

The Pennine Way - South (Edale to Bowes)

The Pennine Way was England's first official national trail, crossing three national parks along its 268 miles (430 km). Starting from Edale in the south, the Pennine Way climbs through the Peak District, continues through the south Pennines to the Yorkshire Dales, the north Pennines and then to the Northumberland national park, ending at Kirk Yetholm.



Pennine Way improvised marking engraved on a rock

The Pennine Way has become one of the “must do” trails for any long distance walker or thru-hiker in the UK with its combination of wild and remote sections, picturesque villages and endless moors. As a must do trail I had no doubt I would want to walk it too, and I chose to hike it in sections through the autumn and winter of 2015-2016, walking over the weekend or on short holidays.

1st weekend – Fast Hiking From Edale to Hebden Bridge

My first section of the Pennine was on an exceptionally warm November weekend, starting from Edale, wild camping near Wessenden Reservoir and finishing at Hebden Bridge. The main feature on this part is the Peak District national park which I have visited many times, including on a very wintery weekend. The good weather on this weekend meant that I had many fellow walkers to meet and share parts of the walk with. It also meant I could practice some [ultralight fast-backpacking](#).



Practising [Ultralight Backpacking](#) on the Pennine Way

Day 1 – Edale train station to Wessenden Reservoir (39.2km)



The official start of the Pennine Way

The train ride to Edale is very simple, being served on a very active train line between [Sheffield and Manchester](#). The station is small, simple and devoid of any amenities. From the station you need to go into Edale, walk down and turn left – passing under the bridge if coming from Sheffield. The walk to the actual start of the Pennine is a 500 meters (ish) walk north on the road. As you get to Edale's town centre, look for the turn past the small store and across from the pub, it will be a small gate to your left.

The trail from here all the way to Kinder Scout is easily recognizable and mostly well signed; the only problem is other trails crossing the Pennine Way and might be a distraction. The trail contours Grindslow Knoll to Upper Booth for 2 km on a clear grassy path that can be very muddy if wet. Through a few gates and around the houses, the trail starts climbing on a paved road that narrows into a 4×4 road and then a wide trail for 2 km until reaching Jacob's ladder. Take the right at the fork and lumber up the stairs, remembering to look back at the views; I found them stunning on that sunny morning.

From here I climbed into a cloud that morning, remembering to turn right (north) after 500 meters and climbing the final section to the top of the Kinder Scout peak. From here the trail follows the western edge of Kinder Scout for 2 km until reaching Kinder Downfall and then turning north west for another 2 km until descending to Mill Hill. The good weather meant the trails were busy with many walkers, charity groups and families, not all well prepared for the coming changing weather conditions! The trail is rocky and muddy at times and can be a real hazard in very wet or frozen conditions.



From Mill Hill the weather turned hot and windy – perfect for some thru-hiking and I turned north east at Mill Hill to trace the Pennine Way on what becomes a slab paved trail. Make sure not to mistakenly take the turn North West on to the Snake Path 150 meters before Mill Hill.



Looking at Kinder Scout from Mill Hill

From Mill Hill it is a 4 km tip tap on the big slabs all the way to the A57 through the bog. Amazing views on a clear day but can be very dreary if the fog settles. Crossing the A57 carefully, continue north while crossing an old Roman way where the trail slowly turns narrower and less clear. Near Hern Clough the trail might be harder to follow and a keener eye should be kept, especially in bad weather. After a short water refill break I continued on the trail for another one km to reach Bleaklow Head – another “peak” that is marked by a small mountain of stones.

Leaving Bleaklow, the trail is a bit muddy and might be very boggy if wet but it is easily marked as I was descending to Grouse Butt via Far Moss. This is the last point to source water from the stream for another 10km or so (unless using human facilities such as people’s kindness or the camp site at Crowden). From Grouse there is a bit of a tricky up and down that might be a little dangerous if wet, but is picked up easily after that while staying on the edge of the ridge. Down to road B6105 after turning left at the Reaps farm, cross the road straight ahead after crossing the Pennine Journey way.



Organized trail section of the Pennine Way

Follow the signs to the Torside Reservoir dam and continue straight up the semi hidden stairs up ahead – I found them bursting with black berries for a quick and refreshing snack. Turn left into this small jam of a wooded section, cross the A628 and join a slightly less nice secondary road for about 600 meters. Keep an eye for the turn left off the road to a grassy path for the ascent to Laddow Moss. 200 meters down the road is the Crowden campsite that has cabins, grassy patches, water and a small store.

Taking the Pennine Way from the road onto an endless meadow of ferns, in the afternoon heat it was swarming with flies so I just moved on, following the clear path the overlooks Crowden Brook on the way to Oaken Clough. The climb is not hard, nor steep nor long, but it was hot and I could feel the heat. Reaching the top of the ridge, the wind picked up, drying my sweat as I picked the narrow path heading north along the eastern edge of Laddow Moss and Blackchew Head.



The climb up to Laddow Moss

Descending down to Crowden Great Brook, the trail makes a slow climb up to Black Hill (the highest point of the day at 582m!) in a patchwork of boggy trail and slab surfaced sections. At this point the day started cooling down and the wind picked up, forcing me to start layering up. After a little “pick me up” digestive at Black Hill, the trail descends onto a wide path until joining an unnaturally straight section heading straight (I do mean straight) to the A635.



At the A635 the trail splits to either going straight on a path I couldn't find or heading up Wessenden Head Road for 200 meters and then turning left on a gravel road. Passing Wessenden Head Reservoir, I met a local cyclist and asked for advice about a nice local spot for a wild camp with accessible water and after some discussion concluded that the best place will be Leyzing Clough, on the wide path above the Pennine Way trail that was used to lay electric lines.

I set camp at 19:30 in the dying light and enjoyed a glorious sunset, basic dinner and a good sleep after more than 40km – bliss.



