

Baldersdale is a wild and harsh upland dale with only a hint of green that surrounds the river impinging on the remote brown ridges of the Cotherstone and Hunderthwaite moors. To the west the river empties into the Tees, to the east just the rocky pork pie-like summit of Goldsborough breaks the monochrome monotony. Three things brought Baldersdale to the attention of the outside world. The first was the building of the reservoirs; the second was the routing of the Pennine Way to these parts. The third, and perhaps the most fascinating, was a 1973 television series that detailed the life of Hannah Hauxwell. Hannah's family worked Low Birk Hat, the little farm down in the bottom of the valley by Blackton Reservoir. When Hannah's parents passed away she was left alone to work this isolated farm without the luxury of running water or electricity. She did so without the benefit of modern farming methods and without the use of artificial fertilisers. When Hannah retired to the nearby village of Cotherstone in 1988, Durham Wildlife Trust purchased her lands as they found the 'unimproved' fields of great interest with several uncommon species of plants flourishing. In August 2016, Hannah celebrated her 90th birthday but sadly she passed away in January 2018.

The suggested 5½ mile **BLACK** anti-clockwise route (with 750ft of ascent) begins along the dam of the huge Balderhead Reservoir where you can look down the valley to the greener but pallid horizons of Teesdale. Your eyes, however will soon be transfixed to a craggy summit that ruffles the profile of Goldsborough which will be the high point for the suggested walk. It is a fine summit, one for prolonged break on the rocks if the sun shines. From here you can look out across the whole of the North Pennines including the highest summit, Cross Fell.

Coming back down into the valley the route tramps the fields around Hury Reservoir, and those at the western end of Blackton Reservoir. The latter is the shallowest of the Baldersdale lakes and one fringed with wetlands. It is a wildfowl haven and you may see coots, moorhens, reed buntings and sedge warblers nesting: feeding visitors include the oystercatcher, snipe and redshank. An board just beyond Low Birk Hat will inform you more!

The climb back to the start point involves passing Hannah's Meadow. The 17½-acre nature reserve has a wide variety of grasses interspersed with colourful wild flowers like wood cranesbill, globeflower, marsh marigold, wood anemone, ragged robin and the adder's tongue fern, which only grows in meadows unpolluted by artificial fertilisers.



1. Walk across the Balderhead Dam causeway to the south side of the reservoir. Double back left on the stony track descending past the Blackton Youth Hostel. Beyond this a grass track leads down towards the Blackton Reservoir where it meets the Pennine Way track beyond a gate. It's worth detouring left from here to visit the wetlands on the north west shores before returning to this point (it's also very pretty). Turn right along the track and climb past Clove Lodge.

2. Beyond this take the tarmac lane to your left. On your left you pass the pastures of several farms, while on your right are the barren slopes of Cotherstone Moor.

3. Just beyond the driveway of East Friar House take the narrow path climbing half right (south-east) towards the rocks of Goldsborough (part of the Bowes Loop Pennine Way alternative).
4. By the first of the rocks take the left fork to climb to the summit. Return to this position, then take a narrow right fork path that descends northwards, back to the road. Turn right along the road and follow it down to Hury Reservoir.
5. Just beyond Willoughby Hall, double back left along the Northumbrian Water access track, then turn right off it along the grassy causeway to the north of the reservoir. A path veers left above the north shore, climbs above the Blackton Dam where it goes through a gate on the right.
6. Through a second gate in the north-west corner of the field the path veers right alongside a line of hawthorns, then turns left alongside more hawthorn trees. Past an old barn, walls to the right at first, then to the left guide the route to the footbridge across Blind Beck. Way-marking arrows are now aiding route-finding.
7. The footpath now crosses two fields, parallel with the reservoir's shoreline. In a third field, follow the dry-stone wall half-left down towards Low Birk Hat, then pass in front of the farmhouse to reach a stony track. The house itself is now in private ownership and it would be courteous not to pause too long here. Turn right along the gated track and climb out of the valley, past Hannah's Meadow and High Birk Hat to reach a higher road. Turn left then take the next turning on the left, a tarmac lane back to the car park.

