

The valley of Swaledale is famous for its natural hay meadows, which provide fertile grounds for wild flowers and grasses to thrive. However, the Hay Meadows at Muker are probably the most dramatic example of wild flower rich fields in the country and are a bit of an unsung national treasure. They are the result of years of management from the local Dales farmers who cut the fields back at the end of June (usually), to provide fodder for their livestock during the winter. With such biodiversity in evidence, the area has been designated a "Site of Special Scientific Interest" (SSSI) and in 2013, four of the meadows here were designated as "Coronation Meadows" by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. Encouraged by a number of local conservation groups such as the National Park and specifically the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, who work closely with the farmers involved, these fields are becoming more and more spectacular each year. The 12 fields at Muker are particularly pretty, especially in June when a wide range of wild flowers (including buttercups, daisies, cat's ear, wood crane's bill, Lady's mantle, pignut and the lovely melancholy thistle) are flowering and the valley floor is carpeted in a sea of colour. Six of the fields have flagged paths, however some are inaccessible but still viewable.

The June Sunday walk will start from Muker and follow the meadow walk alongside the Swale to Keld via the waterfalls and return to Muker via Kisdon, which offers fine views of upper Swaledale. The suggested **BLACK** walk is 6 miles and involves 1092ft of ascent . Meet outside the Farmer's Arms in Muker @ 10:30am. Pay & display car parking is available before the bridge on the approach to the village or free on the verge on left after driving through Muker. The post code for The Farmer's Arms is DL11 6QG and grid reference 909989. Allow 1 hr 45 mins for the journey. From Gateshead take the A1(M) to Scotch Corner then A6108 to Richmond and onwards up Swaledale then taking the B6270 to Muker, passing through Grinton, Reeth, Low Row, Healaugh and Gunnerside. Muker has a tea room and pub where refreshments may be taken after the event. Members taking dogs on this walk should note that a short lead must be used through the hay meadows. Thereafter, either a long or short lead should be used in fields with livestock as Swaledale is obviously sheep country and lambs will be in abundance. Swaledale is rugged with limestone scars above much of the dale. The villages are tightly packed to allow as much space as possible for farming. The drystone walls divide small fields, many containing field barns. Higher up, the upper hillside is less cultivated with walls running up high on to the moor. A number of farms are located high up, some as far as the divide between cultivated land and upper moors. Swaledale has its own hardy breed of sheep and show-winning breeding Rams sell for many thousands of pounds. Swaledale is also noted for lead mining and across the river on the hillside, remains of the industry can be viewed. The tunnels extend to up to six miles but miners also dammed water channels flowing down the hillside. When the dam was removed, a torrent of water would wash away the vegetation to reveal lead. Also on the hillside is what is left of Crackpot Hall! Muker is a typical Dales village with stone cottages shoe-horned into a small space. Alleyways, steps and narrow roads allow access. In addition to the pub, the village has a tearoom, art, woollen and gift shop. The walk leaves the Farmer's Arms up the lane on the right side of the pub to a metal gate and the single file stone flagged path through the meadows. Several fields are crossed before there is a fork, the club walk goes left whilst the other path crosses the Swale by a footbridge. The path begins rising as the dale narrows and follows a wood-edge above a steep drop down to the river. The Kisdon Force waterfall is worth the detour down the Pennine Way. After visiting Keld, our route heads uphill to the Pennine way. A path to the right is taken which doubles back but continues to climb before entering fields. After contouring the hillside, the path joins a track up-hill and passes a remote farm house. This is Kisdon which stands at 499m, although the path does not visit summit. The track levels off and twists to the left reaching a gate. From here the path begins the long descent to Muker crossing the Pennine Way. The views down Swaledale are superb during the descent. Please bring enough food/drink for a lunch stop during the walk.

