



Route Information

Distance 20.5 kilometres (12.8 miles)

Ascent 350 metres (1150 feet)

Time needed 8 hours (approx)

Start point

Hartside Top on the A686 between Alston and Melmerby. Parking available at Hartside Top Café at the summit of the pass NY 616 418

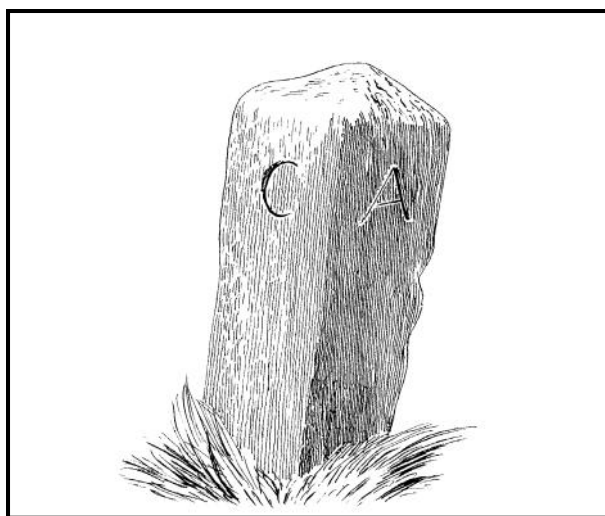
Public Transport

Hartside is served by bus route 888 (limited service - summer only)



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Part of this route crosses open access land on a managed grouse moor, over which **DOGS ARE NOT ALLOWED**. This area is coloured red on the accompanying map. Access may be further restricted during the nesting season and at other times of the year. To avoid disappointment, please visit www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk to get the latest restriction information, before you set out.



Tom Smith's Stone

Engage a moorland mindset! Effectively there is little or no path, the terrain is a typically wild Pennine ridge-top mosaic, with just the occasional exposure of bare peat. During or after a wet spell, the going is decidedly tougher and more tiring. One consolation is the constant fence, bestowing navigational confidence in all weathers, all the way to Cold Fell. Allow at least eight hours, and in less than pleasant weather, add an extra hour. The elevated start from Hartside Pass is a distinct bonus.

Cross the main road at its summit, marching evasively through a rash of nettles to pass through the kissing-gate. A modest path advances on the gentle rise with the ridge fence near to the right. Come to a wall-end stile at the fence junction, with discarded wooden stakes in a sink hole in front.

Follow on with the wandering wall to your left, with a modest path at this early stage. Pass several borrow pits from which the adjacent sturdy ridge-top wall was part-created. A distinct rise sees Little Daffenside underfoot with a small area of boulders on the north side. The ridge wall, as too any hint of a path, falters as an angular snaking fence takes over amid the peaty plateau morass.

The grassy top of Black Fell at 664m/2179ft, marked with an OS column, is a good point to pause and look back to the receding scarp profile of Cross Fell - the highest point on the Pennine chain at 893m/2930ft, which remarkably is only 6m/18ft lower than Great Gable.

The name Black Fell refers to the eastern shadowed aspect, while the western aspect is known as Daffenside, the high point the site of Daffenside Beacon in Kirkoswald parish. Rain draining due north flows into Croglin Water.

Ignore the adjacent stile, as this only gives access to the ridge linking to Watch Hill and the furthest extension Thack Moor above the village of Renwick. Continue north with the fence close left crossing a stile at a fence junction, and yet further eroding peat grough morass. At one point the hollow is sufficiently deep that the fence is double-height to accommodate the taut netting.

The next middle distance objective is the fence-junction at Tom Smith's Stone. Tucked close to the three-way fence-junction, this modest square stone boundary post is inscribed with initials on each of its four faces, presumably defining Victorian landownership: K, C, A, W.

Cross the stile in the fence - which leads NE along the branch ridge to culminate at an OS column on Grey Nag 656m/2152ft. The hill-name means 'the old grey mare'. Persist NW with the fence to the left. Directly after the next stile, turn immediately left and cross the facing stile putting you on the west side of the continuing fence, overlooking the secretive wild depths at the head of Croglin Water - with its age-old and famous vampire connections.

Duly a broken wall junction is met, find here the crumpled aluminium remains of a de Havilland Venom jet fighter which came to grief at this spot in March 1957. The engine appears to lie some 400m down to the west with further fuselage fragments in between.



One of several piles of aircraft wreckage

Continuing, with the wall to the right, to cross a ladder-stile in the wall corner. Maintain course now with a fence to the right. Cross the next fence-stile and follow on with the fence to the left - as opposed to the more direct, broken and extremely boggy line of the old wall. After the next fence-stile continue with the fence and wall to the left passing a cross-ridge bridleway, which is not evident on the ground, other than corresponding cairns (curricks) at Gillingbrigg Gate.

