



Trail

A novel character

Discover what shaped the landscape
that so inspired the Brontës

Time: 1 - 1 ½ hrs

Distance: 1 ½ miles

Landscape: rural

The small village of Haworth in West Yorkshire is most famous for its literary connections. It was here that the Brontë sisters lived, wrote and set much of their work.

But the physical story of how this rocky, wild and weather-beaten place was carved out is no less thrilling. Less than a mile away from The Brontës home we'll find evidence of dramatic movements in the Earth's crust and a landscape literally carved by ice.

Go beyond the tourist trail to discover the wild forces which shaped this landscape and find out why it holds such sway on our imagination.

Location:

Haworth, West Yorkshire

Start:

Haworth railway station, Station Road, BD22 8NJ

Finish:

Oxenhope railway station, BD22 9LB

Grid reference:

SE 03500 37095

Keep an eye out for:

Passing steam trains and locations from the film version of *The Railway Children*

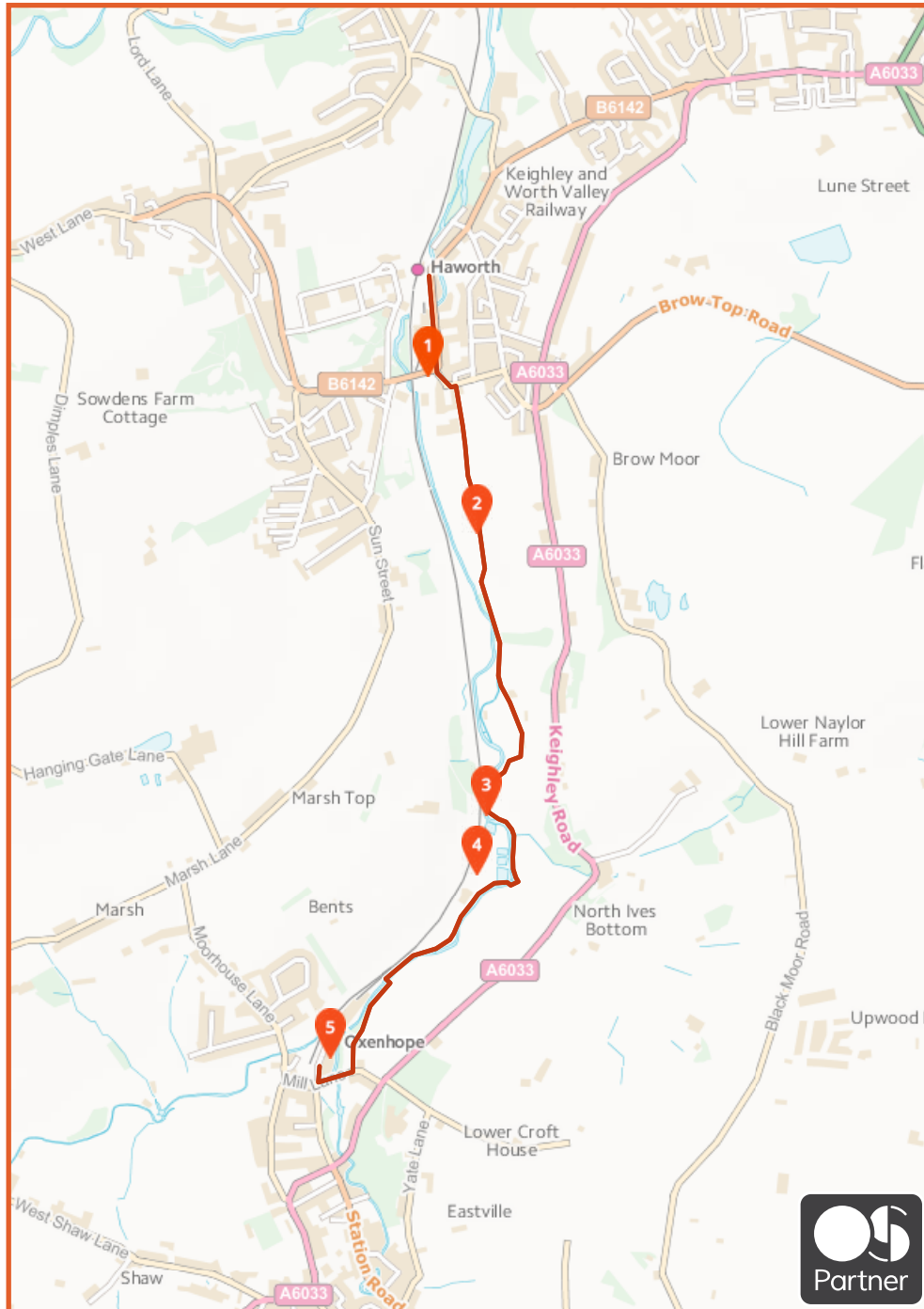
Directions



With Haworth station behind you, follow Station Road to your right and walk along until you reach a bend in the road and a bridge on your right hand side. Cross over the road and stop at the site of Bridgehouse Mill.



