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Semerwater Walk in Raydale

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Parking by Semerwater (private charge) (SD 923874)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer OL 30 – Yorkshire Dales Northern and Central areas.
Distance	5.4 miles
Date of Walk	27 August 2014
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: I could open this introduction with the question - is it Semer Water or Semerwater (answers not required!)? I have seen it written both ways but I have to make a choice, so I go for Semerwater.

Semerwater is one of only two natural lakes in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the other being Malham Tarn. It was left behind by the melting of the last glacier. Amongst other wildlife, it contains a healthy number of the endangered species of white-clawed crayfish.

It has been painted by many artists, the most famous being JMW Turner. There is an elevated fenced area near the parking area denoting where he supposedly pitched his easel in 1816.

Semerwater sits in Raydale, a Yorkshire Dale which few are likely to be able to bring to mind easily. Raydale is a side dale to Wensleydale, leading from Bainbridge. It is a tranquil dale which the modern age seems to have passed by.

The walk takes you through the tiny hamlets of Countersett, Marsett and in my view the prettiest of them all, Stalling Busk. You also get to see the interesting ruin of Stalling Busk Old Church, dating from 1722, set apart from the hamlet itself. The interior is divided by two arcades which run north/south rather than the usual east/west. It fell into disrepair and ceased to be used in the early 20th Century and was replaced by St Mathews Church in Stalling Busk itself in 1908/09. The Old Church has some stunning views through its window apertures.

The walk also takes you along the course of a Roman Road (Cam High Road), now a walled track. There is no mistaking it as it is as straight as a die!

En route are lovely views of Raydale, Wensleydale and if the sun is out, the limestone outcrops positively glow.

The walk starts from parking areas at the north-east end of Semerwater. The lake and the parking are privately owned and you are expected to pay the fairly modest charge (£2.50 for all day when I visited) to Low Blean Farm nearby, or you may be approached directly by the farmer. Notices explain. Although you could park for free

elsewhere, using my cost yardstick of more, or less, than a pint of beer, I felt it was worth the price to start the walk here, as all the climbing then occurs early in the walk.

The easiest way to find Semerwater is to turn south-west, off the A684 at Bainbridge. Countersett and Semerwater are signposted. Immediately after passing through Countersett, turn left for the lake. The turn is signposted for Stalling Busk but by then the lake is visible and the way obvious.

Start: From the car parking (SD 923874) and with your back to the lake, turn left and walk along the road, over the bridge and up the steep hill. At the junction, turn right for Countersett and almost immediately, turn left on to the footpath following the fingerpost for "Hawes End ½ mile" (SD 919878). The first 200 yards or so does not seem to correspond with the OS map ROW, according to the GPS readings I got!

After a few yards, branch off left through a gateway following the direction of a yellow arrow, up the hill. As you climb the hill, there are good views of the flat-topped hill of Addlebrough, behind you.

At the top of the field, you reach a footpath marker post and after going over the little hilltop, drop down to a stile. Cross it and head up the field to the left of the stone barn. Just past it, go through the slit stile in the wall on the left and follow the path as it curves gently right.

As you reach the far side of the field, turn right to follow the wall. Go through another slit stile and follow the wall on the left.

The path leads to a gate which, in turn, leads on to the road at Hawes End (SD 913883). Turn right along the road and follow it for just under half a mile, when it crosses the Roman Road. You will see this dead straight track crossing your path, intersecting the road on a right hand bend. There are tremendous views of Wensleydale along here.

On reaching the Roman Road (SD 906884), turn left, following the fingerpost for "Beggarmans Road 3½ miles".

Stay on the Roman Road for three quarters of a mile, then turn left, following the fingerpost for "Marsett 1 mile" (SD 895878) (the footpath in the opposite direction is to Burterset). The path follows the line of a rocky outcrop at the top of the hill which joins a wall. You can find rocks in this area for a sandwich stop. Follow the well trodden path and as you cross the short plateau, good views of Raydale and Semerwater appear.

The route downhill is clear, heading towards Marsett below you. It arrives at a stony track where you turn left (SD 901874), to descend to the hamlet. At the tarmac road, turn right.

Cross the bridge and turn left along the grassy track. Turn left when you reach the stony track, following the course of the beck. The track drops down to a ford and there is a footbridge to preserve dry feet! Continue along the track to a second ford and footbridge.

Once over this second bridge, turn left to part company with the stream (SD 909859). After 100 yards or so, look out for a gated stile on the right. Cross this and follow the path up the field, ignoring the little gate next to the stone barn. The field narrows at the top and almost at its end, turn right through a walkers' gate and left on the stony track into Stalling Busk.

At the road, turn left, although before continuing your journey, it is worth a wander around this pretty hamlet and St Matthew's Church.

About fifty yards after the church, branch off left following the finger post for "Ruined Church ¼ mile" and "Low Blean 1 mile" (SD 917860). The path drops down to the Old Church with its graveyard, said to contain the bodies of about 750 people.

From the Old Church, it is simply a case of following the lakeside path to the road and turning left back to the car park.