This can be considered as a natural break point from the ridge, as such one might travel west on the bridleway by Croglin Fell, (avoid being drawn onto the ridge-top), leading west along the northern slopes of the Croglin Water valley down to Croglin village as an effective means of halving the walk.

Continue northwards with marshy patches, and as the ridge begins to descend Butt Hill keep the broken wall to the right and fence close left, and cross a stile as the slope steepens leading into the valley bottom at the head of New Water.



The Bog from Butt Hill

To the right the valley is known rather uninvitingly as The Bog, this is the headwater of Gelt Burn (confusingly a tributary of Knar Burn and the South Tyne, not the River Gelt and the Eden). This valley situation, where Cumbria and Northumberland meet has a truly remote feel, a mountain corridor. The heather banks enlivening the scene in late summer.

A fence-stile is crossed in the valley bottom before mounting the steep bank on the north side of the depression, climbing onto Merelaw Hill (which means 'boundary mound hill'). Attention will be drawn to the solitary conifer tree over to the left. Continue with the fence close right through the heather with still no hint of a path to comfort your wearying strides.



Solitary conifer tree on Merelaw Hill

Rising towards Three Pikes, the high point of Knarsdale Common, the fence deflects the ridge walk from the actual top, though there is a fence-stile should you be so inclined to visit this rather featureless height.

You may query what the metal plates are on the fence, these are to warn grouse of the wires. You will find the odd bird skeleton close to the fence, the result of them flying haplessly into it.

Keeping the fence to the right with still nothing more than the occasional hint of a sheep trod for a path, to come upon Hornsby's House.



The ruined 'Hornsby's House'

Curiosity will cause you to pause here and ponder the origins and purpose of the low walls and alcove nook. The remnants hardly sufficient for a shepherd's cot, more likely a wind-shelter for grouse shooters taking a break during a day's sport. The name may reflect some connection with the hamlet of Hornsby, due west close above the Eden.

Cold Fell is barely visible along the horizon, the fence gives encouragement to persist north over West Dun Hill. The occasional track of a quad bike

comes underfoot beside the re-aligned fence and at an odd corner on Great Blacklaw Hill, Cold Fell is now more clearly in range, yet still some 3km away.

Over to the west the farmstead of Geltsdale House is visible, the first dwelling seen for many a mile. This is the home of farming tenant of this expansive moor.

A cairn is passed, a rare sight along the ridge. Yet more peat groughs hamper progress leading to a fence-stile from where the ground begins the steady final rise towards the most northerly summit of the Pennine chain, Cold Fell, a small pool leading to the tumulus 621m/2037ft.



The bleak summit of Cold Fell with its cairn, OS trig point and wind-shelter

An OS column sits between a formal beehive cairn and a rustic wind-shelter and upon the loose remnants of the Bronze Age burial monument, all resting upon a grassy peat pillow. The cairn is a memorial to young local climber.

Cross the fence-stile and bear right NE with the fence. At last an evident path underfoot gives certainty to the route as this guides left N over eroded peat, passing a corrugated iron shooting butt, a quad track leading west then north down the west slope of Tindale Fell to reach a hurdle-fence.

The path wends on down by a signboard proclaiming it to be the Bruthwaite Viewpoint, the high-point of modest adventurers from Howgill below. The path becomes a track leading down to the hamlet of Howgill, a former colliery terrace. Go through the gate and join the access track leading north signed Hallbankgate, pass Tortie Cottage, the adjacent hillock is known as Tortie, meaning 'tortoise-shaped'. The track crosses a cattle-grid to arrive at the Clesketts car park.

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North - South traverse, alternative route description

Route Information

Distance 20.5 kilometres (12.8 miles)

Ascent 685 metres (2250 feet)

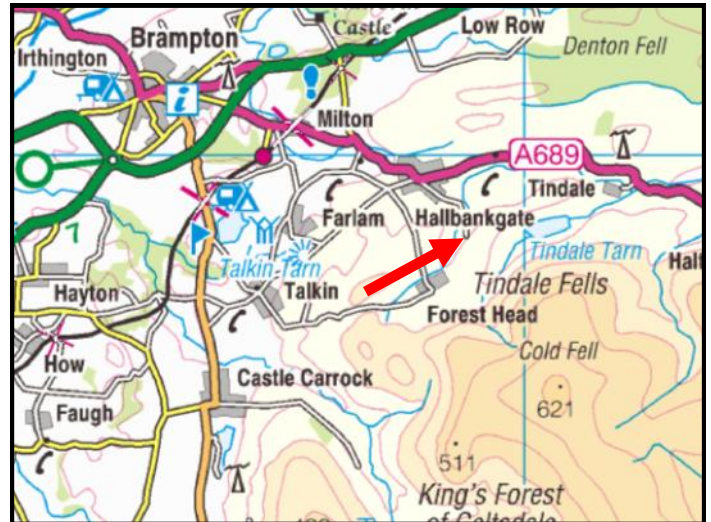
Time needed 9 hours (approx)

Start point

From Hallbankgate on the A689, branch off at the Belted Will pub following Crossgates Road via Park Terrace to reach the road-end car park beyond Clesketts, NY 589 585.

