

“Stone, Coal and Orange Water”



VALE WALKERS
— CORNHOLME —

Supported by



STONE, COAL AND ORANGE WATER

A walk up a secluded valley, taking in some local industrial archaeology, Cornholme’s answer to the “Great Wall of Tod”, the sites of the last working pit in Lancashire and a near disastrous landslide, and some very beautiful scenery. The points of interest are numbered in the text and on the map.

Location

Start near the Roebuck pub, Portsmouth.
Bus and train access to the route: The 591 and 592 buses through Cornholme & Portsmouth go to and from Burnley, Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Halifax.

The Trail

Length and time - About 6km, only a small part of it along the main road. It should take you about 2 hours plus stops.

Gradients - A hilly route with a long climb up an old inclined railway and some steep climbs up and down slopes thereafter.

Terrain & Obstacles - You will need good walking footwear. The route is steep and in places very muddy. There is one stile to climb over and two streams to cross.

Facilities - You can get drinks at the Roebuck pub when open; and meals & drinks at the Glen View pub 200m from the start point.

More about Cornholme’s History

If you want to know more about Cornholme and its history, the following are easily available locally or online:

Cornholme E-Trail - A walk with audio visual commentary for your phone is available at Tod Info Centre.

Heart of the Pennines (www.heartofthepennines.org.uk) has many walks including our first Cornholme walk “Mines, Mills and Missionaries” (go to tinyurl.com/Vale-1) and the Todmorden Moor Geology Trail (go to tinyurl.com/Todm-1)

Tod Antiquarians - www.todmordenantiquarians.co.uk
Todmorden Library has a local history section with books and pamphlets that you can browse

Our thanks to Pennine Digital Archive for permission to use photos in this walk guide.

FOLLOWING THE WALK

Start at the intersection of the A646 and Station Parade near the Roebuck Pub. OS ref SD 898262.
W3W ref [///inched.hypocrite.bandstand](https://www.what3words.com/#!/enched.hypocrite.bandstand).

Before You Set Off

Check the weather forecast. Prolonged rain can make the stream crossings hazardous. Wear the correct clothing for the walk. If you have a dog, take a lead. There are a lot of sheep grazing on the route.

1. Portsmouth Mill

Walk up the main road past the junction with Carr Road until you reach the Roebuck pub. Once very popular with crown green bowlers, its green is now in a sad state of decay.

Cross the road (take care) to Portsmouth Mill. Now it has been made into residences but in the past it was a cotton mill established in the 1840s. It was built here to take advantage of the water coming down Beaters Clough (a “clough” is a steep sided valley). It was also the site of the coal yard where coal was brought down from the mines high above us. We’ll be seeing them later.



2. Beaters Clough

Just next to the Mill you will see a footpath signposted to Bacup. Head up the path. Although now quiet, in the past this was the main route over to the Rossendale Valley and would have been a busy route.

After 100m, turn sharp right and continue to climb through Cock Hill Wood with Beaters Clough on your right. If you catch the right time of year, it's a good place to gather bilberries.

3. The Inclined Railway

At the fell gate, stop and have a look around you. You are now standing about half way down the inclined railway which brought coal down from the mines above you to the coal yard at Portsmouth Mill in the 19th century. From there, the coal was sold on for domestic use and for the steam engines which drove many of the mills in the village.

Carry on your climb up the incline. As you begin, carefully peek over the side and you will see a large wall with a tunnel in it carrying a stream through. This was built with stone from the quarry at the top of the incline. It gives some idea of the cost and importance of this route.



The inclined railway today

Carry on up until you reach the flat area at the top. Look around and you can still see the remains of the top of the incline with steelwork set in concrete. Rails would have been laid down to the bottom at Portsmouth Mill. Early maps show an engine house half-way down. It is likely that the weight of full tubs of coal were used to haul up empty tubs. In the middle was a passing place where there was a steam engine to help the process. These inclined planes are very common all over Britain, particularly around coal and slate mines.

The complexity and cost of this operation clearly shows that the mines along Beaters and Greens Clough were rich enough to make this worthwhile.



This early photograph shows the inclined plane descending from the Engine Shed (see the old map) to Portsmouth Mill. The modern Mill is smaller following a fire in 1948 when the top two stories were removed. The mill chimney on the hill is also now demolished.

4. Greens Clough

Now carry on straight ahead, walking along the obvious *flat* path above the river. After some 200m the path becomes very wet and boggy in wet weather. You may see water dribbling out from the bank to your left. This often marks the point where a drift mine came to surface. These were levels driven in under to intersect the rich coal seams under Carr and Craggs Moor. Early maps show some buildings here too - but nothing can be seen now.

