

## WALK 22 THE HEYS/SKELLY POND

START COWM RES. CAR PARK

DISTANCE 5 MILES

TIME Allow yourself 3 hours

Start counter-intuitively: walk from the res. back down the approach road. Go past the footpath sign on the left. (In truth, you could go up, but the little loop that follows is really pleasant, so...) 50m. further down take the narrow road up at the cottages, and simply swing left and up Kiln Bank Lane. Turn left in front of the first farm gate. 50m. on you'll see the top of the shortcut. There, pass through the next gate, with the self-closing mechanism, and keep on up High Barn Lane between walls, enjoying (in season) bilberries and blackberries, horses that may well peer at you over the numbered field-gates, and views over the left-hand gates down to Manchester.

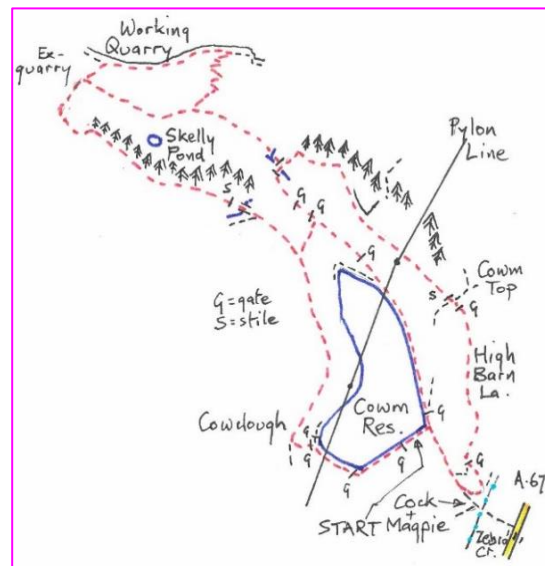


At the lane top you'll meet a gate that *you* have to close, and beyond it the quarry road. Not much traffic, and the wagons you'll hear before you see, but don't dally as you cross – they can come quickly, especially from the right. Directly opposite is a United Utilities facility with a stile immediately to its left. Hop over onto a short path – it's often muddy, but it's wide, so there's usually a do-able way through. **If you are with a dog, please keep it on its lead for this section.** Sheep are nearly always grazing

**ahead, even if, because of the trees and the convex slope of the land, you can't see them.**

Beyond the trees you emerge onto the Heys, which in sunshine is a veritable Sound of Music meadow. Don't rush this bit. Take in the view. To your left is the sparkling water of the reservoir and, beyond, a vista all the way down to Manchester; ahead the emptiness of the moor; to your right the quarry, although, spoil heaps apart, you'll possibly hear more than you see; and above there will be crows and, just maybe, buzzards.

Opposite the Heys are two valleys that are pretty much hidden from any other viewpoint. The first and more obvious, Walsden Clough, leads up to Ab Top (see leaflet 8). The second, nameless – your objective today – is right of that, squeezed between the conifer wood and the rearing wall of the quarry.



Across the Heys is a nearer, fenced, conifer wood. Aim for the left-hand corner of the wood, then follow the fence as it turns parallel with the main valley, along a narrow path atop the slope. The path ends at an awkward stile that is really just a slatted wooden fence. If you look left, down the slope, there's an easier way through. You're heading for the obvious fence ahead that will lead you diagonally downhill. Pass a stone pillar gateway with two distinct saucer holes. A rushy pathway, lined on its left by one of Whitworth's signature flagstone walls, will lead you down further. Where wall and pathway turn left, so should you, but go slightly beyond the path to avoid the thick rushes.

Down in the bottom right corner of this field is a tree, where Walk 8 takes you over a curious little bridge across the stream. But just *before* that there's a stile on the right – over you go. Then you've to leap a smaller stream – no bridge – onto a lovely solid flagstone and follow the narrow path between a ruined building and a low wall. Aim for the nearest trees, pass through, then left at the low gorse bush immediately after. Stay with the gurgling, unseen stream on your left, winding lumpily through rushes, until – shortly – you can cross via a rocky dam/bridge onto a spit of dry land with another burst of gorse halfway along. Rushes to the left of you, and rushes to the right, and then the path dips you through a soggy patch of them (trending left towards the opening of your nameless target valley) and up through the remnants of a wall onto a more definite path that will take you soon to the tumble of an ex-building. Here, you'd do well to glance right, to spot the path that will bring you down to your way home, should you decide later to take the option of returning via the quarry rim.

