

GREAT WHERNSIDE CIRCULAR WALK

Starbotton and the River Wharfe

Visit my website for full details: <https://www.paulbeal.com/great-whernside-circular-walk>

Introduction to the Walk

This circular walk from Kettlewell climbs steadily through Hag Dyke to the summit of Great Whernside before crossing open moorland and descending towards Starbotton. From the village, the route crosses the River Wharfe and follows the Dales Way south through Wharfedale, providing a gentler riverside finish back to Kettlewell.

Highlights of the Walk

The climb above Kettlewell brings increasingly wide views across Wharfedale before reaching the remote buildings at Hag Dyke. Higher up, the path becomes rockier and leads towards the boulder-strewn summit of Great Whernside, where the cairn and triangulation pillar stand at 704 metres. On a clear day, Pen-y-ghent, Ingleborough and Whernside can all be picked out on the western horizon.

Beyond the summit, the route follows the ridge north before descending across Black Dike and continuing around the head of the valley. The old Starbotton Cam Road then zigzags down into Starbotton, where the high ground is left behind. A footbridge crosses the River Wharfe and the final two miles follow the Dales Way through Wharfedale back to Kettlewell.

Additional Information

Distance: 9¼ miles (15 kilometres)

Duration: Approximately 5 hours (excluding stops and breaks)

Difficulty: A fairly substantial hill walk with a long climb to the 704-metre summit of Great Whernside, followed by open moorland and a lengthy descent to Starbotton. The final two miles provide an easier return beside the River Wharfe along the Dales Way.

Trail Conditions: A mixture of tarmac lanes, grassy paths, rocky and stony tracks, open moorland, bridleways and riverside footpaths. Some higher sections can be boggy after wet weather.

Recommended Map: OS Explorer OL30 Yorkshire Dales Northern & Central Area

Parking: Yorkshire Dales National Park pay and display car park in Kettlewell.

• **Google Maps Link:** <https://maps.app.goo.gl/7fcpg2K5d5AeW88dA>

• **What3Words:** ///gravy.highly.negotiators

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STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS

Start your Great Whernside circular walk in the Yorkshire Dales village of Kettlewell, parking in the **Yorkshire Dales National Park pay and display car park (1)**. Leave the car park by the main exit and turn left into the village. Just before the bridge over Kettlewell Beck, turn right onto the road signposted to Kettlewell Camping, and follow it to the village maypole, which stands within a circular seating area in the middle of the crossroads. Turn left here, signposted to the church and the Dales Way, and walk up to the King's Head public house.

At the King's Head, rather than following the road round to the left, carry straight on in the direction of the Dales Way signs. The road leads past houses and cottages with Kettlewell Beck on your left. Stay on the tarmac lane as it leaves the village. Ignore the public footpath on your right signposted to Conistone, and ignore the public bridleway a little further on, also on your right, signposted to Whernside Pastures. Neither of these is part of your route. Where the lane bends left over a single-arched stone bridge, carry straight on, following the sign for Great Whernside via Hag Dyke.

Continue along the stone track to a second single-arched stone bridge near Kettlewell Camping. Immediately after the bridge, turn right onto the public footpath signposted to Hag Dyke and Providence Pot. Go through the **gated gap in the wall (2)** and follow the grassy path uphill, signposted to Hag Dyke. The path is wide and easy to follow as it climbs steeply, and a wooden footpath signpost soon confirms you are heading the right way. Stay on this well-defined path for about a mile, ignoring any side tracks to left and right.

On reaching the **youth hostel at Hag Dyke (3)**, go through the gate and bear right, signposted public footpath to Great Whernside. Follow the path round the right-hand side of the building, then turn left and walk past the rear of it. From here the path becomes rocky and stony as it climbs with a dry stone wall on your left, heading for the boulder-strewn brow of the hill. Pass the cairns at the top of the brow and continue on the grassy path, now aiming for the summit of Great Whernside.

This next mile is marked by wooden posts with yellow painted tops, and the ground can be boggy after wet weather. The gradient eases for a while before rising more steeply for the final push to the top, and on a clear day the summit boulders stay in view as you climb. You will leave the summit heading north, following the visible ridge to the left of the boulder field, so take a moment to perhaps get your bearings ready for when you reach the summit. Follow the path all the way to the **cairn and triangulation pillar (4)**. The summit marks roughly the first quarter of your Great Whernside circular walk.

Stand at the triangulation pillar with your back to the views and to the way you have come, facing the gate in the fence. Look to your left, beyond the large cairn, and you will see a faint path running north across the mountain top. Follow it, keeping the fence on your right. The path runs broadly parallel to the fence but stays a few metres away from it rather than hard against it. Continue north along the ridge, passing more boulders, until you reach the first of a series of yellow-topped wooden posts.

At this first post the path splits. **Take the left-hand fork (5)**, which drops slightly downhill and moves further from the fence. More yellow-topped posts confirm you are on the right line as you head north across the top. The path eventually begins to descend the mountainside and brings you to a **stile at a spot called Black Dike Hole (6)**. Cross the stile and follow the path steeply downhill. After about a third of a mile the gradient eases and the path crosses ground that can be boggy in wet weather. Stay on the main path for roughly another third of a mile to reach a **minor road beside a cattle grid (7)**. This is the Kettlewell to Coverdale road, which climbs out of Wharfedale at Park Rash.

Cross the road and take the grassy track that bears round to the left. It draws close to a bend in the dry stone wall on your left before pulling away again, then meets another grassy bridleway coming in from the right. This is Starbotton Road. Carry straight on along it, and where the bridleway once again comes close to the wall, **pass through the gated gap (8)**. You are now about halfway round your Great Whernside circular walk.

Follow the bridleway straight ahead around the head of the valley, broadly keeping the dry stone wall on your left. At times the wall is right beside you and at others the path swings further from it. After a little over half a mile the **bridleway splits in two (9)**. Take the right-hand fork signposted to Starbotton and carry on downhill across an area known as Sandy Gate. This is Starbotton Cam Road, a wall-enclosed old drovers' road that zigzags down the hillside for the best part of a mile towards the village. As you near Starbotton the stony track gives way to concrete for the final descent. At the tarmac crossroads, continue straight ahead and follow the road downhill to the **B6160 (10)** running through the village. Starbotton is about three quarters of the way round your Great Whernside circular walk.

Turn left and walk along the road to the edge of the village, then turn right onto the bridleway signposted to Arncliffe, Kettlewell and Buckden. Follow it down to the **River Wharfe (11)** and cross the footbridge. On the far bank, turn left onto the Dales Way, signposted to Kettlewell.

The Dales Way now carries you **south through Wharfedale for around two miles (12)**, broadly following the River Wharfe downstream. This final stretch is straightforward and easy to follow, with yellow waymarker arrows along the way. The path eventually delivers you onto the B6160 in Kettlewell, where you turn left and cross the bridge over the Wharfe to return to the car park and finish your Great Whernside circular walk.

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MAP OF THE WALK