Blissful camp near Wessenden Reservoir

Day 2 – Wessenden Reservoir to Hebden Bridge train station (30km)

After a quiet and peaceful night, I woke up to a humid morning. Quickly packing up while sipping coffee and eating biscuits, I was quickly down the 5 meters to the trail. Here, the Pennine Way is a clear 4x4 trail leading to Wessenden Reservoir and Lodge, until it eventually turns left (south-west) 300 meters after the reservoir.



Wessenden Reservoir in the morning mist

Descending on a steep trail into Wessenden Brook and the remains of old coal moving canals, the trail immediately climbs back up to Black Moss, following Blakely Clough and the remains of an old building. On the moor the trail becomes boggy and muddy, at times it is back to tapping on slabs, until it reaches Black Moss Reservoir. At this point I was back in a wet fog, giving the moor an eerie feel of “the end of the world”. Flanking the reservoir from the east, I continued down the Moor towards a meeting point with Standedge Trail. Turning left at the trail intersection just above Redbrook Reservoir leads to a short walk to meet the A62.



Black Moss Reservoir

At the parking lot, cross the road and join wide 4×4 that is shared with the Pennine Bridleway. This short section is not particularly nice, with litter, dirt roads and deserted quarries around. Quickly passing this section, leave the Pennine Bridleway after 50 meters and climb to Standenge to a nice path on the edge of the ridge. This rocky and slippery section joins Oldham Way on Northern Rotcher. Leaving the ridge the trail heads north east on a boggy section that ends up in a small climb to Little Moss and then descends to the A640 and a small parking place.

A quick cross and it is a straightforward climb to White hill and down to the crossing of the A672 and the M62. The trail here is nice and clear, well marked but very wet. After meeting a couple of fellow walkers, I resorted to some foot maintenance after so much time in wet shoes and socks. Reaching White Hill (another pile of rocks that describes a “peak”), the weather cleared a little and the sun came out to join the light wind, making for the perfect hiking weather. Despite the good weather the trail turned into the mess that comes with being very accessible – muddy path leading to a filthy parking place next to the A672 that was very littered.



Where the Pennine Way leaves the Pennine Bridleway after a short ugly section

Passing the parking place it is another uninviting section that makes the 500 meters to the foot bridge over the M62, with its huge cell phone tower. After passing the bridge over the M62, the Pennine Way is back to wild moors: Black Moor and then to White Isles (great names!), the trails winds through them for a couple km until reaching the impressive rock formation around Blackstone Edge. A short walk past the potentially slippery rocks and it is en route to join Blackstone Edge Moor; here you can stay on the wider trail that contours west of the moor or just head straight north to reach the pub the A58 ([The White House Pub](#)). The area is a disused quarry and many of the original parts are around, including the canals that were used to move the stones down to the canal systems and off to the bigger cities.

From The A58 it is a simple matter of heading up to the Reservoir wall (Blackstone Reservoir) and turning left off the road, heading north west. The Pennine Way turns into a wide and easy 4x4 road that is perfect for some fast walking, enjoying the view over the reservoirs (3 of them). When I was passing on a Sunday afternoon, it was busy with families as the wind was picking up. After Warland Reservoir, continue on to the Warland Drain for about a km until leaving it and head north on a slab made trail. Winding up to Coldwell Hill, the wind was picking up, making the walk challenging to the thighs and core muscles.



Many reservoirs are along the way, creating a great atmosphere on the moors

From here it is straight to the impressive Stoodley Pike Monument while looking over on the busy life around the Rochdale Canal. After admiring the monument I walked slowly (I got some nasty blisters from my new boots) down the hill due east to Swillington and then to Hebden Bridge. This area is a mix of farms, walled fields and roads, so finding the trail might be tricky, but signs are around. After passing a couple of fields, I left the Pennine Way just out of Hebden Bridge and made my way into this surprising little town. The walk was a little windy but I made my way to the high street that proved to be bustling, vibrant and full of energy – just in time to buy a great and fresh sandwich for lunch. After just over 30km it was time to catch the train and begin the long way back to London.



Stoodley Pike Monument

Concluding the first section

The wild and beautiful Peak district should be visited many times, but the Pennine Way manages to catch some of the highlights of the northern part of the National Park. The south Pennines are a mixture of vast and quiet moors with the constant presence of the many reservoirs that have been watering the area. Seeing the reservoirs in their wild locations is really amazing, and the sections of solitude in this walk really do give a sense of remoteness, even if it is just for 3-4km.

2nd weekend – Chasing Abigail from Hebden-Bridge to Thornton-In-Craven

My second section experience of the Pennine Way happened as a by product of high train prices: I booked train tickets a month in advance to try and save money, but ended going at the worst possible time. I left a sick child at home with a pregnant wife just to go walking during the tail of the second of the big storms that have been attacking the British Isles lately: Abigail. I spent a weekend on soaking wet trails (who am I kidding? the trail was a river!) with repeated calls home to keep my wife's spirits up and my child entertained. I had a wet night in gales that were high – as high as 60 mph – with my tent spending a big part of the night so sideways it felt like it was hugging me.



Night camp on Thornton Hill in gale force winds

I did end up walking a nice section that combines some very wild moors, farmland and small villages. The weather held me back from making much progress and covering my usual 20+ miles a day. Another big factor was the shorter days – light from 8:00 to 16:00 only gives me 8 hours of walking, if I assume packing up and setting camp in the dark, which is not ideal. I could see how the area could be amazing if the weather were to be kind, but alas, it wasn't and I still had a good time!



Day 1 – Hebden Bridge train station to Thornton Hill (21.3km)

When I arrived in Hebden Bridge, the roads were wet from the recent rains, with a heavy grey sky and a promise for more rain. I left the station and headed back to the town centre, crossing the bridges over River Calder and the Rochdale Canal, onto New Road. This is a steep climb on a paved road and I quickly took my waterproof jacket off as it was really hot. Just as the road flattens there is turn right off the road onto a small trail through a little gate. The trail contours Horsehold and walks into Horsehold wood. That morning the wood was very boggy, muddy, slippery and wet, with a couple of water crossings that are probably usually nothing but a trickle of water. The sun came out a few times and the walk was stunning, despite the perils.



