



WIDDYBANK FELL and CAULDRON SNOUT

FROM COW GREEN RESERVOIR 7¾ MILES (12.5KM)

Upper Teesdale is renowned for its beautiful scenery and this circuit of Widdybank Fell endorses that opinion. The rich variety of flora and fauna should be sufficient to satisfy the most demanding of naturalists.

Before leaving the car park take a little time to look around and absorb the magnificent panorama. Cow Green Reservoir stretches across the view, with the high summits of the Pennine hills providing a stunning backdrop. To the left, beyond the dam, stands Mickley Fell which rises to 2488 feet (758m); looking directly across the reservoir is Meldon Hill at 2517 feet (767m); panning right is Great Dun Fell at 2783 feet (848m) which is easy to recognise with the radar installation perched on its summit; next is Little Dun Fell which is a mere 20 feet (6m) lower; then Cross Fell, the highest peak on the Pennine ridge at 2930 feet (893m).

Cow Green Reservoir opened in 1971 after protests to prevent its construction had failed. It was built to ensure a constant supply of water to the thirsty industries of Teesside, more than 50 miles (80km) away. When filled to capacity the reservoir holds 9000 million gallons (41,000 million litres). The dam is 1875 feet (571m) long and 82 feet (25m) high. Before the reservoir was built the course of the river Tees made a large crescent, known as 'The Weel', where it gathered force before plummeting down the spectacular staircase of Cauldron Snout.

The route from Weelhead Sike provides sweeping views across the valley to Chapelfell Top and Fendrith Fell, helping to compensate for the somewhat hard surface underfoot. To the right is the wild heather moorland of Widdybank Fell. Here, in the spring and early summer, you may see the golden plover, recognised by its golden-brown back with black

speckles and a black belly. Curlew, lapwing, meadow pipit and skylark are also common during the breeding season.

Leaving the road we follow a good track to Widdybank Farm and the prominent outcrop of Cronkley Scar comes into view. In the mid-nineteenth century, an area of shale found in the rocks at Cronkley Scar proved to be suitable for making pencils. A pencil mill was built nearby which operated until 1899. The pencils, known locally as 'widdies', were produced by grinding the shale into a powder and then compressing it into moulds.

After reaching the banks of the river Tees, a broad track leads upstream to the towering crags at Falcon Clints. Golden eagles once soared above these rocky cliffs and their eyries remain, waiting for them to return! Our path winds its way through the rocks at the foot of the cliffs where lichens and mosses are well established; lady fern, wood anemone, wood horsetail and woolly hair moss shelter in the fallen rocks. The rippling of the river is the only sound disturbing the solitude.

Further upstream we reach a confluence where Maize Beck merges with the river Tees. Prior to 1974 this marked the boundaries of three counties; below the juncture, the Tees separated County Durham from the North Riding of Yorkshire; above the juncture, it separated County Durham from Westmorland, which is now part of Cumbria.

Our path continues along the riverside and the sound of crashing water grows louder with each step. Suddenly, we are confronted with the spectacular waterfall of Cauldron Snout, once described as 'a cascade of torrential wildness'. Here the Tees plunges, in a series of cataracts, down a rocky staircase 600 feet (183m) in length. The vertical drop from the first cataract to the last is 200 feet (61m) – England's largest cascade waterfall. Nowadays the Cow Green dam controls the river's flow, releasing enough to make an impressive display most of the time. However, when the reservoir is full, curtains of water spill over and quickly surge into an awesome force, reminiscent of its former magnificence.

According to local folklore the area near the falls is haunted by the ghost of the 'Singing Lady'. A young Victorian farm girl fell in love with a local lead miner, but the affair ended when the miner returned home to his family. Overcome with grief the girl made her way to the edge of the falls where she threw herself into the raging torrent. It is said that her spirit can be seen, on cold moonlit nights, sitting on a rock near the falls where she sadly laments the loss of her lover.

After an invigorating climb to the top of Cauldron Snout, the concrete wall of Cow Green Dam appears. But the views quickly improve and can be enjoyed during our return to the car park.

Start/Parking:

Weelhead Sike car park at Cow Green Reservoir.

Location:

Follow the B6277 Alston Road from Middleton-in-Teesdale for 7¼ miles (12.2km) to the Langdon Beck Hotel. Turn left and follow minor road for 3 miles (4.5km) to Cow Green Reservoir.

Grid Ref:

NY 811 309. Postcode: for Langdon Beck Hotel - DL12 0XP.

Distance:

7¼ miles (12.5km) circular. Allow 4 hrs walking time.

Total Ascent:

531 feet (162m) Maximum Elevation: 1679 feet (512m).

OS Maps:

Explorer OL31 (1:25,000), Landranger 91 (1:50,000) or Landranger 92 (1:50,000).

Refreshments:

None en route, nearest Langdon Beck Hotel.

Public Toilets:

None en route, nearest High Force.

Other:

Bus service passes through Langdon Beck.

