# Seventy years on, the Lyke Wake Walk remains a living family tradition in the North York Moors



One August evening in 1955, the York Mountaineering Club gathered in the Olde Starre Inne, pondering the lack of summits to scale around their city. It was during this gathering that club chair David Laughton brandished a copy of Dalesman magazine, revealing an ambitious challenge conceived by Bill Cowley, the column's writer. Cowley offered an "inexpensive" cup as a prize for anyone who could traverse the North York Moors within 24 hours. The proposed route spanned across a landscape rich in history and hardship, encompassing Carlton Moor, Cringle Moor, Cold Moor, and howling wind-swept ridges leading to the sea at Ravenscar.

With a resounding "Aye," Laughton's fellow mountaineers accepted the challenge. Thus began a series of weekends spent hitchhiking to the moors, finalising their ambitious route. The first successful attempt at the Lyke Wake Walk took place on October 1, 1955, when Laughton, Cowley, and a hardy group of nine others began their trek. The journey lasted for 23 hours and concluded with the group receiving their promised tankards. Cowley, mindful of the ancient burial mounds along the way, named the walk after the "Lyke Wake Dirge," echoing the somber themes surrounding the burial sites along their path.

Reflecting on this rich narrative, many participants over the years have echoed sentiments of camaraderie forged amidst the challenges of the trek. The Lyke Wake Walk has become a rite of passage for over 160,000 walkers since its inception, particularly thriving in the 1960s and 1970s when participation peaked, reaching annual numbers of around 15,000. However, this explosion in popularity had repercussions; the growing foot traffic began to adversely affect the delicate moorland ecology, prompting the New Lyke Wake Club to collaborate with landowners and conservation bodies to protect the landscape. Alternative routes, such as the Hambleton Hobble and Shepherd's Round, were devised to distribute walker traffic more evenly across the popular regions of the moors.

In recent years, the walk has remained a familial tradition for many. One such participant, Paul Walker, shared plans to honour the 70th anniversary of the iconic trek. He was joined by his own children and their families, continuing the legacy of adventure passed down through generations. Notably, Malcolm Walker, one of the original participants, now at 89, walked the final stretch of the route alongside his family. They started their endeavour in the wee hours, braving the early morning darkness and the elements. As they traversed Carlton Bank, the glittering lights of Middlesbrough below served as a comforting backdrop.

Throughout the day, the family navigated through striking landscapes punctuated by standing stones and vibrant expanses of heather, capturing the essence of the moor’s beauty. Opinions varied; while some marveled at the mesmerizing scenery—a riot of pinks, yellows, and lime greens—others expressed fatigue and discomfort. A stop at the venerable Lion Inn moorland pub provided a brief reunion with the modern world, contrasting sharply with the rugged wilderness they had traversed.

