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Fountains Fell

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Roadside parking at SD 843715
Ordnance Survey map	OL2 Yorkshire Dales – Southern and Western
Distance	4.9 miles
Date of Walk	18 September 2024
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: Sitting next to Pen-y-ghent is a relatively neglected hill, namely Fountains Fell. At 2192ft (668 metres) it is only 192ft (58 metres) lower than Pen-y-ghent. It has great views, not least of Pen-y-ghent and the other two of the Yorkshire Three Peaks. Indeed, I was pretty sure I could see the Lake District in the far distance.

Fountains Fell gets its name as it was once owned by the monks of Fountains Abbey who grazed sheep on it. It is now owned by the National Trust. It is Access Land and the first section of the route, which follows the Pennine Way, is the only public footpath/ROW section. The rest is 'off piste'. However you need to be careful.

Coal was mined from 1790 to 1860, although it was a shallow seam of only 30 inches or so. There are some interesting remains, not least a number of mine shafts and bell pits. However this brings with it an element of risk if you go wandering about and I strongly recommend you stick to trodden paths, as do the signs from the National Trust. A detailed 1974 study of the mines on the summit of Fountains Fell revealed there were 192 shafts. Some are fenced off but clearly many are not!

My route follows a well trodden path along the obvious Pennine Way then from a large summit (?) cairn takes a still well trodden path to a second cairn, It then closely follows a wall, as this was not obviously built over the top of shafts!

Of the two cairns mentioned, the first one seems to be generally regarded as the 'summit' cairn but there is a case for claiming the second, smaller one is the real summit. You decide!

Overall, the route is easy to follow with a fairly steep initial ascent. On the descending section from the second cairn mentioned, take it steady. Here and there are 'pockets' hidden in the grass and you will find a foot goes further down than you expect (maybe eight inches or so) with scope to turn an ankle. As long as you do not rush, you should be ok.

If you want a spot to sit for a picnic, the best place is probably at the first cairn, where there are plenty of stones.

After wet weather, you will probably be grateful for gaiters as it is likely to be boggy in places.

The walk starts from roadside parking on the grass verge. To get there, take the road to Langcliffe and Stainforth from Settle (B6479 - signposted). Turn right, off the B6479, at Stainforth, signposted for Halton Gill and Arncliffe. Continue through Stainforth, over the bridge and as the road bends left, keep straight ahead. It is still signed for Halton Gill and Arncliffe. Keep straight ahead as the road climbs (Goat Lane). It is narrow and you may need to back up here and there although it is a very quiet road. Follow the road for three miles from Stainforth, passing one junction on the right.

Keep a look out for a cattle grid just after a track on the left which has a fingerpost for the Pennine Way. The place to park is just beyond the cattle grid. The gate on the right here is your return path.

The start can also be reached from Halton Gill.

Start: From the parking spot, walk NE along the road (i.e. in the opposite direction to Stainforth) for just over three quarters of a mile.

Immediately after another cattle grid, turn right following a fingerpost for "Malham Tarn 6 miles" and "Pennine Way" (SD 853723)

The path climbs steadily with an obvious route, bending sharply left after 0.4 of a mile (SD 858720) and climbing more steeply.

After reaching the top of the climb, cross a stone step stile. There is a sign indicating the area belongs to the National Trust and directly ahead is the tall, conical cairn at SD 868720.

Immediately opposite the cairn is an obvious wide path. Follow this, passing the Old Coke Oven (or Smithy, depending on attribution!) (SD 867718)

Continue to follow this path until you reach the stone cairn shown in the photo.(SD 864716).

As you reach the cairn, turn right to the wall then left to follow it down. As you descend, it becomes more and more dilapidated but its course is clear.

At SD 862715 you pass the remains of a stone building.

Keep following the wall until you reach a well maintained shooting hut. The path turns right here and drops to a footbridge. Go up to the shooting hut. The five bar gate was padlocked (climb at the hinge side) but at the far side of the hut was a 'casual arrangement' of smaller gates, which were easily moved and replaced to save the climb.

There is now a broad, grassy track which you follow back to the car.

Fountains Fell

