

Walk 1 - HAWKSHAW TO HOLCOMBE

Hawkshaw is an attractive village of stone built cottages, church and two pubs, that coalesced around the junction of Hawkshaw Lane and the newly built Bolton to Edenfield turnpike. Prior to this it consisted of a loose knit collection of farms. The area was first recorded in 1205 as being on the edge of Holcombe Forest.

Distance: **4 miles**

About: **2 to 3 hours**

Terrain: **Easy > moderate**

Parking: **Plenty 'on street' available**

Public Transport:

No 273 - Bolton to Rawtenstall
via Ramsbottom.

No 480 - via Greenmount,
Walshaw to Bury.

No 480 - via Affetside to Bolton

Refreshments:

**Red Lion & Waggon and Horses,
Hawkshaw. Shoulder of Mutton
& the Mala Indian Restaurant,
Holcombe.**

**No public toilets. All paths fully
waymarked.**

Please note this route is considered **100% SAFE** even when the red flags are flying or the sound of live gunfire, as not only is it several hundred yards away but they also shoot at targets in the opposite direction to the one in which you are walking.

If in doubt please ring the camp's guard room at **01204 882991** to confirm.

Optional Route 1 (Short cut)

① With your back to the Wagon & Horses, turn right towards Bolton and then almost immediately right again onto Hawkshaw Lane. Proceed for half a mile to Higher House Farm the second farm on the right.

Optional Route 2 (scenic and off road)

With your back to the Wagon & Horses turn right towards Bolton for approx. ¼ mile, turn right on the far side of Walves Bridge (opp. the Red Lion) on to Coal Pit Lane.

② The lane isn't signposted but clearly visible, winding through an attractive wood. As the lane emerges from the wood go through the gate and on to a second gate, noting on your left the remains of the old coal, dry stone, loading ramp.

The name of the lane and the loading ramp are reminders of the successful coal mining activities on the hillside above the track in the late 17th Century.

③ Head diagonally downhill, in line with the red chimney stack on the white bungalow, to the left of the electricity pylon, on top of the hill opposite.

Cross the two wooden bridges over the stream and go uphill following the line of wire fence on the right behind Finney Cote Cottage (avoiding the rushes).

Finney Cote Cottage was the birthplace of Methodism in Hawkshaw and district in 1810.

When the path joins Hawkshaw Lane, turn left and 20 yards further on is Higher House Farm.

**This is where optional routes
1 & 2 join**

At Higher House Farm turn right across the yard over the stile and proceed alongside the hedge to cross the large meadow.

Head for the white flagpole in the distance located to the left hand side of the white house.

④ Enter the Army range and follow the perimeter fence and over the stone flag bridge to join the camp access road. Go left for approx. ¼ mile to the parking area by the start of the MOD assault course on the right.

The Holcombe Moor training camp started life in 1912 when the land was purchased by the Army to train local volunteers. Since then it has expanded to around 750 acres and serves as an all-year-round general purpose MOD training area. It is used by the TA and cadet at weekend and regular Army units during the week, when live firing exercises take place.

Turn left at the 3-way sign post through the iron 'kissing gate'. Follow the path downhill and across the wooden bridge over Holcombe Brook.



Jay

The brook's source is on Wet Moss high up on the moor at the head of the valley where it's called Red Brook and was harnessed upstream to drive the first mill in the valley around 1780 and eventually many more downstream. At times it has shoals of stone loach fish and many aquatic insect larvae such as mayfly nymphs reflecting the cleanliness of the water flowing through the valley.



Continue uphill through the gate and straight on towards the back of Holcombe Hill lying directly ahead.

The ruins of Middle Ridge Farm appear amongst the cluster of trees to the right with the prominent shape of what many believe to be a Bronze Age burial mound.

5 Keep going to the top of the hill to arrive at the ruins of Higher Ridge Farm on the right.

A delightful spot for a picnic lunch on a warm sunny day. Enjoy the views along the upper Reddish valley which contains evidence of human habitation going back more than 5000 years. Flint tools and stone axes have been found and many believe this valley was probably the original Holcombe. Look for the faint parallel lines running down the fields on the hillsides as evidence of the medieval ridge and furrow ploughing, created by the repeated use of ox drawn ploughs and note the ancient field boundaries constructed of earthen banks and vertical flagstone walls.

The gently sloping downhill diagonal path can now be seen going down behind Higher Ridge Farm into the trough between the ridge and the lower slopes of Holcombe Hill.

Go down to the wooden 'kissing gate' below Saplin Wood.

Go through the gate and bear right climbing gradually up through, on a sunny day, the dappled shade of the old oaks in Saplin Wood.

Saplin Wood is one of the largest areas of ancient woodland in Bury and has been recorded for at least 400 years. It provides a valuable natural habitat for many birds along with a carpet of bluebells in Spring.