Horsehold wood outside of Hebden Bridge – slippery but pretty

As the trail meets the canal, you can either go down a steep trail to the lock and cross here onto the canal trail heading west, or continue in the woods until meeting the small road that crosses the canal over a bridge. From here it is a straight walk to the main road (A646, Helifax Road), crossing it and taking a right due east. After 20 meters turn left into the group of houses and go straight ahead under the rail tracks to climb the steep and narrow stone stairs.



The steep steps going up to Dove Scout farm

Continue climbing up along the cottages that cling to the hill's slope following the signs, until reaching the cemetery. Walk around the little cemetery (but not through the gate!) to find a small path going up and due north west. At Dove Scout farm, as you reach a T crossing at the top of the hill, take a right towards the small paved road and then right again, and you will find the Pennine Way signs again. Follow the clear trail signs as it continues deeper into the agricultural landscape, crossing grazing fields, remembering to close the gates behind you. At this point the wind picked up again with a vengeance, giving my lightly running nose an extra workout.

After a km or so the trail dips into the Colden Water and crosses over a small bridge, climbing back up to some more grazing fields. About a half km further, as you cross Edge Lane road, we finally reach the first moor. This is Standing Stone Hill (395m above sea level), and it is a truly windy and bleak South Pennine moor. With the tail of Abigail still present it was really boggy, turning the flagstone sections into pools and rivers.



Getting into the first moor with very boggy path ahead

After a couple of kms wild moors, the trail joins a 4x4 road heading due north near Gorple Lower Reservoir and the nearby Gorple Cottages. Pass around the cottages and head down to Graining Water on a short and slippery descent. The little stream had swelled dramatically when I was there, to disguise itself as a small river. Cross over two bridges and climb up the eastern slope onto the ridge, joining a paved road soon after the small farm. There is an opening from the field to the road, but I couldn't find it so found myself climbing over the wall to join the road. Walk down to the small parking spot and turn right to join another road towards Walshaw Dean Reservoirs.



Wet trudge towards Walshaw Dean Reservoirs

The walk is pretty straight forward here as the paved road is clearly signed and newly paved, but the now-increasing rain got me settled into a slightly depressing, very wet walk. Huddled in my jacket with wet legs up to my underwear, I met several trail runners heading home for hot showers, coffees and plates of food. After a km I turned right off the road, walking on the south dam of Walshaw Dean Lower Reservoir to its eastern shore. From here it is a km of wading through tall grass (now my trousers were even wetter!) until leaving the reservoirs due north east.

The foot path leaving the 4x4 road is clearly marked and climbs onto another moor. The walk through Withins Highet was a repeat of the previous moor, but the relentless rain caused an increase of water levels on the trail. A slushy walk up to the Moor leads to the “Top Withens” farmhouse, which is beautifully located overlooking the South Dean Beck. Taking the route to the left (follow the signs), the Pennine Way continues on the ridge, and the unrelenting rain was causing a real drop in my morale. I was not even half way to the distance goal I gave myself and the low clouds were making the day darker than it should have been.



Approaching “Top Withens” farmhouse – a deserted building that can be used as a refuge

I continued down the ridge onto a farm road at The Height, staying on paved roads and following the signs, greeting brave dog owners that were out for a walk. The wind was picking up now even more, sending everyone indoors, leaving the flooded roads all to me. Past Buckley Farm I reached Pondley Reservoir, turned left and then right at the dam on the western edge, climbing a short section on broken asphalt. Rounding Ponden Hall and the all-too-tempting Ponden Guest House, I continued on a domestic paved road down the hill to New Laith road at the edge of the reservoir.

From the road take the right (following the sign) up the hill following Dean Clough until meeting Dean Edge Road. It was getting darker now and I was starting to get a bit desperate to find a place for the night before it got truly dark. The rain decided to take a short break, allowing me to reach Crag Top and decide to push a bit further and higher onto Thornton Hill. 200 meters up the hill I found a junction of walls that blocked some of the wind with enough flat space and relatively drained patches of land. I pitched my tent at 16:00 as the day was growing deep cobalt around me.



Tent pitched in between high grass and in very boggy ground

I quickly made a few attempt to communicate with home and set all I needed for the night to limit my time out of the tent. The wind and the rain returned with a vengeance, at times flattening the tent with some gales. I managed to get in touch with home, somehow cook dinner and even try my new Pat's Backcountry beer kit (I had a pale ale with my dinner) and mostly just stayed in my sleeping bag, trying to stay dry. The night was wet, windy and very unpleasant, but I managed to get some sleep in between wind gusts and my imagination....

Day 2 – Thornton Hill to Thornton-In-Craven (17.6km)

I woke up to a damp and foggy morning that was very far from sunrise (that would come at 8:00). I made coffee while in my sleeping bag and started to assess how wet my gear was – it was all soaked. The condensation and the constant shaking of the tent caused a feeling of rain indoors, even though it was not as wet as outside. After my coffee and some cookies I made a hasty camp break, just before the rain started again, and I started walking. I very quickly got even wetter as I followed the Pennine Way as it went north along a wall through long grass. The trail itself turned into a stream and many parts were knee deep.



Luckily there are parts of the Pennine Way are paved.....

From Old Bass to Cat Stone Hill the trail turned into a fully flowing river, with more streams flowing into it. Many times I had to walk around the trail as the water was deeper than I was willing to sink my poles into (deeper than 1 meter). I eventually made it to Grouse Butt and then to the stalking huts near High End Lowe. By 10:00 I had covered just over 4 km and I was already drained and tired. I found shelter in the front porch of one of the stalking huts and made coffee, had some food and made some calls – I was ready to call it the day. The extremely wet conditions and the battering wind got to me, which is very rare, and I decided to cut the trip short.



