



# Walking to Yorkshire's top spot

A circular walk to Whernside getting 'up close and personal' with the iconic Ribblehead Viaduct along the way. 8 miles. Words and photographs: Paul Heaton (Fotocraft Images)



The ascent of Whernside takes the walker to the highest point in Yorkshire, and offers superb long distance views as far as the Lake District and Lancashire coast. The sometimes curmudgeonly A. W. Wainwright was scathing in his assessment of the climb up Whernside saying it could be 'ascended with little impediment and not much pleasure from any direction.' I would like to prove his assessment wrong with this eight mile circuit from Ribblehead which offers good paths, great views, and plenty of points of interest along the way. On summer weekends the paths are often busy with walkers hurrying to complete the Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge walk. On weekdays however, or outside the main season, Whernside attracts fewer visitors than either Ingleborough or Pen-y-Ghent, and you are much more likely to be accompanied by the sounds of curlews and skylarks than people. The walk starts from the junction of the roads linking Hawes, Ingleton and Horton in Ribblesdale. There is plenty of parking beside the road here with views of Ribblehead Viaduct with the bulk of Whernside behind it. Cross the road and take the stony footpath (FP sign Blea Moor Sidings ¾mile). This path heads towards the impressive stone arches of the viaduct. Join a wider vehicle track and continue ▶

LEFT: The entrance to Blea Moor Tunnel. TOP: Ribblehead Viaduct.

BELOW: Plaque marking the restoration of Ribblehead Viaductm.  
 RIGHT: Looking across to Ingleborough from the path down from Whernside.  
 BOTTOM MIDDLE: Information board where the route forks right off the gravel road.  
 BOTTOM RIGHT: The Station Inn pub and bunk barn.

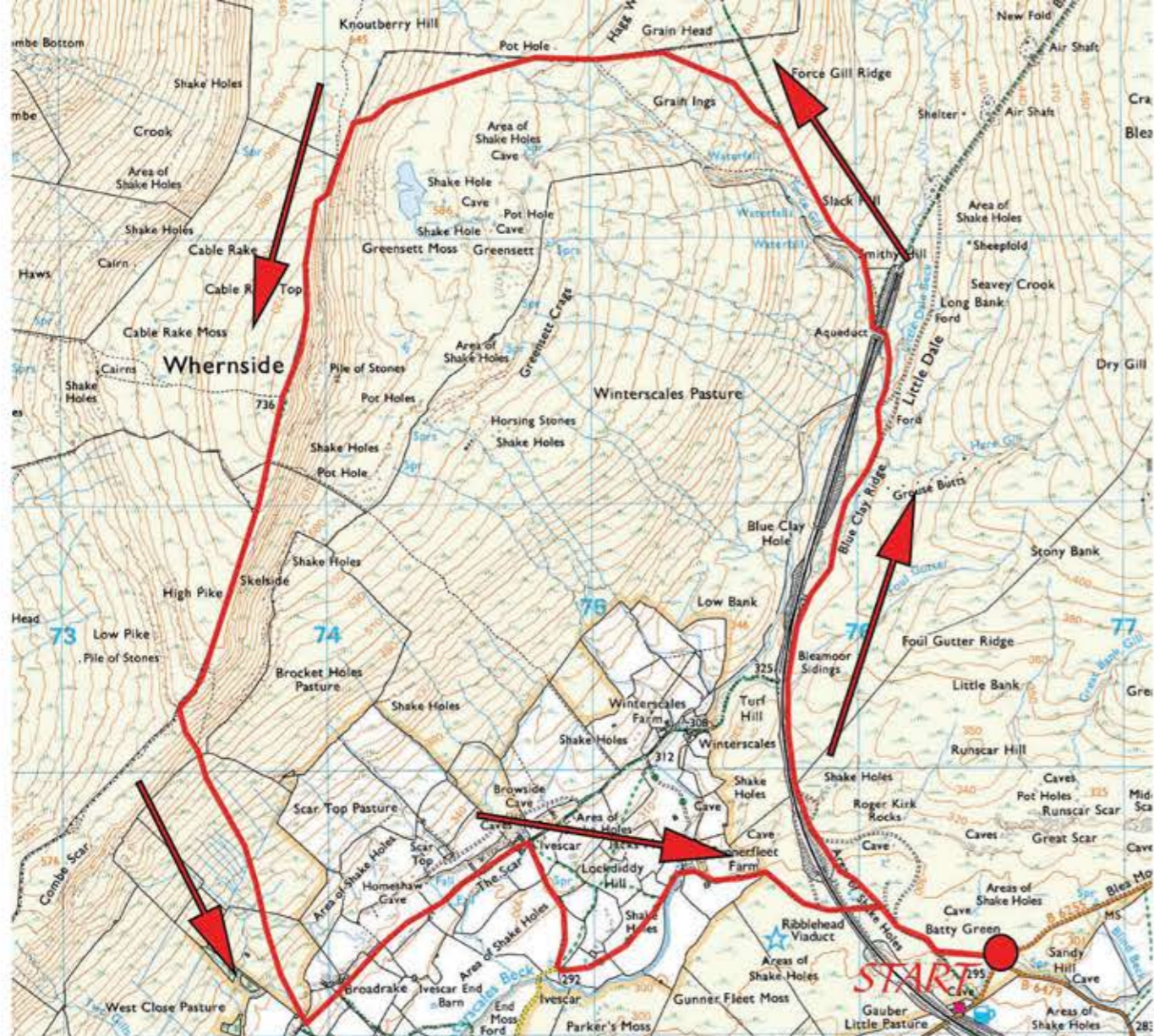


towards the viaduct then, after a couple of hundred yards, bear right along a path running parallel to the railway line. There is a board next to the junction giving details of the remains of the construction site which was built here to support the building of the viaduct and the nearby Blea Moor Tunnel.

