

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 20 High Cup Nick from Dufton

After a charming dene and tame farmland, the character of the route changes dramatically as it heads up the great gorge of High Cup before returning via an old miners' track. The difficult climb up through the nick makes the walk unsuitable for adverse conditions.

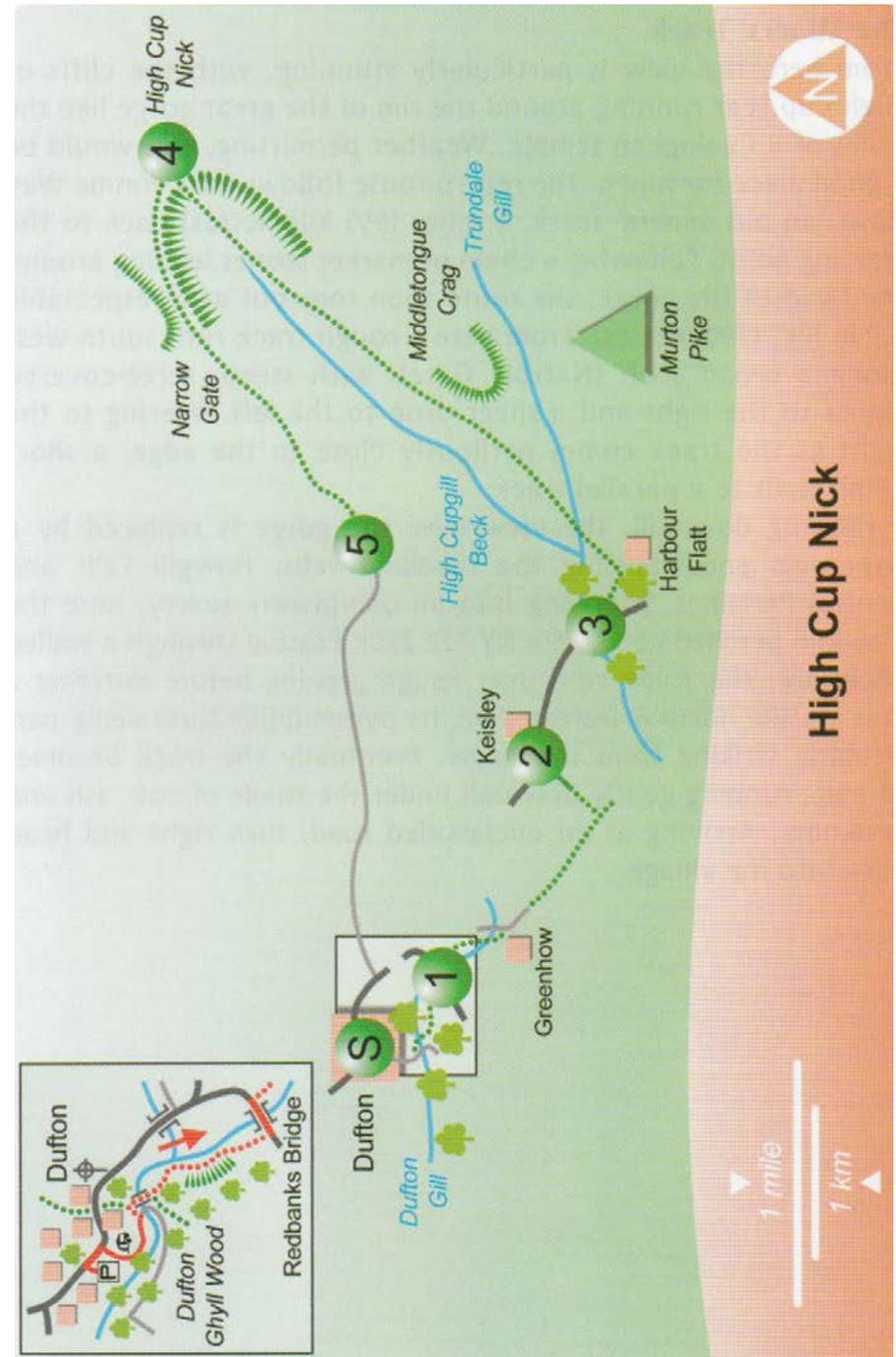


- Length: 9½ miles (15¼ kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,608 feet (490 metres)
- Highest Point: 1,936 feet (590 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 19 ('Howgill Fells & Upper Eden Valley') (Upper Eden Valley [North] Sheet)
- Starting Point: Dufton village car park, Upper Eden Valley (NY 689 250)
- Facilities: Public toilets, inn and refreshments.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-20-high-cup-nick-dufton>