Much needed food, coffee and shelter – at last a break from the rain and wind!

After some food and coffee, I continued down the trail in the moor, turning left (west) to Eller Hill. At this point the trail became a full river, especially at the spill point of the small waterfall, making the walk down to Lower Summer House farm very challenging. From the farm it is a straight forward, marked walk down to the western edge of Cowling (Ickornshaw?) with a quick cross over an old bridge. Turn left after the bridge and follow the signs through the farming lanes.

Just past Gill Top farm (when you are on a paved road that is framed by walls), turn left with the road and into the field straight ahead. Don't be tempted to walk to the stream ahead but head a bit to the right (north west) to the meeting point of 3 streams – this is the crossing. Get to the bottom of the hill and head to a slightly angled metal gate and pass through into the grazing field. From here follow the signs as you get into and out of sheep grazing fields.



The approach to Gill Top farm

The fog had settled again but the rain ceased, tempting me to continue walking. Passing the farmland and getting to Lothersdale, I told myself that if the pub was open I would stop there and after a couple of pints, catch a train home. When I arrived to Lothersdale, I found the village completely deserted but for a few passing cars, and the pub shut despite it being lunch time. Alas, I decided that the closed pub and the fact that the rain stopped were good enough signs for me to continue my walk, so I did.



A very familiar sight on the South Pennines – crossing sheep grazing fields along the wall, again....

From just past the pub (on the main road in Lothersdale), the trail joins a new farm road that leads north but leaves it after 100 meters to start climbing through some more farm land. After less than a km the trail crosses White Hill Lane and heads north west to enter Elslack Moorvia, the Kirk Skyes farm road. Pass the gate and angle around the wall to get some open and wild space again. The trail was again deep in water and to prove my stupidity of choosing to continue walking, the rain and wind returned with as much force as ever. I was heading west now towards Thornton Moor and the wind and rain were blowing head-on.



Pinhaw Beacon up ahead, just need to press through the wind and rain

I huddled into my hood the best I could and pressed on to get out of the strong wind. The trail was clear and as I passed Pinhaw Beacon, it got slightly better. I joined the wide trail heading west and onto the paved Clogger Lane. After 500 m the trail leaves the lane and follows a wall that, in good weather, would have been amazing, but in the conditions I faced was soggy and depressing. Shortly the trail enters a grazing field and you need to head to the wall and the broken gate. After that just head to the stream and the Spring Barn house ahead. This is a dairy farm and there many cows around, most of them curious, which also means muddy, dung infested walk into the farm. The area around the farm is badly maintained and the farm itself is very much a working farm – a true eyesore.



Leaving Clogger Lane onto a very wet and very boggy trail to Thornton-in-Craven

Past the Brown House farm it is a nice walk on a paved round under a bridge and into Thornton-in-Craven. As I reached the valley I found that the whole valley was fully flooded with fields upon fields under water – I just thought it was a lake when walking down until I checked the map! Thornton doesn't offer much and on Sunday afternoon it had even less. I could have headed to one of two pubs, one a couple of miles to the east and one a couple of miles to the west, but I found a bus station with only 25 minutes wait till the next bus to Skipton, so that was my choice.



Concluding the second section

This part of the Pennine Way is pretty easy and straight forward in terms of walking conditions and navigation; it might even possible to tackle in one day if the conditions are right. I remember walking part of the southern Pennines in the past and I really enjoyed it, having more an air of a country walk than crossing wild Dales. The occasional Moor and fells crossing are easy to find and short to walk, but very beautiful and wild.

An extra note about the flooding: it took me 6 hours to get from Skipton to Leeds to catch a train south, a ride that usually takes 50 minutes in total. The flooding stopped all trains to Leeds from the west and north. If you are planning a trip in similar conditions, make sure to plan for more travel time.

3rd weekend (3 days) – Weather Roller Coaster from Gargrave to Bowes

The third section of my trip was planned to be a proper winter trip: 3 days over the Christmas holiday when the Yorkshire Dales are white and frosty, letting me test and play in winter conditions; sadly, that didn't happen. Instead, the weather decided to give me some of everything: a sunny afternoon along the River Aire that turned into gale force winds at night, to constant rain and even snow on Great Shunner Fell – I got it all during this trip.



The Yorkshire Dales 3 peaks during a rare break in the clouds

I specifically planned for a 3 day trip to allow me to walk the whole length of the Yorkshire Dales Pennine Way section in one go, allowing for a full immersion in the national park and enabling a simpler travel by public transportation. The walk itself is indeed stunning, passing many fells, some over 700m, giving stunning views in the changing sky conditions.

The missing link – Thornton-In-Craven to Gargrave (5km)

If you read my previous accounts of my Pennine Way walk, you know that last time I stopped at Thornton-In-Craven, so that is where I planned on continuing from. On the first day of this trip I arrived to Skipton in order to take the first bus to Thornton (at 10:24), but after 11:00 had passed in the bus station and none of the drivers knew where the bus was, I decided that considering the short days, I needed get on the trail, so I caught the first bus that headed towards the trail – the 580 bus from Skipton to Gargrave.

In reality, it meant not walking a 5km section between Thornton and Gargrave that is mainly [very wet] grazing fields.

Day 1 – Gargrave to Malham Tarn (17.3km)

My adventure started before I even got off bus number 580 at the Gargrave village centre as we forded several flooded road sections, not knowing if the bus will make it. In Gargrave I erred on the cautious side and got off near the post office (too early) and found myself walking to the start of the trail near the Church Street Bridge (the right place!).



The Pennine Way sign in Gargrave

I picked up the Pennine Way on the main junction in Gargrave where the A65 meets Church Street, where a delightful sign can be found telling me I have covered 70 miles of the Pennine Way and have 186 more miles to go – easy! I headed north around the little tearooms and followed the sleepy West Street (signs provided). Pass the bridge and on to, where I could see the promise of wet ground: the fields all around were soaked. Passing Gargrave House, the road turns into a dirt road, following a small plantation for 200 meters on the right. Right at the end of the plantation, the Pennine Way leaves the road to the right.



