

FELL WALKING GROUP REPORT

On 28th January eleven of us gathered at Mickleton Station car park for a 12-mile walk around Teesdale and Lunedale. I'd like to say the day dawned bright and sunny, but as had been the norm for the previous couple of weeks we were initially met with low-lying mist and dampness. However by the time we set off the sun was threatening to break through and our commitment was subsequently rewarded with clear skies and, for the time of year, reasonably warm temperatures. Later we discovered that most of the local area remained shrouded in mist for the whole day – sometimes climbing hills brings its own rewards!

We began, though, by going *downhill* to Beckstones Wath bridge, more popularly known as the millennium bridge. This 80 metre footbridge, built at a cost of £220,000, was started in 2000 (hence the local name) and formally opened in May 2002, the opening having been delayed because of the foot and mouth restrictions in place at the time. Before we crossed it we first had to negotiate a nearby field where a spring creates what is usually an easily crossed beck, but had become a swollen river due to January's persistent rains.

Once over the bridge we headed towards Middleton-in-Teesdale on the Teesdale Way. Again this is normally a straightforward part of the walk, but by the end of January parts of the path had become quite eroded, while elsewhere another beck proved challenging because a very simple plank bridge had been washed away. We all made it safely across though with only a few wet feet and soon reached Middleton where we stopped beside the B6277 road bridge for our coffee break. Built between 1810 and 1813 this was the first public road bridge across the Tees.

Coffee over, we walked up the B6277 to the start of the Holwick road, where we branched off for the Pennine Way towards the foot of Harter Fell. From there it is a steady climb of 45 minutes or so until cresting the rise we had lovely views of Grassholme and Selset reservoirs below us. Descending to Grassholme we stopped at the car park for lunch, before continuing along the north bank, eventually coming up to Mickleton road near the Grassholme observatory car park. From there a short walk along the road took us to another footpath leading across some fields until we reached the Tees railway path and so back to the car park – steam train impersonations were optional!



In all we covered 12 miles, ascended a total of 1441 feet, but descended 1627 feet, and got back to our cars exactly 6 hours after setting out.

Jim Coleman