

5 *Musbury Heights and Helmshore*

Stunning scenery and fantastic views await you on this Helmshore-based route.

START: Car park at Helmshore Mills, Helmshore (GPS waypoint SD 777 214)

DISTANCE: 4.5 miles (7km)

DIFFICULTY: 🟡 **HEIGHT GAIN:** ▲▲

APPROX. TIME: 2 hours

PARKING: Available at Helmshore Mills at the beginning of the route

ROUTE TERRAIN: Hard tracks, fields, grass hillsides

FACILITIES: Café at Helmshore Mills, open to the general public from 11am

SUITABILITY: Not suitable for wheelchairs or prams, dogs must be kept under control around livestock and ground nesting birds

OS MAPS: Landranger 103 (Blackburn and Burnley), Explorer 287 (West Pennine Moors)

A four and a half mile route, which starts from the quiet village of Helmshore and takes the walker over moorland, through valleys and over hilltops, before skirting nearby Holden Wood Reservoir.

Due to the terrain and number of hills and stiles encountered, we can't class this as an accessible walk. Dogs are permitted, but must be kept under control, especially in areas with ground nesting birds.

Parking is available at the beginning of the route at Helmshore Mills Textile Museum, plus there's a café if you fancy something to eat or drink while you're there.



Helmshore is a village in the Rossendale Valley, south of Haslingden. The village sits beside and includes the old township of Musbury, part of Haslingden and part of Tottington Higher End.

The name 'Helmshore' is said to mean 'shelter on the steep slope' and the spectacular, flat-topped Musbury Tor dominates the area. At 338 metres, it is one of the tallest hills in the Rossendale Valley and was once at the centre of a deer park, created in the 1300s by the Earl of Lincoln.



Either side of the Tor are two valleys; Musbury Valley to the north west and Alden Valley in the south west.

The area was thinly populated until the Industrial Revolution, which transformed the whole of East Lancashire into a hub for textiles. Small mills were built on the river valleys, with a number appearing in Alden Valley in particular. At the end of the 18th century, Midge Hole Mill and Sunnybank Mill were built and by the 1830s, there was also a small bleach works – Alden Old Mill – at the head of the valley, as well as the additions of Clough, Higher and Lower Alden Mills. Higher Alden was the

first dedicated cotton mill and was located immediately below where Alden Farm stands today.

Industry expanded as time went on and larger mills were built in Helmshore, closer to the railway, roads and the housing where the workers lived, making these mills much more practical than the outlying smaller ones. By the latter half of the 19th century, the small mills had disappeared and a focus on farming returned to the valley, while Helmshore became a mill workers settlement, with woollen and

cotton mills and workers housing along the River Ogden.

On the north west side of Musbury Valley is Musbury Heights, which was once a quarry but is now disused. The ruins of several structures remain here, including a chimney, spoil heaps and old workings. The area is popular with walkers and is an ideal starting point for a walk to the nearby Grane Valley.

This walk also skims Holden Wood Reservoir, one of the three reservoirs found in Haslingden Grane, along with Calf Hey Reservoir and Ogden Reservoir. Before the

reservoirs were built in the 19th century, Haslingden Grane had a population of around 1,300 and the remains of some buildings can still be seen.

Getting there

If you're looking to travel to Helmshore via public transport, there are regular buses from

Blackburn bus station and nearby Rawtenstall bus station, which is on Bacup Road. The East Lancashire Railway also runs between Rawtenstall, Bury and Heywood, but this service doesn't run at all times during the week, so it's best to check before you travel via the East Lancashire Railway website – www.eastlancsrailway.org.uk

Where to visit

Helmshore Mills Textile Museum

Holcombe Road, Helmshore, Lancashire, BB4 4NP

Situated at the beginning of the route, Helmshore Mills Textile Museum is the perfect place to pop into while you're in the area.



You can explore the true story of the Lancashire textile industry, from the 18th century right up to the present day, through live demonstrations of the original working machinery and the various textile treasures on display from famous inventors.