Mark House Lane

From here I negotiated an uphill climb through grazing fields and then crossed fields for about 2.5km, hoping to keep the right path for the gate opening on the other side. The ground was very wet and slippery, but the weather was superb with a warm sun and a cold wind – perfect hiking weather.

After some guess work around Haw crag about which opening to take (the one straight north in the little gully ahead), I reached the small curve in the road (follow the signs around it) and down to a little footpath bridge. The flooding damage was very visible all around and I picked the trail following River Aire north. Quickly the trail started to disappear into deep

puddles, knee deep gate passes and river spills – it was clear to see that this whole area has been under water lately.



Wet and muddy fields underfoot

The day stayed nice and sunny and the trail continued following River Aire all the way to Malham, some 5km, passing via Ariton and Hanlith on a pretty clear and well-marked path. I met a couple of elderly gentlemen who were out for a walk from Gargrave to Malham and back and we chatted a bit about my route and their past experience with it (they are locals and have walked it many times), reaching to Hanlith together. In Hanlith there is a slight diversion from the river, turning right at the road past the farm and climbing up the hill. Continue following the road, turning left with the bend and just as the road turns again you will find the trail leaving the road to your left.



River Aire after the latest floods

As I approached Malham I learned two things: the trail leading to the village was one big puddle that turn into paved paths, and that Malham is very, very popular on sunny days! The area was very busy with families and groups going up to Malham cove and some even

heading to Malham tarn! I walked into the village centre, heading to the second fork, left to the bridge over Malham Beck and just followed the many people coming back from the cove. The trail leaves the road but remains a very good trail.



The many people on the trail to Malham Cove – the weather was nice!

The weather was turning cooler and windier and the sun was getting lower as I reached the climb up to the west (on the left) of Malham cove. A good strenuous climb, I was up there in 15 minutes, trying not to step on people and seeking my route away from the crowds. The skies were still hazy so I didn't have great views from the top of the cove. I continued on the lip of the cove heading east until I found the sign pointing north to Malham tarn. I picked the clear path and the signs all the way to the Malham tarn car park, just under 2 km away. The temperatures had dropped around the tarn, with the wind-chill increasing rapidly, driving less insane people into their cars and to warm places.



The walk around the tarn was boggy at first but you quickly pick up a dirt road heading to the north shore of the tarn. The views were amazing and the thin woods gave an eerie feeling in the fading light. I continued walking past the field centre on the north shore (woohoo – toilets!) and started looking for a place to camp. I reached Water Houses without having found a suitable place, so I left the road with the Pennine Way and headed north into the fields, hoping to find a semi-shelter for a night that was due to be windy and wet.

I found a nice spot near a low wall just past the houses on the slope of a small crest overlooking Far Fell, which I would be walking in the morning. I set up my Trailstar, that I brought back from retirement, despite the early time – it was only 15:00 with more than an hour of light, but I knew that if I continued it would mean camping on the fell, something I was avoiding in the bad weather. Instead, I walked all around, climbing the hills all around my camp seeking views and some cell phone reception to let my wife know that I was fine – I was not successful. When the sun went down I went into my tent for a long evening of reading in my sleeping bag, making tea, dinner, more tea and eventually sleep.



Night camp near Water Houses

Day 2 – Malham Tarn to Bluebell Hill [Harddraw] (43.3km)

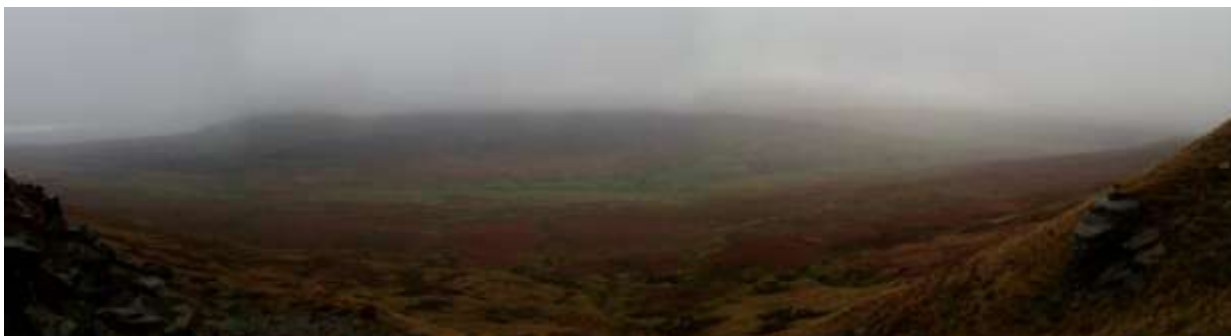
After a wild night (though I was comfortable in my sleeping bag), I got up early to get as much walking done as I could. I started walking at 7:30 as the night was turning into a deep blue of early morning, joining the Pennine Way at the bottom of the crest and heading north. Following the signs, the trail goes through 2 km of grazing fields which were mainly blurs of green in the early morning light until reaching the road and then onto the approach road (the left gate) to Tennant Gill. Follow the dirt road and turn left when on the first split, taking you around the farm and then between the milking pen (on the right) and hay bale storage (on the left); head straight up the hill ahead.



Early start on the Pennine Way

Up the hill I entered Middle Fell on what had turned out to be a dry and cold morning; the views were stunning, but the strong wind ruined any attempt for decent pictures, making them all a blur as I tried to stand straight and stable! The trail is pretty clear here though boggy at times, heading North West and then turning north towards Grouse Butts. About one km later the trail veers North West again towards a disused quarry where open shafts are dotting the fell (keep to the trail!). At this time the wind picked up again, bringing rain with it to make the already demanding fell even more demanding. I started the descent to Blishmire close on an extremely slippery slope – a grassy, wet and muddy slope that threatened to send my feet away from me with every step. I also finally managed to make contact with my wife as this area has some cell reception.

