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Rishworth Moor's Expanse

A bracing ramble on old moorland tracks, with extensive views all the way.

Distance 5.5 miles (8.8km)

Minimum time 2hrs 30min

Ascent/gradient 328ft (100m)

Level of difficulty Hard

Paths Moorland paths; may be boggy after rain

Landscape Open moorland

Suggested map aqua3 OS Outdoor Leisure 21 South Pennines

Start/finish SE 010184

Dog friendliness Under control where sheep are grazing

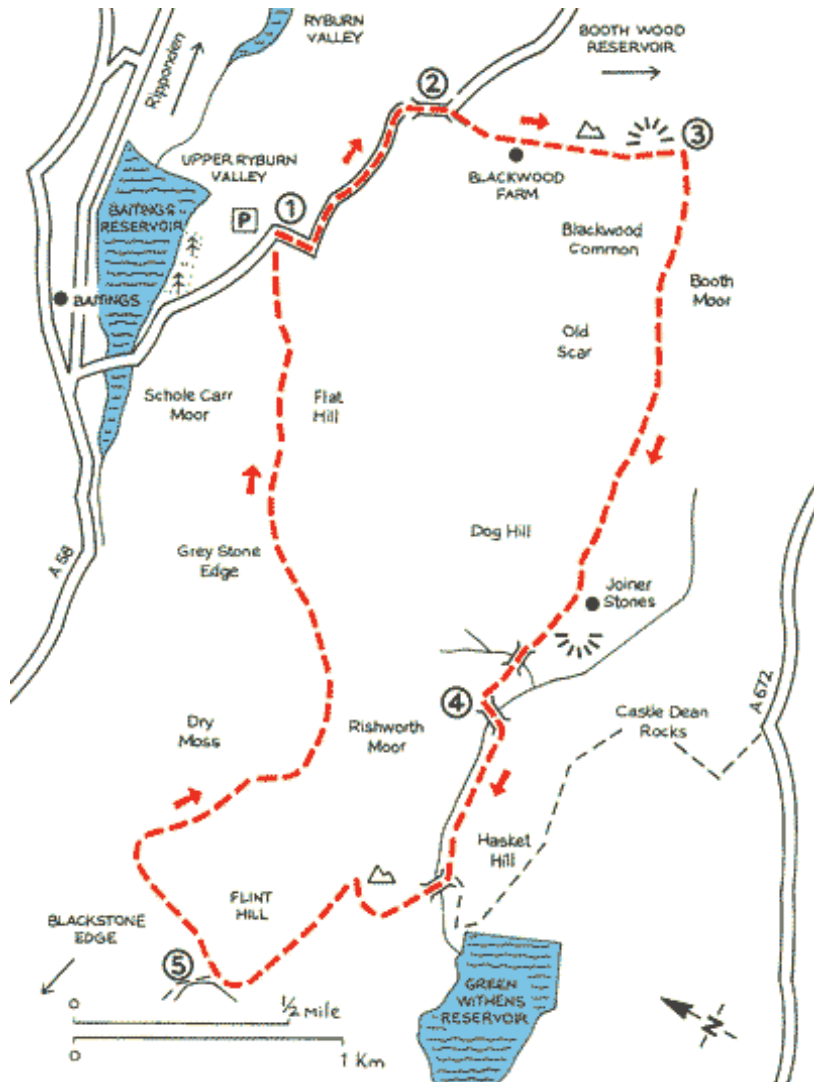
Parking Small car park above Baitings Reservoir

Public toilets None on route

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1 From the car park, walk left down the road. 50yds (46m) after crossing the beck, take a gate in the wall on your right (signposted to Booth Wood Reservoir).

2 Follow a tumbledown wall uphill towards the left-hand side of Blackwood Farm. Walk between the farmhouse and an outbuilding, to a gate at the top of the farmyard. Walk up the next field to a stile and continue steeply uphill, following the wall to your right. Look for views of the Ryburn Valley, as you crest the hill and arrive at a ladder stile, next to a gate in the wall.

3 From here you strike off to the right, across rough moorland; the path is distinct but narrow. Keep straight ahead at a yellow-topped post (you will see others on your route). Walk roughly parallel to the M62, heading just to the right of a tall mast on the far side of the motorway. At the next waymarker stick, bear slightly

right, on a less obvious path. As you start to walk downhill you have good views down to Green Withens Reservoir ahead. Descend to cross a side-beck on a little plank bridge, to meet the reservoir drainage channel.