Ribblehead Viaduct is 440 yards (400m) long and the highest point of its 24 arches stands 104ft above Batty Moss. The limestone blocks used in its construction were quarried locally and the 1.5 million bricks used were made on site. The local materials and the passage of time have caused the structure to blend with its surroundings such that it now seems to me to be a part of the landscape rather than being imposed upon it. The path climbs up the right hand side of the viaduct and continues parallel to the railway line past Blea Moor Signal box and a nearby cottage. Cross a stream (often dry) and bear left where the path forks back down to the stream bed (there is a footbridge available a few yards upstream if the water is high). The slopes of Whernside seem much more imposing on the left along this section of the walk.

Cross over the railway line on a substantial stone bridge. There are great views from this bridge, with the entrance of Blea Moor tunnel on the right and a view down the Settle and Carlisle railway line towards Ingleborough on the left of the bridge. Blea Moor tunnel runs for a mile and a half under the fell, with cones of spoil on the hillside marking its route under the landscape. There is also an attractive curved aqueduct ▶





1:25,000 map extract.

on the left side of the bridge, with small steps leading Force Gill over the railway line.

Pass through a gate and continue straight on where the path forks (sign Dentdale 4). There is an attractive waterfall visible to the left of the path along this section. Look out for a stile in the fence on the left of the path. Pass through this stile and continue steadily uphill. Some parts of this path were boggy, but it now has substantial stone flags along much of its length. Clues about the nature of the ground are visible on the map – Hag Worm Haw Moss, and Greensett Moss being particularly evocative. The path bends slowly around to the left, climbing up towards the summit ridge. Approaching the ridge, the waters of Greensett Tarn are visible on the left. Once the ridge is reached views of Dentdale, with the rounded slopes of the Howgill Fells beyond, open up to the right of the path. The broad ridge continues to the summit itself, topped with a concrete

triangulation pillar and a two part dry stone wind shelter. The view from the 2,415 foot (736m) summit is extensive, taking in the other two of Yorkshire's three peaks, many other Yorkshire hills, Pendle Hill, some 25 miles away, Lakeland fells, the Howgills and the Lancashire coast. On a clear day, the hills of the Isle of Man and even Blackpool Tower can be seen. Closer to hand, Ribblesdale Viaduct and the woods and fields around Chapel le Dale draw the eye. Continue along the ridge from the summit, initially fairly gently. After a while the path descends more steeply down rocky steps and then bears left, dropping down the side of the ridge. Pass through two gates and down to a third gate which leads into a walled lane. After a few yards turn left through a gate and along a bridleway (sign Winterscales 1¼). The bridleway passes the cottages of Broadrake on the left and through a further three gates to join a vehicle track. Several of the fields along this section are maintained as

traditional hay meadows, and are a sea of yellow in June when the buttercups are in flower. Continue through a metal gate and then two gates close together leading into the farmyard of Ivescar. Walk to the right of the farmyard and then turn right along a metalled farm road. A few yards before crossing Winterscales Beck, turn left through a gate and along another farm road heading towards the viaduct. Continue through two gates then turn right just before Gunnerfleet Farm over a bridge crossing Winterscales Beck. Pass through a gate to the left of a cattle grid and past the farm buildings. The road becomes a stone surfaced track, passes through a gate and then under Ribblesdale Viaduct. There is a plaque near the viaduct marking the restoration work carried out in 1991. After the viaduct, take the left fork off the main track along a narrower path leading directly back to the start point. ■

RIGHT: Looking back up the path towards Whernside's summit  
BELOW: Ribblesdale Viaduct and Whernside from the start point of the walk  
BOTTOM: Aqueduct carrying Force Gill over the railway line



## Information box:

**Walk length:** 8 miles

**Maps:** Ordnance Survey Explorer OL2 (Yorkshire Dales Southern and Western Area) and OS Landranger 98 (Wensleydale).

**Going:** The paths are clear throughout. Many of the formerly muddy and boggy sections now have stone flagged paths. Whernside is a considerable peak, and the weather is normally significantly cooler at the summit. It is advisable to wear strong footwear or boots for this walk and to carry an extra layer of clothing, waterproof and some food and drink.

**Start and finish:** Pull off next to the road at the junction of the B6255 and B6479 at Ribblesdale

**Refreshments:** There is usually a van serving refreshments in the pull off at the start/finish of the walk. Food and drinks are also available from the Station Inn near Ribblesdale Viaduct

**Toilets:** None on the route, but toilets are available for patrons at the Station Inn

**Public transport:** Ribblesdale Station on the Settle to Carlisle line is close to the start of this walk and provides links to national rail network.

**GPX file:** If you would like a free gpx file of the route for this walk, for your walking GPS unit, e-mail [paul@fotocraftimages.co.uk](mailto:paul@fotocraftimages.co.uk)