafe / pub at Muker (with your back to the cafe/pub) turn left along the road and then retrace your steps back up along the lane into the heart of the village (passing the Literary Institute on your right) into the small 'square' where the lane levels out - bear left along the lane between the houses to pass to the left side of Stoneleigh B&B along a track that leads out of the village (signpost 'Keld'). Follow the track passing the Old Vicarage and on to reach a gate across the track after the last of the houses. After the gate, walk straight on along the track rising up (wall on your right) for 100 metres then, where the track swings sharply up to the left after 100 metres, head straight on alongside the wall on

your right and through a gate in the corner.

**5** Head through the gate and follow the enclosed path straight on through woodland for 475 metres before dropping down to reach a path junction just beyond a barn, with the river just across to your right (small signpost). After the barn, follow the flat, clear path straight on along the top of a small bank heading up through Swaledale. After 700 metres the path drops down slightly through the edge of some woodland to join the river again - head straight on along the broad, flat grassy riverside path (woodland across to your left). As you approach the stone wall across your path, bear very slightly left away from the river and through a wall-gap then follow the clear path ahead across pastures (wall-stiles) across the flat valley floor, passing between stone barns and on to reach the end of an old walled path, with an old ruinous farmhouse across to your right.

**6** Follow the path straight on rising up, with the wall on your right, rising up a bank and over a tumbledown wall then straight on across the hillside, passing a roofless barn and a small barn, after which continue along the path rising up (Swaledale falling away to your right) to join a walled footpath that passes below a dilapidated farmhouse, on to reach a bridle-gate that leads into woodland. Follow the undulating clear footpath straight on through the woodland for 500 metres to join the route of the Pennine Way (3-finger signpost) - follow this clear path straight on back into Keld.

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## Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

THE illegal persecution of birds of prey is once again the leading topic for birders both in the region and nationally. It follows the discovery of three pole-traps, outlawed in Britain since 1904, on a grouse moor in North Yorkshire where a rare hen harrier was seen hunting.

Raptors hunting open country seek out high perches which give them an all-round view. Victorian gamekeepers exploited this by placing metal spring-loaded traps chained to the top of poles out on their moors. Any bird landing on the pole would trigger the trap breaking its legs and leaving it to dangle and suffer an agonisingly

lingering death.

In 1904 parliament considered them so barbarically cruel that they were banned. Yet here we are over a century later with them still being used on a shooting estate. The pole-traps were spotted by a walker who alerted the RSPB. Investigators visited the moor, made the traps harmless and set up hidden cameras.

Next day they filmed a man resetting the traps. Police moved in and tracked down the culprit. Instead of being charging, senior officers decided on a caution, causing an outcry across social media. So outspoken were

comments about the North Yorkshire force that some were censored for reasons of libel by the leading website, Raptor Persecution UK. More reasoned protests have been made to the force, one of whose senior officers has, ironically, just been given the national wildlife crime brief by the Association of Chief Police Officers. The local police and crime commissioner has said that she cannot intervene.

The Moorland Association, which represents landowners, said the incident involved a "junior employee" on the Mossdale Estate. It expressed disgust about the traps, but said he had acted without the knowledge of the landowner or head gamekeeper. He

had been suspended and as a result of the caution could no longer possess a gun. But its statement has been greeted with derision. It seems that estates have once again handed useful propaganda to campaigners against game shooting.

The incident has also given further impetus to calls for England to follow Scotland's example and make landowners legally responsible for the actions of employees. There are also demands for estates to be licensed and shooting banned if illegal incidents are proved.

Late spring migration is now virtually over although a northward-bound male red-backed shrike lingered at the South Gare. A rosefinch sang at Whitburn

and a first-summer Bonaparte's gull was a big attraction in the Wansbeck estuary. A great white egret toured various pools around Druridge Bay.

