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Settle to Birchshow Rocks

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Settle – pay and display car park (SD 819638)
Ordnance Survey map	OS Explorer OL41 – Forest of Bowland & Ribblesdale
Distance	9 miles
Date of Walk	5 November 2014
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This walk from Settle breaks with the norm in that instead of heading North or East into the Yorkshire Dales proper and the limestone country, it heads South-West along the river before visiting the village of Rathmell and Birchshow Rocks.

Rathmell is a small village, probably outside of most people's knowledge. It has little to exert a particular pull in itself but it is in the most fantastic location with amazing views. The centre is nominated by a reading room built in the early 20th century. Reading rooms were generally built by philanthropists to encourage the poor to read, play games or socialise (instead of going to the pub!). They usually had the daily papers. The other building of note is Holy Trinity Church.

Birchshow Rocks is an outcrop of gritstone with many scattered boulders. It is sometimes used by climbers for "bouldering". There are some useful spots amongst them for your "sarnies", whilst you sit in the sun (hopefully) admiring the view!

The walk nears its conclusion passing Giggleswick School with its distinctive domed chapel. According to the chapel guide, the dome was a requirement of the donor of the funds to build the chapel, reflecting his experience in Palestine. The chapel was opened in 1901.

What is quite surprising about this walk is the number of great vistas seen during the circuit. Pendle Hill, Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough all come into view at various times. The general views too are very attractive. All this for relatively little effort, the highest point only being around 800ft and you start at 500ft!

Because most walkers are heading in the opposite direction, you are likely to see few others on this route. This means some of the footpath sections are not well worn but overall, navigation is not too difficult. The start is straightforward as it follows the Ribble Way.

The walk starts from the pay and display car park next to the main B6480 in the centre of Settle. There are public toilets here.

If doing this walk after wet weather, gaiters will be useful!

Start: Exit the car park on to the B6480 and turn left. Cross the bridge over the River Ribble and turn immediately left on the well surfaced riverside path, following the sign for Giggleswick. Keep following the river when the path divides.

On reaching some houses, (SD 813635), follow the road (Sandholme Close) through them and at the 'T' junction (with Station Road) turn left. Almost immediately, turn right off the road, through a walkers' gate following a fingerpost "Public Footpath Ribble Way" and "Rathmell 2½ miles".

Continue to follow the river under the A65 and the railway bridge. After less than half a mile beyond the railway bridge, when the river turns quite definitely left (SD 806617), bear right to cross a footbridge. Once over it, turn left. You are looking for a stone stile. This was quite difficult to spot when I did the walk as I was facing a low sun and the stile itself is somewhat "camouflaged" by fencing. Find a short isolated section of wall, which is where the stile hides. Cross this stile and then another footbridge in the next field.

Follow the path to the road and turn left (SD 805614). You leave the Ribble Way here, so ignore the footpath opposite.

Walk along the road for 200 yards or so and about the same distance before you get to the stone barn on the right, turn right over a stone step stile to follow the public footpath fingerpost (SD 805613).

Cross another stile (right of the hole in the wall for the sheep).

At the track leading to the farm, go through the gate to the left of the track (by a cattle grid) and bear left to another gate. Through this, follow the right field boundary to two stiles. Cross these and keep straight ahead.

Go through the gate in the far right hand corner then, turn left to follow the left boundary to the road.

Turn right along the road into Rathmell.

Pass the road junction and note the church and reading room. Not far past the church, turn right to follow a public footpath fingerpost (SD804598). The path goes diagonally left across the field to another stile which opens into a pleasant tree-lined lane. Follow this to its end and at a cross-roads of tracks, turn right to follow the blue bridleway arrow (SD 800597).

You only go a few yards along here before climbing some steps on the right and across a gated stile. The next stile is soon visible. Keep straight ahead, coming out on a road opposite the school. Turn left, then quickly right, to follow a fingerpost for the Ribble way once more (also Settle 2½ miles).

Your route is now in a straight line, across several fields, passing to the left of a large, old stone barn. Come out at Green Farm (SD 798605) and turn left along the tarmac lane to the road, where you turn right.

You have to walk along the road for half a mile but it is a quiet road and I saw no traffic. To the left are nice views towards Pendle Hill.

At a left hand bend in the road, where there is a wide stony area on the right, turn right off the road over a stile following the public footpath fingerpost (SD 789609).

Keep in a straight line, just to the left of the top of the hill and you will soon see the crag of Birchshow Rocks ahead of you with Ingleborough behind. The stile out of this field is in the far left hand corner. Once over this, just keep heading in the direction of the rocks. The route is pretty straightforward.

Skirt round the bottom of the rocks and go through a five bar gate. Keep straight ahead or slightly right across the rough pasture and at the wall which bars your way, turn right to follow it (SD 781625). Do not cross the stile in this wall. Follow it to the top of the hill. Great views open out here. In the corner is a slit stile. Go through this and follow the wall on the left. Settle, Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough progressively come into vision as you descend.

Follow the wall until a stile puts you in the centre of the boundary of a large field. From here, bear right to the next stile. Over this and two farms are below you. Head for the right hand farm, crossing another stile.

The next stile you want goes into a tiny field behind the farm (SD790626). Cross the field and turn right through the gate. The next gate is ahead of you.

Go through this and keep to the left boundary, following the wall down. At the ruined barn in a little group of trees, turn left through the gate and go straight ahead. Go through a slit stile in the bottom left hand corner of the field then turn left.

At the road, turn right. Follow the road down to a 'T' junction and turn left.

Follow the road for 200 yards until, where it bends left, turn right to follow a public footpath fingerpost (SD 797631). Follow the path down and under the railway.

At the group of buildings, keep straight ahead on the broad track. Follow this to its end and through a gate. Beyond the gate, bear slightly right to another gate and through this, turn right down a broad track.

As the wall on the left bends sharply left, follow that bend but when it bends again, keep straight ahead. Through a gate, follow a walled footpath/track (SD 807638). This passes Giggleswick School Chapel. I did not get the best photo of this, as at that vantage point, there were a number of schoolgirls at games and I did not dare use the camera. What society has come to!

Follow the track to the road and turn right. At the junction turn right. Go past a row of white painted cottages then turn left. At the main road, turn right back into Settle.