Arriving at the top of the wood, follow the path just below the barbed wire fence

known locally as 'the ridge' and enjoy the splendid views that open up across Redisher and beyond to Affetside and Quarlton Heights.

Ignore the stile and public footpath sign to the left below Bank Top, continue along 'the ridge' for a further few minutes above Fine Brows.

Fine Brows provides an interesting mosaic of young birch, bracken and heathland and gorse creating impressive displays of colour in spring and autumn and a home for green hairstreak butterfly, green woodpeckers, kestrels and sparrow hawks.

Arrive at a 'T' junction where a fence and the remains of a dry stone wall and a footpath cross the 'Ridge' path.

Turn left through the 'kissing gate' proceeding up the field alongside the dry stone wall with the hill now looming ahead.

Cross the stone stile (or go through the gap in the wall behind it) into the next field and proceed straight ahead up to the narrow stone stile and onto the Moorbottom Rd.

Cross Moorbottom Road and take the stile opposite following the track across the field up to the right.

6 Option 1 (to Peel Tower). For those feeling little weary there's always:

Option 2 (Short Cut)

Turn right down Moorbottom Rd for the direct route back to Holcombe Village, missing out Peel Tower.

Otherwise, go up and around the shoulder of the hill until Peel Tower comes into view and the path joins the main track up to the tower.

7 Cross over the track to the Millennium bench (installed to celebrate the bonfire attended by thousands on Dec 31st 1999) providing a welcome treat for weary walkers to put their feet up and take in the panoramic views over Rossendale to the north and across the whole of Manchester to the Derbyshire hills in the South.

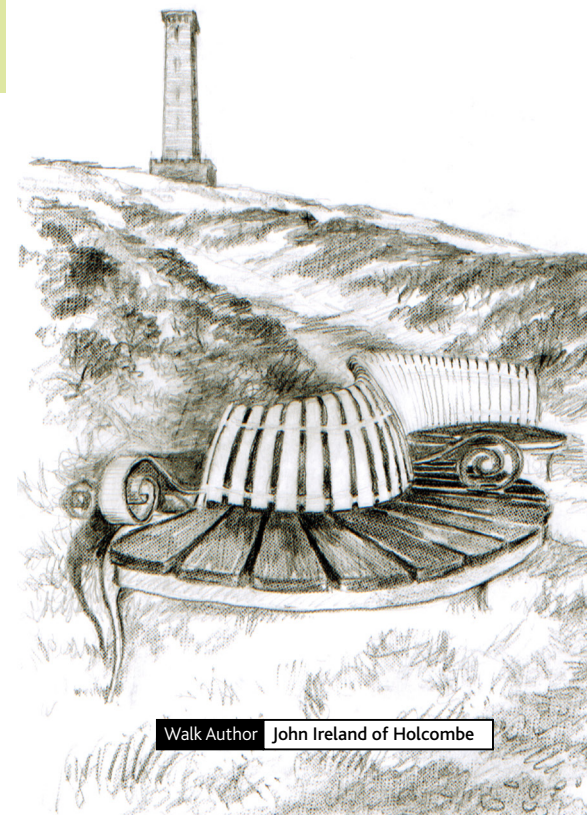
Hopefully refreshed and replenished, follow the path from the bench across the open heath land up to the Peel Monument known locally as Holcombe Tower.

The tower is 128 feet high and one of the great landmarks in East Lancashire and was opened on the 9th September 1852 as a memorial to Sir Robert Peel, Prime Minister who created the modern Police Force (often called Bobbies and Peelers years ago). The £1000 cost was raised by public subscription. It's often open at weekends, look for the Union flag flying from the top of the tower or Tel: 0161 253 5111 to confirm access.

An interesting diversion for those walkers still feeling energetic upon arrival at the Tower is to take the path to the north towards the hill in the distance, skirting the shallow pit from where the stone was quarried to build the tower and through the double gate in the distance and climb to the summit of the Harcles Hill about ½ mile ahead. This route not only provides spectacular panoramic views but is the highest point in Greater Manchester at 371 metres above sea level.

8 From the Tower continue heading north along the track over the cattle grid and alongside the dry stone wall bearing right all the way down to the Moor Rd and Holcombe village and the welcoming sight of the 18th century Shoulder of Mutton.

Holcombe village is unique in the area, an excellent example of a pre-industrial settlement almost untouched by recent developments and well worthy of its conservation area status. The village is believed to have been settled since the early medieval period and may have had a praying station there as early as 1225. Many houses date from the 17th and 18th centuries, one of the oldest being Hey House (1616). Holcombe's sporting traditions are legend and has some of the oldest hunts in England. The Holcombe Old English Game Fowl show held until recently at The Shoulder of Mutton, every New Year's Day, is reputedly the oldest in the country and evidence of the village's historic cockfighting traditions. The Holcombe Wakes, held annually until 1880, were known far and wide for their drunkenness and debauchery.



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