As Malcolm reflected on the experience, he expressed a touching sentiment about the true value of the walk being the time spent with family, rather than the exertion itself. The shared journey, embodying both challenge and celebration, showcased how the spirits of past generations continue to resonate through the landscape. As they reached their final destination at the Raven Hall Hotel in Ravenscar, it was clear that for many, the Lyke Wake Walk transcends mere physical accomplishment—it is a cherished tradition that binds families across the sweeping expanses of the North York Moors, reminding all who journey through it of their shared heritage in this rugged terrain.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2025/may/13/north-york-moors-walk-lyke-wake)
2. Paragraphs 3-4: [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyke_Wake_Walk), [[3]](https://lykewakewalk.co.uk/history.html)
3. Paragraph 5: [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilla_Cross), [[5]](https://hikingphotographer.uk/2022/06/lyke-wake-walk-north-yorkshire-map-route.html)
4. Paragraphs 6-7: [[6]](https://www.thewhitbyguide.co.uk/lyke-wake-walk/)
5. Paragraphs 8-9: [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Man-i%27-th%27-Moss)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2025/may/13/north-york-moors-walk-lyke-wake> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyke_Wake_Walk> - The Lyke Wake Walk is a 40-mile challenge walk across the North York Moors in England. Established in 1955 by Bill Cowley, it commemorates the ancient burial mounds and coffin routes of the moors. The walk starts at Scarth Wood Moor near Osmotherley and ends at Ravenscar on the coast. Participants aim to complete the route within 24 hours. The walk's name derives from the 'Lyke-Wake Dirge,' a traditional Yorkshire song about watching over a corpse. Over 160,000 people have completed the walk since its inception, with peak participation in the 1960s and 1970s. The Lyke Wake Club, founded by Cowley, maintains records and traditions associated with the walk. The club's archives are held at the North Yorkshire County Archives and the Ryedale Folk Museum. The walk passes notable landmarks such as Lilla Cross, a 10th-century cross marking the burial site of Lilla, a thegn of King Edwin of Northumbria. The route also includes the Blue Man-i'-th'-Moss, a standing stone believed to have been standing since pre-Roman times. The New Lyke Wake Club continues to promote the walk and its traditions, organizing events and maintaining the route. The club's website provides information on the walk, membership, and related activities.
3. <https://lykewakewalk.co.uk/history.html> - The Lyke Wake Walk was established in 1955 when Bill Cowley challenged walkers to traverse the North York Moors from west to east within 24 hours. The first successful crossing was completed on October 1, 1955, leading to the formation of the Lyke Wake Club. Over the following decades, the walk gained popularity, with an estimated 160,000 people completing it by the 2000s. During its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, up to 15,000 walkers participated annually, many raising funds for various charities. However, the high volume of walkers began to impact the moorland ecology, prompting the club to collaborate with landowners and the National Park Authorities to mitigate environmental damage. Alternative routes, such as the Hambleton Hobble and the Shepherd's Round, were developed to distribute foot traffic more evenly across the area. In 1973, the Lyke Wake Club formed a limited company to protect the intellectual property rights associated with the walk.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilla_Cross> - Lilla Cross is a 10th-century cross located on Lilla's Howe, a hilltop in the North York Moors, England. The cross marks the burial site of Lilla, a thegn of King Edwin of Northumbria, who is said to have been killed in 626 while protecting the king from an assassination attempt. The cross became a waymarker for travelers, especially those journeying from Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay to Pickering. It intersects with several ancient paths, including the Old Salt Road and Pannierman's Way. The Lyke Wake Walk passes near Lilla Cross, and the area is known for its archaeological significance, including ancient burial mounds and standing stones.
5. <https://hikingphotographer.uk/2022/06/lyke-wake-walk-north-yorkshire-map-route.html> - The Lyke Wake Walk is a 40-mile challenge across the North York Moors, established in 1955 by Bill Cowley. The walk commemorates ancient burial mounds and coffin routes, with the name derived from the 'Lyke-Wake Dirge,' a traditional Yorkshire song about watching over a corpse. Over 160,000 people have completed the walk since its inception, with peak participation in the 1960s and 1970s. The route starts at Scarth Wood Moor near Osmotherley and ends at Ravenscar on the coast. The walk passes notable landmarks such as Lilla Cross, a 10th-century cross marking the burial site of Lilla, a thegn of King Edwin of Northumbria. The Blue Man-i'-th'-Moss, a standing stone believed to have been standing since pre-Roman times, is also along the route. The New Lyke Wake Club continues to promote the walk and its traditions, organizing events and maintaining the route. The club's website provides information on the walk, membership, and related activities.
6. <https://www.thewhitbyguide.co.uk/lyke-wake-walk/> - The Lyke Wake Walk is a 40-mile challenge across the North York Moors, established in 1955 by Bill Cowley. The walk commemorates ancient burial mounds and coffin routes, with the name derived from the 'Lyke-Wake Dirge,' a traditional Yorkshire song about watching over a corpse. Over 160,000 people have completed the walk since its inception, with peak participation in the 1960s and 1970s. The route starts at Scarth Wood Moor near Osmotherley and ends at Ravenscar on the coast. The walk passes notable landmarks such as Lilla Cross, a 10th-century cross marking the burial site of Lilla, a thegn of King Edwin of Northumbria. The Blue Man-i'-th'-Moss, a standing stone believed to have been standing since pre-Roman times, is also along the route. The New Lyke Wake Club continues to promote the walk and its traditions, organizing events and maintaining the route. The club's website provides information on the walk, membership, and related activities.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Man-i%27-th%27-Moss> - Blue Man-i'-th'-Moss is a standing stone located on Wheeldale Moor in the North York Moors, England. It stands approximately 2 meters tall and is believed to have been in place since pre-Roman times. The stone is weathered, with traces of blue paint and an engraved letter 'E' with the date 1841 on its south face. The stone serves as a parish boundary marker and is situated along the Lyke Wake Walk route. A memorial plaque was placed at its base in 2003 but was removed in 2016. The stone's exact origins and purpose remain a subject of interest and research.