The road at Blishmire close is reached through the very wet and boggy final stretch of the trail, then it is a turn left (south west) and a km of road walking until leaving the road again next to Dale Head (and the dramatic farm there) on route to climb Pen-y-Ghent. Last time I was here, in March (2015), it was snowy, frozen and the climb was a tad too scary, but this time the rain had stopped and the clouds lifted a bit – I was ready for a nice climb.



Looking onto Pen-y-Ghent hiding under the clouds

Follow the well-marked and signed trail to Pen-y-Ghent, turning right at Churn Milk Hole, climbing up to the wall and heading straight north to the top. The climb to Pen-y-Ghent can be a bit scary as it does require some hand work to support the climb in a couple of spots, and as I got higher the wind started to really pick up, pushing on to the rocks a few times in a less than friendly manner. Luckily the wind was behind me and wasn't aiming to through me off, but rather assertively sending me up to the top. At the top I couldn't even stand straight, bent over by the wind, so I just stumbled to the trig point and found some refuge behind the wall at the top.



The view off Pen-y-Ghent as the wind howling over

Climbing the wall at the top towards Horton-in-Ribblesdale, it was a knee crunching descent but a nice one nonetheless. 10 minutes into my walk down, a strong wind brought in heavy sideways rain that soaked me to my undergarments within minutes. From this point on I was focused solely on reaching Horton and the cafe I remembered was down there. It was a long walk (only 3 km, but it felt endless) down the hill before joining the Pennine Journey at the bottom of the hill on a wide and comfortable 4x4 road. By the time I reached Horton-in-Ribblesdale, the rain was nothing but a light drizzle and I was wet and cold in many places.



The Pennine Way meeting the Pennine Journey

Into to the small woodland and past a few houses, the Pennine Way reaches a road (B6479) where you need to turn right, heading north. Up ahead there are (in order) a cafe on the left, a parking lot with a pay phone and public toilets (no water filling facilities) and then a pub where the trail leaves the road again. I had a 30 minute break in the cafe enjoying a hot coffee and homemade chocolate cake; both were good and much needed for energy and morale. Leaving the cafe, head to the Crown hotel (the pub) and turn right just in front of it before the road bridge – the gate and the trail are right ahead.



The cafe in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, saving my cold and wet limbs

At this point I realised that my goal of passing Hawes was more than 24km away and I had just over 3 hours of light left – it was time to move it, and move it fast. Luckily just out of Horton the trail is mostly clear, well-marked and easy to follow, so I started picking up the pace. Three kms of a 4x4 dirt road contouring around the western edge of Horton Moor leads to a fork in the road near Birkwith Moor (signs are easily visible) and after turning left on the fork and walking 600m, the Pennine Way joins the Pennine Bridleway near Old-Ing farm. Turning right with the Pennine Bridleway, the trail is now a clear wide dirt road that allows for great views all around. The sky cleared for a while and I could move to “auto-walk”: a fast 6 km/h pace while looking all around me, forgetting that my legs and feet were working hard.



Joining the Pennine Bridleway for some [speed hiking](#)

Passing the newly recovered Gill Rigg restored forest gorge, I got a glimpse of what this area might look like if it was reforested – what a sight that would be! Another 1.5 km and the Pennine Way joins another trail at Cam End: the Dales Way. From here I had perfect views of the Yorkshire Three Peaks (that have a much better maintained trail than the Pennine Way!) as the sun was getting lower and the clouds higher. Taking right towards Cam fell, the road was being worked on to become a pressed gravel road and I continued on, climbing higher and looking east at Cam Woodlands. The wind was picking up again but the walk was good and brisk.



Gill Rigg and the promise for restored woodland in the Yorkshire Dales

At the fork above the old quarry, the Dales Way go right while the Pennine Way continues left and higher up the fell. About a km further on, as the views to the east fully open up, the trail abruptly becomes a smooth black tarmac road, beautifully made – if only I had my road bike! Just past the gate where we say goodbye to the Pennine Bridleway, the Pennine Way

leaves the road at a very clear and lonely sign near the road. I left the tarmac as the drizzle returned.



Unexpected tarmac on the Pennine Way

From the tarmac the trail is an easy, simple affair: a wide path along the north western contour of Dodd Fell, looking over Snaizholme Valley on a glorious late afternoon. Just before Ten End, the trail leaves the 4×4 road and veers to the north east towards Gayle and Hawes. The rain had stopped but it was getting darker, the clouds were back and the world was becoming full of long shadows. At the bottom of Ten End the trail disappears a bit into the bog – keep close to the crest and veer around the bog heading east, the trail will be on the other side.



A slippery descent to Gayle

The rest of my descent to Gayle was wet and slippery, as trails tend to be closer to settled areas. I walked and slipped and then walked and slipped some more until picking up Gaudy Lane just past Gaudy house. From here it is all about streets and houses. The darkness was

rapidly falling and by the time I reached Gayle it was completely dark. The Pennine Way cuts through several meadows through Gayle and Hawes for a more direct route, but those sections were dark, wet and very uninviting. I decided to walk all the way to Hardraw on the roads, making the walk not really exciting, but in pitch black I didn't care about much but reaching my camp and retiring for the night.

Gayle is a sleepy little suburban-style village mixed with a few farms, but Hawes is a little busier, sitting on the A684. I walked down to the main junction that leads from Hawes to Gayle and then turned right into town to find many pubs, shops, chippies and more. The area was very busy with locals and tourists, who I later found out come from the Hawes Campervan Park down the road. Passed the bridge over Gayle Beck and turned left to Burnt Acres Road, quickly passing a few bends in the road and reaching the camping site that had a big sign: "no tents," so they wouldn't be getting my money.