Dufton Ghyll Wood

A finger sign beside the car park marks the start of a stony track running past a caravan site, down into Dufton Ghyll. At the bottom of the charming dene, just before the track crosses a stone bridge, another finger sign marks a turn over a rickety footbridge, joining a path leading to Redbanks Bridge. This runs south-east along the wooded valley floor, passing overgrown quarries where the St. Bees Sandstone is exposed. All too soon the trees thin-out and a gate leads to an unclassified road (1 = NY 694 245).

Crossing a road bridge, a finger sign shows a path to Keisley. This joins the access for Greenhow farm, then continues south-east over fields, keeping to the right of a tree-lined boundary. Eventually another finger sign



shows the route turning over a drystone wall on the left, heading north-east up the middle of a field then along a hedge-lined track to arrive at an unclassified road (2 = NY 707 238). Ignoring a path signed for High Cup Nick (via Bow Hall), turn right and head along the lane, with the distinctive forms of Murton Pike and Roman Fell dominating the view ahead. A short way after the road crosses Keisley Beck by a stone bridge, a finger sign on the left marks the start of a path to Harbour Flatt farm (3 = NY 717 234).

High Cup Gill

From here to the head of High Cup Gill is a distance of 2¾ miles (4½ kilometres), with a difficult climb up through the nick. Crossing a fence stile, head south-east over pasture, veering to the left of a tree-crowned hillock. Approaching the farm buildings, turn onto a stony track heading down through a scattering of ash and hazel. Forging a stream, leave the track and head north-east up the broad ridge separating High Cup Gill and Trundale Gill. Veering to the left before Middletongue Crag is reached, the path heads down to the valley floor.

Ahead are stunning views up the great gorge, with a collar of cliffs arrayed on either side of a boulder-choked cleft. Crossing a drystone wall, High Cupgill Beck is followed upstream to the point where it emerges from the ground. Ahead is a boulder field of dolerite blocks, torn from the Great Whin Sill by the passage of ice. The boulders can be very slippery, so take care. The final section of the climb up through the nick is a daunting scramble, although the boulder field is reasonably stable (the route marked on the map heads up very steep slopes to the left, offering an alternative). High Cup Plain is gained at the point where a mossy stream empties into the cleft (4 = NY 746 262).

The Miners' Track

From here the view is particularly stunning, with the cliffs of High Cup Scar running around the rim of the great gorge like the aisles of a Cyclopean temple. Weather permitting, this would be a good place for lunch. The return route follows the Pennine Way down an old miners' track, 4 miles

(6½ kilometres) back to the starting point. Following a chain of marker stones leading around the head of the gorge, the route soon tops-out at a respectable 1,936 feet (590 metres). From here a rough track runs south-west along a broad shelf (Narrow Gate), with steep, scree-covered slopes to the right and a sheer drop to the left. Veering to the right as the track comes perilously close to the edge, a short climb leads to a parallel track.

High Cup Nick

The great gorge of High Cup is reminiscent of the glacial trenches seen in the Cairngorms, although it looks so out of place in the North Pennines that the splendour of the scene is greatly exaggerated. The dramatic cliffs are an outcropping of the Great Whin Sill, exposed by the passage of ice. The boulders littering the valley floor are relics of the collapsed sill - the underlying limestone being eroded away. One of the pinnacles along the cliff edge, Nichol's Chair (or Nichol's Last), was named for a local cobbler who, for a bet, sat on top while mending a pair of shoes. Occasionally the stream that empties into the cleft can be seen spurting upward. Peregrine falcons also catch the updraft, circling as they hunt for prey.

Heading downhill, the view over the gorge is replaced by a panorama encompassing the Lakeland Fells, Howgill Fells and Central Pennines. Dropping into an overgrown quarry, note the lime kiln perched above (5 = NY 722 250). Passing through a walled enclosure, the track runs over rough grazing before entering a lane. To the north is Dufton Pike, its pyramid-like form being particularly striking from this angle. Eventually the track becomes tarmac, running gently downhill under the shade of oak, ash and sycamore. Arriving at an unclassified road, turn right and head back into the village.

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