Public Transport

Hallbankgate is served by bus routes 94 & 97 (limited service)



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The more energetic southbound commitment, allow at least nine hours for the fullest enjoyment. The effort of an early start rewarded by the elimination of a tiresome descent at day's end.

Starting from Clesketts car park, cross the cattle-grid and follow the open track to the small hamlet of Howgill, an old colliery community associated with the Venture Drift Mine.

Go through the gate signed 'Woodend Bridge via Tarn' on the RSPB's Stagsike Trail. But almost at once veer right on the steep green track that ascends in harmony with Howgill Beck, bulldozed for when grouse shooting parties came this way (no more).

The green path ascends by the Bruthwaite Viewpoint board diminishing at a hurdle-gate by a ruin. Go through, noting the curious quartz rock rib up to the left, and follow the quad track which maintains a useful purpose as a guide especially through the peaty exposures leading to the fence rising to the ridge-top and a stile accessing the summit tumulus.

The summit is enigmatic, like neighbouring Tindale Fell. A huge pile of stones were gathered on the exalted crest several thousand years ago to mark a tribal ceremonial burial place, you stand in ancient exalted company.

The view is suitably awe-inspiring and extensive from the Cheviots to the north-east to Scafell Pike to the south-west, and keen eyes might also spot the glistening of sun on the windscreens of cars on Hartside Pass, our destination over 14km away due south.

Let the ridge proper commence, the fence a sure and steady companion for the entire journey, but you'll scratch your head to discern a path. This fact means a level of discomfort from irregular ankle movements is unavoidable. However, the moorland herbage is seldom rank and a steady pace can be maintained.



Typical North Pennines terrain, after leaving Cold Fell

The journey is largely uneventful for the first three kilometres, even the county boundary makes no

impression on the eyes, as Northumberland comes along the ridge fence to the east. However there is a fence-stile short of Great Blacklaw Hill to consider, and cross. The ridge fence has been re-aligned variously as it continues southwards over West Dun Hill.

Should circumstances require, just after the fence junction is a practical point for a considered escape off the remote ridge eastwards to join a shooters' track which leads down the Thinhope Burn valley to Knarsdale in the South Tyne valley.

But with firm intent, sticking to task, the ridge fence comes upon the remnants of a fold known as Hornby's House. With nothing more than the odd sheep track in the heather the fence leads on past Three Pikes, missing the actual crest but turning south-west to dip down a steep bank of Merelaw Hill into the valley at the head of New Water.

The left side of the fence (broken wall) is Northumberland and the marshy headwater of Knar Burn, unpropitiously known as The Bog. The valley has the air of a glacial channel, with little hint of gradient either way. A fence-stile is crossed in the midst of the valley from where ascend Butt Hill by a further stile now with a more convincing wall close left and fence right.



Active sphagnum near Gillingbrigg Gate

The wall dies as the marshy upper ridge is regained passing a galvanised gate in the fence, a spot known as Gillingbrigg Gate. Here a bridleway crosses the ridge east to west into the valley of Croglin Water, and provides another escape route to consider should need arise.

After the next stile, the ridge fence is a saving grace in mist never more so in the next marshy section, keeping on the east side to a fence-stile then a

ladder-stile over a wall. Just prior to crossing a dilapidated wall junction find the aluminium remains of a de Havilland Venom jet fighter that came to grief here in 1957.



View from the track above Howgill cottages

The ridge way arrives at a fence-stile where cross the ridge fence and almost at once a second fence-stile in the joining fence, now advancing to a fence-stile beside the boundary post at Tom Smith's Stone. The ridge now turns more certainly south, with considerable expanses of exposed peat and grough banks to negotiate en route to Black Fell, with one intermediate fence-stile.

The Ordnance Survey column may lack charm and the panorama lacks substance, even Cross Fell is now a somewhat distant subject of attention, but interestingly the situation was once a beacon site, Daffenside Beacon. But you will have cause to smile as henceforward there is a path underfoot and soon a strong wall for company passing over Little Daffenside.

Coming by a borrow pit (a source of walling stone) the wall snakes on to a stone-stile where the wall abruptly ends at the meeting point of two fences. This point is known as Hartside Height and shangri la is in view: the café at Hartside Pass beckons you on with the fence close left, avoiding one notable marshy patch to reach a kissing-gate onto the road summit, and our journey's end.

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