4 Take a bridge over the channel and walk right, following this watercourse towards the reservoir. About 300yds (274m) before the reservoir embankment, take a bridge back over the channel (waymarked 'Blackstone Edge and Baitings'). Bear slightly left to follow a path uphill - soon quite steeply - before it levels out and bears left around Flint Hill. The view behind you recedes; ahead is the Upper Ryburn Valley. Descend to a water channel on your left and a fork of paths.

5 Go right here (a sign indicates Baitings Reservoir), continuing to skirt the hill on a good, level path. Keep left, where the path forks, to begin a gradual descent towards Baitings Reservoir. When you come to a wall corner, keep straight ahead, following the wall on your left. Soon you are on a walled track, passing through two gates and finally emerging at the little car park above the reservoir.

The first part of this exhilarating moorland walk is called Blackstone Edge Road and was much used by quarrymen. The moorland is peaty, and the path may be boggy in places, so this walk is best tackled during a dry spell, when there is good visibility (both for ease of route-finding and to enjoy the views). The views are extensive. On the outward section of the walk, you can look down on the cars streaming along the M62, making easy work of traversing the Pennine watershed. You will see that the east- and west-bound carriageways divide around a solitary farm. The farmer's protests about the motorway being built - and this surreal diversion - were much in the news when the road was being constructed.

As you stride out across Rishworth Moor, probably sighting few other walkers, you can pity the motorists in their little metal boxes. Or, if the weather is turning nasty, you may feel a twinge of envy instead. On the second half of the walk you get excellent views of the Ryburn Valley and beyond, including Blackstone Edge, Pendle Hill and distant windfarms.

The South Pennine hills, straddling the Yorkshire/Lancashire boundary and watershed, have long been a great obstacle to travel. A fascinating paved road climbs steeply up Blackstone Edge; opinions are divided as to whether it is Roman or a medieval packhorse track. But no one was in any doubt that this was difficult terrain. The redoubtable traveller, Celia Fiennes, coming this way in 1698, described this route as '...a dismal high precipice, steep in ascent'. Daniel Defoe

came the same way in August 1724, during a blizzard that was unseasonal even for the Pennines.

A succession of turnpike roads were built in the 18th and early 19th centuries, which offered increasingly comfortable gradients. Yet it was as recently as the 1970s, with the building of the M62 motorway, that trans-Pennine travel finally became routine. Surveyors did some of their initial work using ponies: the easiest mode of transport in this bleak and inhospitable landscape. As drivers now cruise effortlessly across the empty moors, it's easy to forget just what a feat of engineering it was to build 'the motorway in the clouds'. At an altitude of 1,220ft (370m), the M62 is the highest motorway in the country, and this Pennine section offers some dramatic features. Scammonden Bridge, arching across a deep cutting, is the largest single-span bridge in Europe. Scammonden Reservoir was created by damming the Deanhead Valley, flooding a dozen farms in the process. The reservoir's huge dam, which also carries the motorway, is the largest earth-filled dam in Europe. It took five years to build the dam, and a further two years to fill with water. It may be easier to travel across the Pennines these days, but nature has a way of reminding us not to take things for granted. When it was opened, the M62 was called, somewhat optimistically, 'the motorway that never closes'. In fact, the weather up here is notoriously unpredictable, and few years pass without the traffic seizing up in winter's icy grip.

Where to eat and drink

Take the opportunity to visit one of the oldest (14th-century) and most delightful pubs in West Yorkshire. You could drive through Ripponden without seeing it, because the Old Bridge Inn is tucked out of sight off the main A58 road. You'll find it near the church, on a cobbled lane, just beyond an old packhorse bridge. Real ale, picturesque surroundings and excellent food make the pub rather special.

While you're there

The Ryburn Valley branches off from the Calder at Sowerby Bridge. Ripponden is a little straggle of a town that's well worth exploring. It was an important weaving centre, known for its dark 'Navy Blue' cloth; at one time it was the sole supplier to the Royal Navy.

What to look for

The upland moors of the South Pennines are now officially recognised as

important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It's a sparse landscape of heather, grasses, bilberry, cotton grass and crowberry, where birds such as the merlin and the golden plover still thrive. The only thing that's lacking, apart from trees, is people. You can stride out across these moors for mile after mile without seeing another walker.



You may be interested in

- [🏠 Old Bridge Inn](#)
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