Route and stopping points



- 01 Bridgehouse Mill
- 02 Remains of water channel
- 03 Rocky outcrop
- 04 Meadow looking up to bank
- 05 Oxenhope railway station

01 Bridgehouse Mill

This handsome five-storey stone building was once a cotton spinning mill. Built in 1790 it was also the first textile mill to be powered by water. Notice how many windows there are. Spinning yarn into cotton required a lot of light.

As well as cotton, local work was centred specifically on the woollen industry, and the washing and weaving of wool. There were 5 large woollen mills and 1200 handlooms in Haworth and Oxenhope alone.

So why were there so many woollen mills in this area of Yorkshire? Haworth, like nearby Keighley, Bradford and Thornton benefitted from locally available coal, stone and wool. The deep valleys and climate of heavy rainfall created a plentiful and powerful water supply. These naturally occurring resources and the local workforce, created the textile industry.

Living conditions for workers however were often poor and there was little sanitation. Houses were overcrowded by large families and mortality rates were high. Much piecework was done at home or in long working days in the factories.

Although their lives were very different, The Brontës would have experienced the noise, smoke and smells from these 'dark Satanic mills' and been aware of the lives of the workers. Charlotte Brontë's novel *Shirley* published in 1849 is set against the backdrop of the Luddite uprisings in the Yorkshire cotton mills.

Directions

From the mill and road bridge, turn into Brow Road which bends around to your left and goes past Bridge House B&B, Surgery Street and the entrance to the original Bridge Mill. At the foot of the hill, take the footpath immediately signposted to your right. The path goes up some stone steps to continue forward along a stone walled lane, with the wall on your right hand side.

As you emerge from the lane into a field, the path continues forward and straight on. Your path will now be parallel to the railway line and the beck will be below you and to your right for most of the walk. Follow this path along through several fields until you reach an iron kissing gate. Go through the gate and into the field. Look for an overgrown water channel on the right.

02 Remains of water channel

See if you can spot the remains of a long, low, man-made water channel. This channel (or goit) was built to re-direct the water flowing from Bridgehouse Beck (the beck just below us) down towards a water-wheel which powered Bridgehouse Mill where we started the trail. But was it necessary to dig this trench? Surely with a regular rainfall the beck itself would provide enough water to power the factories?

Although the local climate provided regular rainfall it wasn't enough to guarantee a constant, powerful flow. For the mill owners periods of low rain fall were not good for production. This water channel helped feed a constant supply of water from the beck into a dam which in turn powered the water wheel and kept the looms working and the workers busy.

Now take in the view around you, down into the valley and towards the beck, and then behind you at the steep hillside opposite Haworth. During the last Ice Age around 18-25,000 years ago a layer of thick ice covered the north of Britain. Both the ice itself and the torrents of meltwater that were unleashed when it melted, helped to carve the steep valleys we see in the landscape.

Steep-sided valleys like the one you are standing in now were perfect sites for industries relying on waterpower, well before electricity was developed. Natural forces created the ideal conditions for industry to thrive and in turn formed the particular character of this area of West Yorkshire where mill towns nestle

in deep valleys. This combination of rugged scenery and smoking factories must have helped form the strong imaginations of the Brontës and were evocative settings against which their dramatic novels could unfold.

Directions

To get here, you passed through a second iron kissing gate and an iron bridge. Cross the bridge and continue left along the footpath, carrying straight on through woodland (with the goit on your left). Walk between some black bollards as the path narrows (the muddy, boggy goit is immediately to your left and the stream to your right lower down the hillside). Continue through a metal kissing gate to reach a footpath sign. Follow the path forward and slightly left.

A pasture and the railway line will be on the right and the path continues slightly uphill. When you reach a ruined farm building on the left, the path forks. Keep on the right hand fork, leading to a stone stile. Follow the path uphill with a low stone wall on your right. The footpath emerges into a farm.

Go through the farmyard keeping the farmhouse on your left and head to the yellow footpath sign on the gate at the other side of the yard. Immediately through the gate, turn right and follow the footpath steeply downhill back towards the valley bottom.

Continue along through some trees and onto the riverside path. Stop when you reach a stone bridge leading over the beck with an onward path under the railway line. Don't cross the bridge. With the bridge on your right, turn around to look for a very high rocky outcrop beyond the meadow, covered mostly in heather. See if you can see the black ledge of a small cave high up.

