

Walk 2 - HOLCOMBE TO HAWKSHAW

Distance: 4 miles

About: 2 to 3 hours

Terrain: Easy > moderate

Parking: Plenty 'on street' available

Public transport:

Bus and train to Ramsbottom followed by a walk up a steep hill to Holcombe.

Refreshments:

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

No public toilets. All paths fully waymarked.

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 probably had a praying station there as early as 1225. Many houses date from the 17th and 18th centuries and 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.

Optional Route 1 (to by-pass Peel Tower)

⑧ Starting with your back to the Shoulder of Mutton turn left and then cross the road to go down Cross Lane.

At the first junction bear right along Moorbottom Rd for approximately 1/2 mile to just beyond the back of Hey House Mews to the second narrow stone stile in the wall on the left (where options 1 & 2 join)

Optional Route 2 (scenic and off road)

Starting at the Shoulder of Mutton, cross the road and proceed up the Moor Rd, over the cattle grid, turn left at the way marker, below the bench on the hillside, and follow the track up to the Tower.

An interesting diversion en route for those walkers feeling energetic is to take the path, that branches off to the right, through the quarries and climb to the summit of the Harcles Hill just ahead which not only provides spectacular panoramic views but is the highest point in Greater Manchester at 371 metres above sea level.

The Tower is 128 feet high and one of the great landmarks in East Lancashire. It was opened on the 9th September 1852 as a memorial to Sir Robert Peel, who, as Prime Minister, not only created the modern Police Force but also repealed the Corn Laws that dropped the price of a loaf of bread. 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.

Continue on past the Tower along the track and a little way downhill, on the bend, cross the stile to the right, opposite the Millennium Bench.

⑦ Installed to celebrate the Millennium bonfire, attended by thousands on Dec 31st 1999. Providing a welcome sight for weary walkers to enjoy the panoramic views over Rossendale to the north and across the whole of Manchester to Derbyshire in the South.

Proceed downhill around the shoulder of the hill and straight on (do not bear left) to Moorbottom Rd below.

Where optional 1 & 2 join

⑥ Cross Moorbottom Rd and the stone stile opposite, go down the field, through the gap in the wall and downhill again as far the 'kissing gate'.

Turn right at the gate and enjoy the superb 'ridge' walk above Fine Brows with distant view of Winter Hill and Darwen Tower to the north and west.

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.

Ignore the stile and the public footpath sign to the right below Bank Top, continue along 'the ridge'.

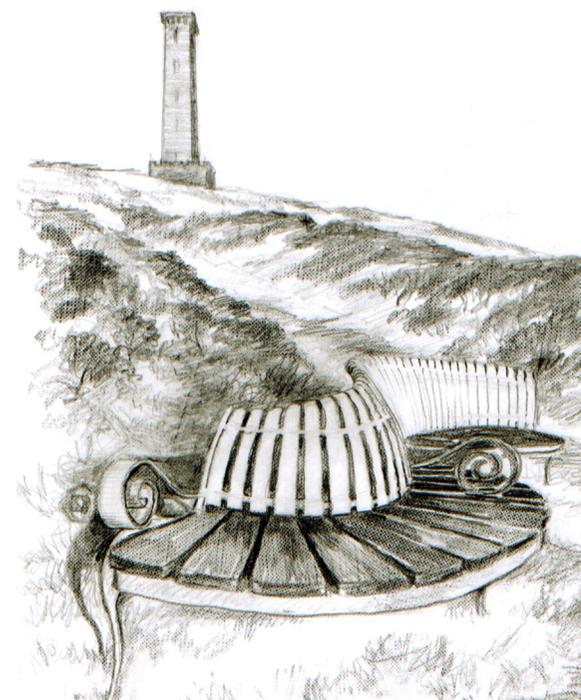
Below the easily recognisable shape of a possible bronze burial mound can be seen to the left of the ruins of Upper Ridge Farm.

Upon entering the more mature oak trees of Saplin Wood, follow the path to the left downhill through the wood, to the 'kissing gate' at the bottom.

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

⑤ Go through the gate, diagonally up the slope to the ruins of Higher Ridge Farm.

A delightful spot for a picnic on a sunny day. Enjoy the views up the length of the upper Redisher valley which contains evidence of human habitation going back over 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 method, created by the repeated use of ox drawn ploughs and also note the ancient field boundaries constructed of earthen banks and vertical flagstone walls.



Go around to the right of the ruins of Higher Ridge Farm and then down the somewhat indistinct track towards the 7 barred gate with, on a clear day, the TV mast on Winter Hill in the distance.

The ruins of Middle Ridge farm appear indistinctly amongst the cluster trees on the left, with the prominent shape of what many believe to be a Bronze Age burial mound behind it.

Go through the 7 barred gate and down the hill, do not bear left at the bottom but carry straight on crossing Holcombe Brook via a wooden bridge.

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 at Bottoms 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.

Go over the stile and uphill following the fence on the left, through the old iron 'kissing gate', to emerge onto the car park at the end of the MOD assault course as seen on the 'Krypton Factor' on TV many years ago.

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 units at weekend and regular Army units during the week, when live firing exercises take place.

④ Turn right down the access road heading for the entrance to the camp. At the camp's perimeter fence turn right again following the fence across a small stone bridge and, over the stile into the large meadow beyond the camp.

Bear slightly left and head for Higher House Farm on the far side of the field.

Approach the farm along the left hand side of the hawthorn hedge

Cross the farmyard and emerge on to Hawkshaw Lane.

Here there is a choice of routes: Option 1 (short cut)

Continue down the lane to the centre of Hawkshaw village.

Option 2 (off road and more scenic)

Turn left down the lane for no more than 20 yards and turn right up the wooden steps.

Go straight ahead across the meadow behind Finney Cote Cottage and down the hill (avoiding the rushes) following the line of the fence on the left.

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

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.

⑤ Cross the stream over the double wooden bridge and head diagonally left up the field to the 5 barred gate.

Follow the cart track, Coal Pit Lane, through a second 5 barred gate noting the remains of the old coal dry stone loading ramp on the right.

The name of the lane and the loading ramp are reminders of the successful coal mining activities that the Knowles family developed on the hillside above the track from the late 17th century onwards.

Take the right fork entering a very pleasant stretch of woodland, thick with bluebells in Spring every year.

Shortly the sound of traffic will be heard coming up from the main road between Bolton and Holcombe Brook.

② The path finishes just across the road from the Red Lion Hotel.

① Turn left and around ¼ mile up the main road is the Waggon and Horses and the centre of Hawkshaw.



Jay

Hawkshaw is an attractive village of stone built cottages, church and two warm and inviting pubs that coalesced around the junction of Hawkshaw Lane and the newly built Bolton to Edenfield turnpike in 1803. Prior to this it consisted of a loose knit collection of scattered farms. The area was first recorded in writing in 1205 as being on the edge of Holcombe Forest.

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