Now it's simply a matter of working your way up the valley. Sometimes there are steep sections which offer ultra-clear routes, but generally these are the result of motor bikes and often, if you look carefully, there are shallower sheep tracks around the edges of such ramps. Even before the black water of Skelly Pond (sheep bones!) the sides of the valley get steeper and more shadowed. But eventually, after an unavoidable steep section, you're up at another ex-building (possibly once housing winding gear?) - and here you've a choice to make. Turn around. Look back down the valley. You've two possible routes back, other than retreat.

The first, to what is now your left, sends you up to and around the quarry rim. The path has long views, and is surprisingly flat and good, at least for the first half. The second half, the descent, is more challenging. You are advised to come down 100m. before a right-angled bend in the quarry fence, dropping to the path you spotted earlier. Beyond, there *are* ways down, but they are either mad-motorbiker steep, or big-bouldery, and all send you into that wide morass of wet rushy ground. It's possible to stay high and work round to the Heys, but that one's for masochists...or high-level-circuit seekers.

If you are going for the rim, pass to that side of the ex-building, and work your way across a broad boggy section that is firmer than it looks, as long as you're choosy where you plant your boots. Ahead, hung on the barbed wire, are the first of many white notices that tell you to stay out of this busy working quarry. If you look over the edge 100m. before the sharp right in the quarry fence you'll spot two large rubbery snakes of discarded conveyor belt. Zigzag very carefully down, then work your way equally carefully through the industrial archaeology/detritus beyond – wooden beams, metal

flanges, brick-and-mortar lumps – to the path spotted earlier. One area of squelch then, but otherwise ok.

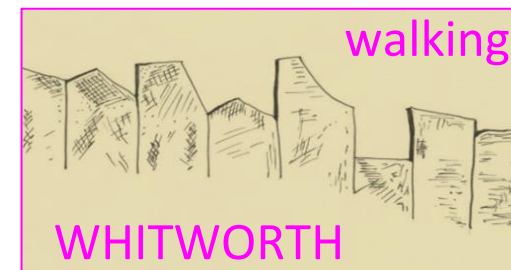
Pass the little ex-building, through the wall and soggy dip, onto the spit, between the trees, and back to the stile. Go over and drop down to the curious little bridge, over, then up and left, working your way along the meadow to a gate (or stile) with a stony track beyond. At the *next* (double) gate, near a stone bench, you've a choice of ways back. See end of olive-green paragraph.

The second option, in the other direction, starts simply, along a good flat path skirting the left of an abandoned quarry hole. At its far end, at a Y-junction, bear left, up and round the end of the spoil heap you've been walking alongside, and head for the trees/fence. Turn right, then



Jay. Pencil crayon by Mary Cawley

follow this path all the way down, never more than about 40m. from the fence. After the final brow pass through a cross-wall featuring two large, leaning flagstones, to enter a curving lane which will bring you to the last conifer, a reassuringly solid stile, and a bridge made of three more huge flagstones. Cross, then hurdle the fallen tree up onto a flat path ahead that is sheltered by (or dripped on from) a line of deciduous trees. At the junction in 200m. either way will get you back to the car park. Left, then right at the stone bench, is the busier, once past the silver squeeze-stile. Right, as far as the ruin of Cowclough hamlet, is delightfully quiet for somewhere so close to the busiest path in Whitworth. At Cowclough cut through the field to join said path. JF



This walk is for serious curmudgeons – or those who enjoy a solid dose of solitude. You could easily complete the bulk of this walk without meeting another human being. So, if you do fly solo, leave a note for someone – back of Cowm, second left - because the second half of the walk is genuinely remote, and not always easy underfoot. It's also a walk of choices – be realistic about your capability. In fog the second half has too many places where navigation would be difficult/dangerous. So why take it on? Because it's there, obviously, but a blank space on your OS map, and – who knows? – you might one day fancy developing the challenge into a complete high-level circuit of Cowm.

If you duck the innominate valley, the Heys section on its own is a gorgeous little walk. Finish it via the curious bridge mentioned in the last tan paragraph, then go left, back towards the res. JF

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