

Distance: 3½ miles (5.8km)

Ascent: 210m

Time: 1½-3 hours

**Public Transport:** There is no public transport to Midgehole, but the start of the route is only 1 mile from Hebden Bridge and ½ mile from the bus stop at the end of Midgehole Road served by the B3 bus between Keighley and Hebden Bridge.

**Parking:** Pay car parks at Midgehole at entrance to the National Trust's Hardcastle Craggs estate.

**Refreshments:** No refreshments.

**Character:** A short exploration of the beautiful valley of Crimsworth Dean. The route takes in Lumb Hole, Abel Cross, part of Hardcastle Craggs and the 'sacred place' Ted Hughes camped as a boy. Good paths throughout.

Hughes's poem *Dead Farms, Dead Leaves* (later retitled *Shackleton Hill*) is about the ruined farms of Crimsworth Dean's landscape. Hughes considered that the history of human effort in the region was coming to an end, defeated by the weather, land, and collapse of farming and industry. It is illustrated in *Remains of Elmet* by Fay Godwin's photo of *Baby House*, which was sited half a mile further along the track up the valley, but nearby *Nook* and *Sunny Bank* have a similar air of decay.

Continue along the track from *Abel Cross* and turn left at the end, climbing past the farm at *Laithe*. After another half mile fork right at a signpost and angle down the slope to the ruins of *Sunny Bank*. Follow the walled path down the hill to the wooded hollow of *Lumb Hole*, a fine waterfall and pool just below *Horse Bridge*. On the far bank there is a plaque commemorating Hughes's poem *Six Young Men*, which is based on a photograph taken at this location.

The *Willow Gate* packhorse path up through *Foul Scout Wood* crosses through the middle of a small circular *beareth* that was one of many dug out of the hillside for burning charcoal. These were used from the 12th century onwards and this example is notable as the path's stone surface has been laid across it, meaning it was already out of use by the 16th century or earlier. If you dig around on the lower side you'll find small pieces of charcoal that are hundreds of years old.

The horses field near *Shackleton* was where a seven-year old Hughes had the experience he would later write about in *The Horses*, describing them as 'Huge in the dense grey - ten together - megalith-still'.

Retrace your steps to the stile and follow the old walled path up the hill past the ventilation shaft for the aqueduct between *Widdop Reservoir* and *Halifax*. At the top, turn right along the track into the hamlet of *Shackleton*. At the junction bear left to a sign and stile to the left of a farm building, and follow the broken-down wall right along the edge of the field. Continue beyond the end of the wall to the left-hand of two gates, then cross the fence by another gate 20m beyond. Follow the right side of the fence and old wall through two gaps until a pedestrian gate brings you onto the other side of the next wall. Before *Abel Cote Farm*, recross to the right side and join the vehicle track immediately in front of the farm. Follow this right for half a mile to the prominent site of *Abel Cross* (see overleaf for more information).



*Slurring Rock* was used for sliding (or 'slurring') down by local children in the 19th century, and their clog irons have worn a clear groove in the rock's northern side.

From the road end at *Midgehole*, turn right at a sign before the lower car park and follow a path up to the higher track. Continue straight across above the upper car park, then turn right at a waymark post and follow a walled path between open fields. This old packhorse route bends left and continues steadily up through the trees beyond. Passing *Slurring Rock* near the top, keep right at a waymarker and then bear left before the stile to reach *Willow Gate Rock* after a few yards. There are great views from here across the *Hardcastle Craggs* woodland estate.

*Lumb Bridge* stood on *Limers' Gate*, a packhorse route between *Lancashire* and *Halifax*, and used to be known as *Horse Bridge* (and the whole valley *Horse-bridge Clough*). The pool below the *Lumb Hole* waterfall is a popular local swimming spot.

Retrace your steps from *Lumb Hole* back up the hill only as far as the first bend, then bear left at a sign and follow an old wall above *Crimsworth Dean Beck*. The path continues across *Charles Rough* to a high stone stile, then follows the fence around *Outwood*. Head straight across the track beyond and descend into *Abel Cote Wood* at a stile, soon after which you reach *Wheat Ing Bridge*.



'From where these sit  
You hear the water of seven streams fall  
To the roarer in the bottom and through all  
The leafy valley a rumouring of air go.'

The poem *Six Young Men* was based on a photograph of six companions taken at *Lumb Hole* in 1914, just before they enlisted to fight in WWI. All of them were killed, some within weeks. Hughes was greatly preoccupied with WWI and wrote about it frequently.

Do not cross *Wheat Ing Bridge*, but stay above the right bank of the stream. The path continues through *Green Hirst Wood* to a waymark post, where you turn right and climb up to join a large vehicle track. Follow it left and after 200m you pass a sheer quarry face where Hughes camped as a child. This is the setting for the second half of Hughes's story *The Deadfall*, a site he later described as a 'sacred place to me' (see overleaf for more details). At the top of the wood, the *deadfall stone* is still in place at the foot of a pine tree near the wall, but it is very difficult to access up the rough and steep bank.

*Hollin Hall* is named after its earlier use for holly farming, which provided winter fodder for livestock, and one of the valley's many names was *Hollins Valley*.

From the quarry follow the vehicle track steadily back down the hill past *Hollin Hall* to return to the car parks at *Midgehole*. It is only a mile from here along the road into *Hebden Bridge* and half a mile to the bus stop at the end of *Midgehole Road*.

*Horse Bridge* is so named because it was the site of the old packhorse bridge at *Midgehole*. It was replaced by the larger vehicle bridge when the *Saviles* developed their estate in the late 19th century and built the carriage drive up through *Hardcastle Craggs* to *Walshaw*. Horses were kept at a cottage that once stood beside *Winter Well*, which served the busy packhorse route of *Willow Gate* running between *Heptonstall* and *Limers' Gate* to the north.

Hughes's poem *Hardcastle Craggs* (later rewritten as *Leaf Mould*) was inspired by the rich woodland landscape of the *National Trust's* estate, where the Hughes family often picnicked. The woods were originally planted along the carriage drive to the *Saviles'* shooting lodge at *Walshaw*.