The bustling downtown of Hawes

I stopped for a much needed conversation with my wife and daughter, exchanging experiences from the last couple of days and after that I went to the kitchen area in the camping site and got 4 litres of water for the night. Another few wet and windy (the rain was back) kms of climbing to the junction towards Hardraw and then passing Hardraw and the very inviting Green Dragon Pub, I continued a bit further on to the point where the Pennine Way turns right off the road and starts climbing up the hill.

I wish I could tell you more about the walk up to Bluebell Hill and how I walked to the edge of the fell and back a bit to find a place to camp near the trail; tell you about the rabbits and pheasants I spooked in my night walk or how the trail is surrounded by a protective wall, but I could see barely any of it – it was too dark.



Settling down for the night on Bluebell Hill

In a much needed break in the rain I set up my camp, stripped out of my wet clothes and dove into my sleeping bag to have dinner, listen to the wind and rain, read and then sleep – a long and satisfying day.

Day 3 – Bluebell Hill [Hardraw] to Bowes (39.6km)

My last day on this trip was a direct extension of the night: cold, windy and wet. The rain continued, mostly a drizzle but getting stronger at times, making the idea of leaving the sleeping bag very, very unappealing. Nonetheless, I got up at 6:30, slowly made my way out of the bag, into wet clothes, had a quick coffee and cookies and I was again walking with the first rays of the sun by 7:30.



First sun on the Pennine Way, just outside of Hardraw

Climbing up to Great Shunner Fell was a true battle with the elements – when I left my camp it was drizzly and windy, turning into very strong winds and drizzly, then heavy rain with gales, hail and eventually snow at the summit; I was not prepared for such conditions! After leaving my camp site it was a short walk to the point where the fell began and civilization ended, and crossing the small wall I was ready for a good climb.



The start of the climb to Great Shunner Fell

The trail is wide and clear, well-marked all the way up to Hearne Top, then past the gate and onto Black Hill Mos. From here the walk is less steep but the weather was closing in again, bringing freezing winds and cold rain to make sure I climbed quickly. It was a long and wet slog through bog, mud, puddles and flagstones, trying to move fast to warm up and get out of the horrible conditions that were forming around me. The trail, luckily, is very clear and well signed, and even in the worsening conditions I didn't need to pull out my map or GPS, just keep on going up and up. After 4.5km and more than an hour of walking, I reached the top and was pushed forward by the strong wind; I decided to take the hint and make a hasty retreat to lower, less cold and more protected grounds in the valley ahead.



Quickly deteriorating weather on Great Shunner Fell – snow dusting

The walk down from Great Shunner Fell was tricky as water, slushy ice and snow were covering the trail and the wind was pushing me forward. I took my time to make sure I walked carefully to avoid slipping and injuring myself from hitting the flagstones. Slowly, as I moved away from and below the 716m peak, the rain mostly stopped and the wind stayed though it helped to dry my trousers, which were soaked. I still had no sensation in my hands and feet but the rest of my body was starting to warm up.



Descending to Great Shunner Fell

Here, too, the trail is clear with flagstones at times or bogs at others, but the heavy rain made most of the way down into a stream – cold and rapid, which at times veered away just to recollect 10 meters ahead. I made the 3km steep descent quickly, while enjoying beautiful views over to Green Side as the clouds were breaking. Eventually the trail joins a 4x4 road made of loose cobble stones (very slippery!) and the final descent into Thwaite was imminent as I became surrounded by stone agricultural structures. At the road I turned right and followed the signs to the hamlets centre where I found the Kearton Hotel – and they had an open cafe! I had a good coffee and brownie while enjoying being in a warm building, relaxing and finally getting sensation in all my digits – I was ready to get going.



My second saviour cafe on this trip

Leaving Kearnton Hotel, I took a left (away from where I came) and headed to the end of the road, where a small gate leads out to a trail between some fences. It is an ugly start but it gets much better, quickly. Follow the signs and cross the fields to start climbing up to the southern slope of Kisdon. The way was muddy to the small stone bridge, but past that the trail goes into a bit of a steep climb on a narrow route. At about 300m, the trail starts contouring the hill to the east, passing some more muddy grazing fields where it is obvious that the locals walk their dogs often (the trail is well used). There is another gate onto a wide 4x4 road and then it open views to the north and east on to River Swale and Arn Gill.



Leaving Thwaite

There is another tricky section in which the Pennine Way meets a few other trails – take the left with the sign and stay level with the contours, the trail is easily seen from there. From here it is a little maze of old walls and woods that were a muddy, slippery mess when I walked them, with grassy patches when my feet came out from under me. The weather was nice and the walk to Birk Hill was very nice: getting into old woodland near the river, the Pennine Way meets the Pennine Journey and I actually saw some more walkers. When the trail descended to meet the River Swale, I found a nice little waterfall after the bridge that I spent a few minutes marvelling (despite the time limit). From the river it is a hard climb on wide roads and through East Stonesdale, continuing up to Black Moor.



River Swale

The walk on Black Moor is really nice, on an open trail on the west contours of the moor. The river below was pretty excited from all the rain, there were breaks in the cloud and open views to Ravenseat Moor. I met other walkers on the way to Tan Hill; my guess is that they were heading to the Tan Hill Inn (the highest pub in England!). I could see myself making this 6km walk from Stonesdale to the pub on a windy afternoon for a couple of pints and a good walk back, what a great idea! On the Moor I fell into a fast and consistent pace, enjoying the easy footing, clear markings and the open Moor. The climb up to Tan Hill and then seeing the pub 100m to the north was quite the sight, and if I wasn't in a rush to catch a train I would have been very tempted to stay for a couple of pints.



Walking towards Tan Hill on Black Moor

I walked down to the pub, enquired about a way to get to Darlington and my train (you can always ask, as a pint sounded really nice), but no success. Instead, the nice men at the bar filled up my water bottles and I was back on the moor. The wind had picked up again and the drizzle returned – I did not look forward to this part of the walk.