03 Rocky outcrop

You'll often see outcrops of hard rock on and around the hills of West Yorkshire. The Cow and Calf rocks on Ilkley Moor are perhaps one of the most well-known examples.

Such rocks were formed in the Carboniferous period around 360-290 million years ago, when this was a swampy area. Over time layers of sand and mud were laid down and compressed together to form hard rock layers – these are the millstone grits that formed the Pennines. Look closely and you'll see the layers, rather like a millefeuille pastry.

Here the rocks lie directly along the line of the Hewenden Fault, a small fracture line in the earth's surface and part of the Craven Fault pattern that stretches across North Yorkshire and Lancashire. Towards the end of the Carboniferous Period a distant collision of continents created the power and the stress to generate earthquakes, open up fault lines and force the rocks upwards to form the hilly and rocky Pennine landscape. The rocks here aren't particularly high (around 200 metres), but in other parts of the region the uplift was 1,200 metres.

But why are some rocks like these found in outcrops or left standing in isolation? When the ice melted much of the softer rocks were washed away by the melt-water. Over the years these rocks were further eroded by wind and rain, leaving only the harder lumps of rock, like this outcrop, exposed.

In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, these outcrops of gritstone rock become symbolic of a dead, barren landscape: *"The abrupt descent of Penistone Crags particularly attracted her notice; especially when the setting sun shone on it and the topmost heights, and the whole extent of landscape besides lay in shadow. I explained that they were bare masses of stone, with hardly enough earth in their clefts to nourish a stunted tree."*

Directions

Return to the path by the riverside and pick up your original direction, following the path along the beck. You will almost immediately cross over some large stones laid as a small bridge across a stream into the beck. Cross a small wooden bridge and go through a stone stile-gate and walk further along into this next meadow, pausing to look upwards to your left and to a line of trees on top of a grassy bank.

04

Meadow looking up to bank

The rising bank of land you can see ahead is another feature shaped by water during the Ice Age. If you look carefully, you may notice that it slopes slightly, and is curved at the top.

The bank is made up of boulder clay. The glaciers that covered the land here actually flowed very gradually, like slow-motion rivers of ice. As it travelled over the rocky landscape the ice picked up debris and gradually wore it down into fine particles and silt. When the ice melted, streams flowed across the country, carrying with them the silt. It is thought that several rivers flowed together to form a river delta here.

When the water reached the lower part of the hillside it had less energy so deposited the silt - forming boulder clay. This created the bank we see today. Where the water stopped suddenly then trickled immediately downwards, it left a sharp, curved edge to the bank.

Directions

Continue along the riverside path and slightly uphill to a stile. Continue along the beck side path which leads towards Oxenhope. Go through the field and up some stone steps and through a stone stile.

Continue on this rocky path, now slightly downhill, and turn right over a footbridge. Once across the bridge, turn left onto a gently sloping stony path with a wall on the left immediately facing a farm. Continue forwards and slightly uphill onto a tarmac path which leads you past a sewage plant.

Continue onto the footpath with a high wall on the right hand side. Go through a kissing gate and you should now have the railway line above and immediately on the right, with the stream on the left. When you meet a footbridge, turn left across the bridge, ignoring signs for the Railway Children walk to your right.

Continue along the path to a grassy slope towards a wall and gate. You will then emerge in open space with shingly flat area to your right and a house on the left. Continue to the end of the track where your path meets a lane and turn right, slightly downhill. Follow the road, crossing over the river. At the next junction, turn right and walk towards Oxenhope railway station.

05

Oxenhope railway station

Here at Oxenhope station you can take the train back to Haworth where we started the trail. Built in 1867 to bring factory workers to the mills from Keighley, Bradford and beyond, this railway line was instrumental in the success of the textile mills and the huge profits made by the mill owners.

The line follows the path of the river towards Haworth along the bottom of the valley. Today the station and railway line is a key part of the local tourist trail. Oxenhope station and this line were used in the popular film version of *The Railway Children*.

Thousands of visitors come to Haworth, Top Withens and Oxenhope from all over the world. Some to

follow in the footsteps of Brontës' characters but many are compelled by the drama and 'wildness' of this rugged moorland. Our perceptions of this landscape are indelibly caught up with the vision they created of a wild, untamed place carved from ice and eroded by rain and wind.

On this trail we've gone beyond the fiction to find out how physical processes that happened thousands of years ago have given this area its novel character that we cannot help but think of a 'Brontë Country.'

Directions

To return to the start of the walk, catch the train from Oxenhope station or follow the riverside path back to Haworth.

 Trail complete – we hope you have enjoyed it!

Thank you!



This trail was created by Charlotte Derry with assistance and research from Linda Pierson and Reg Hindley, author of *Exploring Oxenhope* (2006, Amadeus Press)