At the end of the track, where it crosses a small stream and then goes up some steps, you will also see a large patch of bright orange mud. Again, this marks where a drift mine went into the hillside and has collapsed. The mine has flooded and the water, now rich in iron oxide (the orange stuff), bubbles out, colouring the stream and in turn causing the upper Calder to turn orange too. Have a look but don't get the stuff on your boots. it's not dangerous but is difficult to get off.

The steps take you up a spoil heap from another mine, now long gone. You will see small pieces of coal in the spoil. Keep an eye out for a Burnley Bobber. These are round, very hard rock balls which were common in the area's coalfields. All of this coal would have been loaded up on trucks and sent down the incline to Cornholme.



Greens Clough stream bed, dyed orange by iron oxide

Follow the path along the spoil heap and it eventually takes you down and across the stream (there are yellow topped posts to guide you). Take care crossing the stream, particularly if it is in flood. Follow the path up the other side and then stop and have a look around.

5. The Last Coal Mine in Lancashire

The flat grassy site is all that's left of Lancashire's last coal mine, Hill Top Colliery. It closed around 2014 but was on care and maintenance until very recently when the mine was sealed, the buildings removed, and the site cleared and landscaped.

If you have a look around, you may still see some evidence of the mine. It was a drift mine which used an inclined plane to remove coal rather like the one further down the valley. Originally opened just after WW2, it was a National Coal Board mine which employed 115 men underground. It was known as a wet mine, discharging some 250 gallons of water per minute via pumps into the infant River Irwell rather than down Greens Clough.

The mine closed in 1966 but in 1997 a local man re-opened it to provide coal to the local area and exploit the nearly 9 hectares of coal underground. The recent final closure has inevitably meant that water escaping through old mine workings is running out of the ground, as we saw earlier in the walk

Now follow the obvious road down the other side of Greens Clough and Beaters Clough for 1200m. You will be able to see the path you've just walked up on the other side of the valley, which will help you understand the tramway system.

Eventually you will come to Greens Farm. The footpath goes through the gate on the left. It's very well signposted. Follow this path for about 100m until there is a gate on the right which you should go through.

6. Monk's House Rake

At this point the footpath splits and you have a choice.

If you want to call it a day, descend straight down the hill past the farm and pick up a road at the bottom (this route is in yellow dots on our map). Follow this down and it will bring you to a track and then out on the main road just above Portsmouth Mill.

Our path, however, will take the left hand branch which is indistinct but follows the fence. You will soon see a modern barn a couple of hundred metres away. Head in its direction following the fence. In the corner of the field to the left of the farm, there is a stile leading to a path just above the wood.

Follow the obvious path downwards along the top of the wood for 200m. Go through an opening and descend through the wood. Take care as the path can be slippery when wet.

The path is known as Monk's House Rake (or Monk's House Ride on some maps) but there doesn't seem to be a reason for this known ... yet.

The woodland area is also another site of old coal mines, many of which are marked on early maps. This is why the ground is so pockmarked with small mounds.

7. Ratten Clough & the Landslide

When you emerge at the bottom, stop and have a look around you. The steep valley on your left is called Ratten Clough. It's not clear where this name came from, as to "ratten", a northern word, means to steal someone's tools to prevent them working. It may be a corruption of "Rotten" as the rock is quite loose and friable.



Ratten Clough - with traces of the landslide on the right

To prove this, in October 1947, this was the scene of a disaster. After a period of prolonged rain, an estimated million tons of mine spoil, mud and loose rock hurtled down the Clough, blocked the road, went across the field and then threatened to engulf the railway line. Luckily the Cornholme Methodist Football pitch absorbed the flow and the line was not affected.

As you look around and down towards the railway line you will see many strange mounds, now grass-covered which are the remains of the inundation.

Now cross the road and walk back down towards the start point. After 400m you will see a car park on your left. Go through it and cross the railway line. As you cross, look up the line and see if you can see any more evidence of the landslide.

8. The Mill Pond

Now turn right to walk past the mill pond, which originally fed Portsmouth Mill where we started our journey. This was also the site, in the past, of village swimming galas.



Portsmouth Mill Pond

Go through the small kissing gate at the corner of the reservoir and follow the obvious track across the fields towards the large red brick buildings.

9. Portsmouth Station

On the hill you will see the tracks of the Havok Mountain Bike Track. When you reach the gate near the red buildings, turn right past them and cross the railway track. Pay attention to the instructions and cross safely. Before you do so, glance to your left. This was the site of Portsmouth Station, closed in 1938.

Go straight ahead and you are back on Station Parade, where we started.

The walking route is marked by the green dotted line and the shortcut by the yellow dotted line

1. Portsmouth Mill with Roebuck Pub opposite
2. The path to Bacup and Beaters Clough
3. The inclined railway
4. Greens Clough & old mine workings
5. The last coal mine in Lancashire
6. Monks House Rake or Ride
7. Ratten Clough & the landslide
8. The mill pond
9. Portsmouth station