The final push to Tan Hill Inn

From the pub it is a short walk east (right) to find the Pennine Way going into Bowes Moor. Immediately the trail was great: clear and straight forward, though a bit narrow. After about 100m the trail was gone and I was in a middle of a knee-deep, freezing bog. It was 13:30 and my time was short: I had 4 hours to get to Bernard Castle for the last bus to Darlington. At this time I finally got some cell signal and my wife managed to get through after almost a day of no contact (no service). I got an earful for not being in touch for so long (a woman 8 months pregnant is allowed to do that), and after 15 minutes of conversation my toes were fully numb and I had to get going. I finished the conversation with my wife and started to try and find my way to Darlington.



The deceiving entrance to Bowes Moor, looks almost inviting with the pole markings

I started heading north, stumbling about in the water, following what I thought are markings for the Pennine Way until I realized they are just bog restoration markings. Checking my map closely I found that the trail started by paralleling the road towards east (number 70), so I started following it. Soon enough I found the first marking, cairn and Frumming Beck. The trail follows the beck for 2.5km so finding it was a huge success. I picked up the boggy, wet, muddy crumbling trail and tried to pick up some speed. The rain was back with a vengeance and the wind picked up again – I was soaked again. With no alternative, I hunkered into my hood and moved on. The biggest danger on this part is the wooden planks used to walk over very deep bog sections. The planks can be very useful, but they are very slippery when wet (is it ever dry in the bog?), so a wire mesh could have been useful to reduce the danger of slipping; I opted for baby steps on them.



The dangers of the planks! Careful steps in Bowes Moor

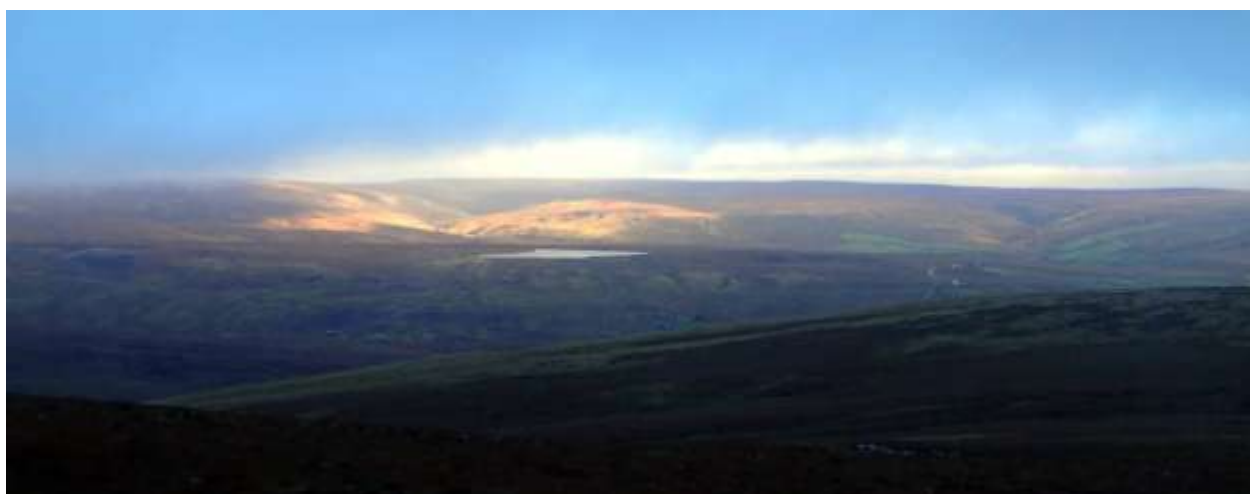
Somewhere along the way I realized I hadn't eaten for a few hours and with the temperatures dropping, I needed some energy. My new "lunch on the go" kit of 70g dried chorizo and a pack of 6 Scottish oat cakes were out and I managed to consume it all while doing 5km/h in driving rain and wind – not bad! The walk felt very long and I finally arrived to the bridge over White Stone Gill. Cross the bridge to the right and follow the road from here to Sleightholme, simple right? The rain was getting heavier and fully horizontal and the road was moving on the open moor, getting me fully cold and wet. I kept on walking, hiding in my rain jacket, and when I arrived to Sleightholme I decided to forgo the trail that crosses the Beck and climbs up to Wytham Moor, and stuck to the road.



Horizontal rain, cold and miserable, on route to Sleightholme

I said goodbye to the Pennine Way and made my miserable way to Bowes and then hopefully home. The rain persisted and the couple of cars that passed completely ignored my begging for a ride. I continued making my way on the road as the rain calmed down, alternating between walking and running as I was running out of time for the bus and I was too cold. After 5km of following the road, seeing sheep that looked wetter than me along the way, I finally made it to the outskirts of Bowes and where I would be finally saying goodbye to the Pennine Way for a while.

I made my way to road A67 under the bridge that leads to Bernard Castle at 16:20, knowing I had just over an hour to get to the bus. I started walking along the road, trying to catch a ride but I got nothing but speeding cars, trying to run away from my scary presence – so much for northern hospitality! I ended up running the 4 miles from Bowes to Bernard Castle in full gear, making in to the bus with 20 minutes to spare.



A break in the rain and snow, view from Great Shunner Fell

Section end and a break

This part of the Pennine Way is amazing; the Yorkshire Dales are vast, open and manage to constantly keep an edge of wildness. I wish sheep grazing would be stopped here and reforestation would begin, bringing the wooded fells back to life – that would make this section truly amazing.

The weather was a challenge at times, but it seems that every trip like this makes me more prepared for the harsh British weather and I feel more and more comfortable with that. The distances I covered in these conditions make me believe I can do the Cape Wrath Trail in 8 days as I plan on doing in a few months.



Walking the Pennine Way, hiding in my rain jacket, crossing the Yorkshire Dales