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Chelburn Moor Circuit

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Free car park next to The White House Pub, near Littleborough (SD 969179)
Ordnance Survey map	OL21 – South Pennines
Distance	11 miles
Date of Walk	13 April 2016
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This walk at the Yorkshire/Lancashire border is a walk of contrasts. It begins across bleak moorland to a rock curiosity known as the Aiggin Stone. Moorland then gives way to civilisation on the outskirts of Littleborough before a journey through industrial history, along the Rochdale Canal. Finally, having reached Walsden, a gradual ascent begins to regain the bleak moorland and follow three reservoirs back to the starting point.

There are far reaching views from the moorland sections across Rochdale and Manchester and north to Pendle Hill. There is even a poem, a real conjoining of literature and the landscape!

There are various explanations about the name and purpose of the Aiggin Stone, with its carved cross and letters. Its name may be a corruption of the Latin “Agger” meaning amongst other things, “pile” or “heap”; or it may be “aggerere” meaning “to bear to a place” or “heap up”. As regards its purpose, it may be, as the nearby plaque says, a medieval waymarker. Or, it could be to mark the meeting of the Yorkshire and Lancashire borders. Take your pick! In any event, there are great views from here.

From the Aiggin stone, the descent follows what may be the remains of a Roman road, or it may be a medieval packhorse route, possibly built on the route of a Roman road. Whichever, there are certainly laid stones.

The Rochdale Canal runs for 33 miles between Manchester and Sowerby Bridge and was fully opened in 1804. It was closed in 1952 but following the establishing of the Rochdale Canal Society and a considerable amount of work restoring locks etc, it was reopened in 2002. There are a large number of locks along the relatively short section along which this route travels. It seemed especially popular with Canada geese when I did the walk!

Having reached Walsden, the walk climbs back to moorland to reach a series of reservoirs, Warland, Light Hazzles and Blackstone Edge. Originally built to service the Rochdale Canal, these were purchased by Rochdale and Oldham Corporations in 1923 and became part of overall water supply.

Finally, the poem “Rain”, is carved into the rock at disused Cow’s Mouth Quarry. This is part of the series of Stanza Stones, collaboration between imove, the Ilkley Literature Festival, Simon Armitage and Pennine Prospects. Simon Armitage was

commissioned to create a series of poems responding to the landscape of the Pennine Watershed in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. These were then carved on to stones across the uplands by artist Pip Hall. There is a Stanza Stones trail where you can walk to see all the poems. More information at <http://www.ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Stanza-Stones-Trail-Guide.pdf>

Weather erosion has also demonstrated some artistry and with a little imagination, one can read unexpected shapes!

The walk provides easy navigation.

The walk starts from a free car park next to the White House pub. This is situated to the north side of the A58, a couple of miles east of Littleborough.

Start: Exit the car park (SD 969179) on to the road and turn right. After a few yards, turn left following the fingerpost for “Blackstone Edge” and “Pennine Way”.

You approach a quarry and there is a footpath straight through it but I opted to follow the broad track curving anti-clockwise round it, as this route is clearer on the ground. Look out for a small concrete bridge over the culvert and turn left here to follow the fairly obvious path across the moor (SD 967175).

The path leads to the Aiggin Stone with a small information board. Roughly west, are views over Littleborough.

From the Aiggin Stone (SD 973171), take the broad track downhill, following the fence line. This may (or may not) be part of the old Roman road. Certainly stones have been laid here at some time to reinforce the route. To the left, are good views of Blackstone Edge with the trig. point clearly visible.

As you join another broad track near the road (SD 962168), turn right then immediately left through a walkers' gate to follow the path downhill alongside the wall. The path drops down to a row of cottages, starting with The Old Millhouse. Pass in front of these to the tarmac lane and turn left.

Follow the lane down, through the hamlet of Lydgate until you reach the main A58. Turn left along here for around two hundred yards, until you reach the bridge over the Rochdale Canal at lock 47 (Durn Lock) and turn right along the towpath, following the cycleway sign for Todmorden.

You now follow the Rochdale Canal's towpath for just under two and a half miles to Walsden. En route, there is the Summit Pub, logically enough, at Summit (SD 947188) where you might obtain refreshment. Alternatively, there are various benches where you can perch for a picnic stop. I used one at SD 946198.

Stay on the towpath as far as Lock 28 (Travis Mill Lock), cross the bridge over the canal (SD 935220).

Follow Birks Lane. On the way, pass Birks House, where there is a blue plaque honouring Sir John Cockroft, a Nobel Prize winning physicist.

At North Hollingworth Farm, turn right but not before looking behind you at the splendid view over Walsden. Not far after here, go through a gate and the tarmac turns to a rougher, stony broad track. Follow this as it curves left.

The track leads to Higher Scout Cottage. Bear left here to follow the path parallel with the left hand boundary of the property. At the end of the wall, continue in the same direction, following a public footpath fingerpost. The route over the moor is obvious and there are a number of yellow topped posts to emphasise the way.

Arrive at Warland Reservoir (SD 955215) and turn right to follow the broad track across the dam. Continue along this track, ignoring a turn to the left after the second reservoir and just before the pylons.

Just after passing under the power cables, ignore another left turn.

You pass the disused Cow's Mouth Quarry (SD 964192) where there is the poem "Rain".

Continue to follow the track to join the A58 road by Blackstone Edge Reservoir. Turn right back to the car park.

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