

# HIGH FORCE WALK

## Circular Including Low Force and Bleabeck Force

Visit my website for full details: <https://www.paulbeal.com/high-force-walk>

### Introduction to the Walk

Begin this superb circular walk at the Bowlees Visitor Centre in the North Pennines and explore the dramatic scenery along the River Tees. The route showcases both Low Force and the iconic High Force, two of England's most beautiful waterfalls. Before joining the main trail, there's a short detour to Gibson's Cave and Summerhill Force, a hidden waterfall tucked within a wooded gorge just behind the visitor centre. Return to the visitor centre, cross Wynch Bridge, then follow the Pennine Way upstream past Low Force, High Force, and Bleabeck Force before looping back through open countryside and peaceful rural lanes.

### Highlights of the Walk

Highlights abound throughout this High Force walk. Start with the enchanting woodland path to Gibson's Cave, where Summerhill Force spills over a limestone ledge into a shaded gorge once used as a hideout by a 16th-century outlaw. Then follow the Pennine Way beside the River Tees, passing sculpted sandstone sheep and the tumbling waters of Low Force. After witnessing the power of High Force, continue upstream to the quieter but equally picturesque Bleabeck Force. Cross the river and return via quiet lanes and rolling farmland, passing the whitewashed farmhouses so characteristic of Upper Teesdale.

High Force ranks among England's most impressive waterfalls. It plunges 21 metres over the Whin Sill into a deep pool below, set within the Forest-in-Teesdale landscape of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The surrounding scenery is equally captivating, with sweeping moorland, colourful hay meadows, tranquil woodland, and far-reaching views across the hills. The area is rich in history too, shaped by Viking place-names, ancient geology, and traces of its lead-mining heritage.

### Additional Information

- **Distance:** 8¼ miles (13¼ kilometres).
- **Duration:** Approximately 4 hours (excluding stops and breaks).
- **Difficulty:** Moderate. The route is straightforward to follow, with gentle gradients for most of the way and only a few short climbs. Suitable for regular walkers with a basic level of fitness.
- **Trail Conditions:** A mix of well-defined paths, grassy tracks, and stony sections along the Pennine Way. Expect some uneven and occasionally muddy ground after rain.
- **Recommended Map:** OS Explorer OL31 – North Pennines.
- **Parking:** Bowlees Visitor Centre, where you'll also find toilets, a café, and visitor information. The centre is located near Low Force Waterfall on the B6277, just over three miles north-west of Middleton-in-Teesdale.
  - **Google Maps Link:** <https://maps.app.goo.gl/EwaSCgtRxxCpEBa89>
  - **What3Words:** ///trader.thousands.craft

### Support My Work

If you've found these directions helpful or enjoyed this walk, please consider making a £2 donation to support what I do. Your contribution helps me create more free walking guides like this one.

You can donate by visiting <https://buymeacoffee.com/paulbeal> or by scanning the QR code.

Thank you for your support!

Paul Beal



# Step-by-Step Directions

To start your High Force walk, begin at the **Bowlees Visitor Centre (1)**. The centre is located near Low Force Waterfall on the B6277, just over three miles north-west of Middleton-in-Teesdale. The visitor centre offers parking, a café, a gift shop, and information about the local area, as well as toilet facilities and a picnic area. Before embarking on your main route, you might want to take a 30-minute detour to visit **Gibson's Cave and Summerhill Force (2)**. The path is clearly signposted from the car park and follows a simple there-and-back route, totalling about two-thirds of a mile. Once you've explored the cave, return to the car park along the same path.

To start your main High Force walk, cross the bridge over Bow Lee Beck and ascend the steps that lead to the visitor centre. Walk past the visitor centre and follow the lane to the **B6277 road (3)**. After crossing the road, take the signposted footpath towards Low Force Waterfall and Wynch Bridge. Once you've crossed **Wynch Bridge (4)**, turn right onto the Pennine Way. The trail runs alongside the River Tees, and along the way, you'll pass two sandstone sheep sculptures before reaching the spectacular **Low Force Waterfall (5)**.

Keep following the **Pennine Way (6)** along the River Tees for approximately 1½ miles until you reach the magnificent **High Force Waterfall (7)**. From there, continue westward on the Pennine Way for another 1¼ miles, passing **Bleabeck Force (8)** and ascending **Bracken Rigg (9)**. Once you reach the top, follow the **Pennine Way as it bends to the north (10)**. You'll find a paved path that eventually descends towards Cronkley.

From the **farm at Cronkley (11)**, follow the stone track leading towards the River Tees, where you will cross the **river via the footbridge (12)**. After crossing, the track bends to the right and leads you east for just over half a mile until you reach the **B6277 main road (13)**. Turn right at the road, and shortly afterwards, turn left onto a lane opposite the Methodist Chapel.

Follow this lane uphill to the farm, then veer right and continue along the lane past **Chapel On The Hill (14)**. Further ahead, **as the track bends to the right (15)** towards the farm, go straight ahead across the fields, following the wall until you reach the **minor road at Birch Rigg (16)**. Turn right and follow the road south-east for about half a mile until you reach a **junction marked by a small triangular grassy area (17)** with tall trees.

At the junction, turn left and follow the quiet country lane downhill towards the farm at Dirt Pit. From there, continue along the lane, ignoring any side paths, and after just over a mile, the lane will bring you back to Bowlees Visitor Centre. This completes your High Force walk, which, including the detour to Gibson's Cave and Summerhill Force, covers approximately 8¼ miles through the stunning North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This is a detailed topographic map of the Forest-in-Reesdale area. The map shows a route marked with blue numbers 1 through 29. The route starts at the bottom left, near the 'Summary Hill' and 'Bowles and Gibson's Cave', and winds through the area, ending at the top right, near the 'Forest-in-Reesdale' and 'Walker Hill Plantation'. The map includes contour lines, rivers, and various landmarks. Key features include the River Reesdale, the Pennine Way, and several waterfalls. The route is marked with blue numbers 1 through 29, and the map is oriented with North at the top.