There's also a chance to follow the story of Lancashire's unique role in the industrial revolution, through the revolution gallery, and you can discover how raw wool and cotton were transformed into yarn ready to be woven into cloth.

There's a changing programme of events, activities, demonstrations, talks, workshops and children's holiday activities too, which will keep all the family entertained.

After you've soaked in the atmosphere of these majestic mills, why not visit the museum café and shop, where you can relax and enjoy wholesome Lancashire food with an up-to-date twist. The shop offers traditional and contemporary gifts for all ages, focusing on Lancashire-made crafts and products.

Helmshore Mills Textile Museum is open seven days a week, from 12pm to 4pm Monday to Friday and 12pm to 5pm Saturday and Sunday. The café and shop are both open from 11am. Entry is £4 for adults, £3 for concessions, with no charge for accompanied children.

The walker's view



David Turner discovers Helmshore with this route

I've covered some great walks around Lancashire over the last few months but this particular route, which takes in the hills and valleys around Helmshore, stands out as one of my favourites. Perhaps it was the particularly good weather that put a smile on my face - or perhaps it was the big views and variety of wildlife that I passed along the way that did the trick.

The route from Helmshore Mills soon rises up to meet a section of the Rossendale Way, a 41-mile high-level route around the Rossendale Valley. There's a sense of anticipation as you make your way along the path between High Moss and Green Height. The route you're to take can be seen to disappear around Burnt



Hill to the left, before emerging on the other side of the valley and following the hillside all the way along to Musbury Heights.

Lapwing called and circled overhead as I made my way towards the valley path. These are ground nesting birds and although I didn't spot a nest, it's

likely that there was one nearby; it's certainly the right time of year. Make sure to keep dogs on a lead around this section so as not to disturb the birds.

Buzzards and wheatear made an appearance on the section around Musden Head and the hot sun brought the butterflies out in force. There are quite a few tumbledown stone and slate structures along the valley path and they're ideal for providing a low wall, where you can rest your legs for a few minutes and take in the view.

I can't imagine this particular route is much of a secret, but despite the fine weather I didn't see a single person between leaving the road at Helmshore, and descending the hillside path to Holden Wood Reservoir at the tail end of the walk. I'm looking forward to walking more of the Rossendale Way in the near future and if this particular section is anything to go by, I'm in for a treat.



While you are there!

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Irwell Sculpture Trail

Running close to this route is a section of the 33 mile long Irwell Sculpture Trail. The trail runs through Salford, Bury and Rossendale and is the largest sculpture route in the UK. It makes a great free day out for all the family, connecting local heritage, the landscape and communities, plus there are links to a host of cultural attractions, from art galleries and museums to the East Lancashire Railway.

The nearest sculptures to Helmshore are In the Picture, below, and Remnant Kings, just south of Irwell Vale. Although some may choose to, you don't have to do all 33 miles of the trail in one go, as it's also split into bite size clusters, allowing you to either take a short walk or spend all day exploring the area.



Snig Hole Park

If you want to really make a day of it, why not head to Helmshore Community Park, popularly known as Snig Hole Park. The park isn't far from the beginning of this route and is ideally positioned for popping into on the way home or even before you head out on this walk.

The park dates back to 1922 and was given to the people of Helmshore by Mr and Mrs Oliver William Porritt, in memory of their father and grandfather. It consists of two areas - a formal gardens area with clock tower and pathways between the lawns, shrubs and mature trees - and a second area where you can find the children's play area and football pitch.

A community group has been set up to help re-develop areas of the park, but it is still a pleasant place to explore if you're in the area.

Wildlife watch

This is a particularly great route if you want to see some wildlife, with nesting lapwing, buzzards soaring above and wheatear just some of the birds spotted when we went to test this walk out. It's also a great time for butterflies at the moment, with small skipper, speckled wood and peacock just a few to look out for.



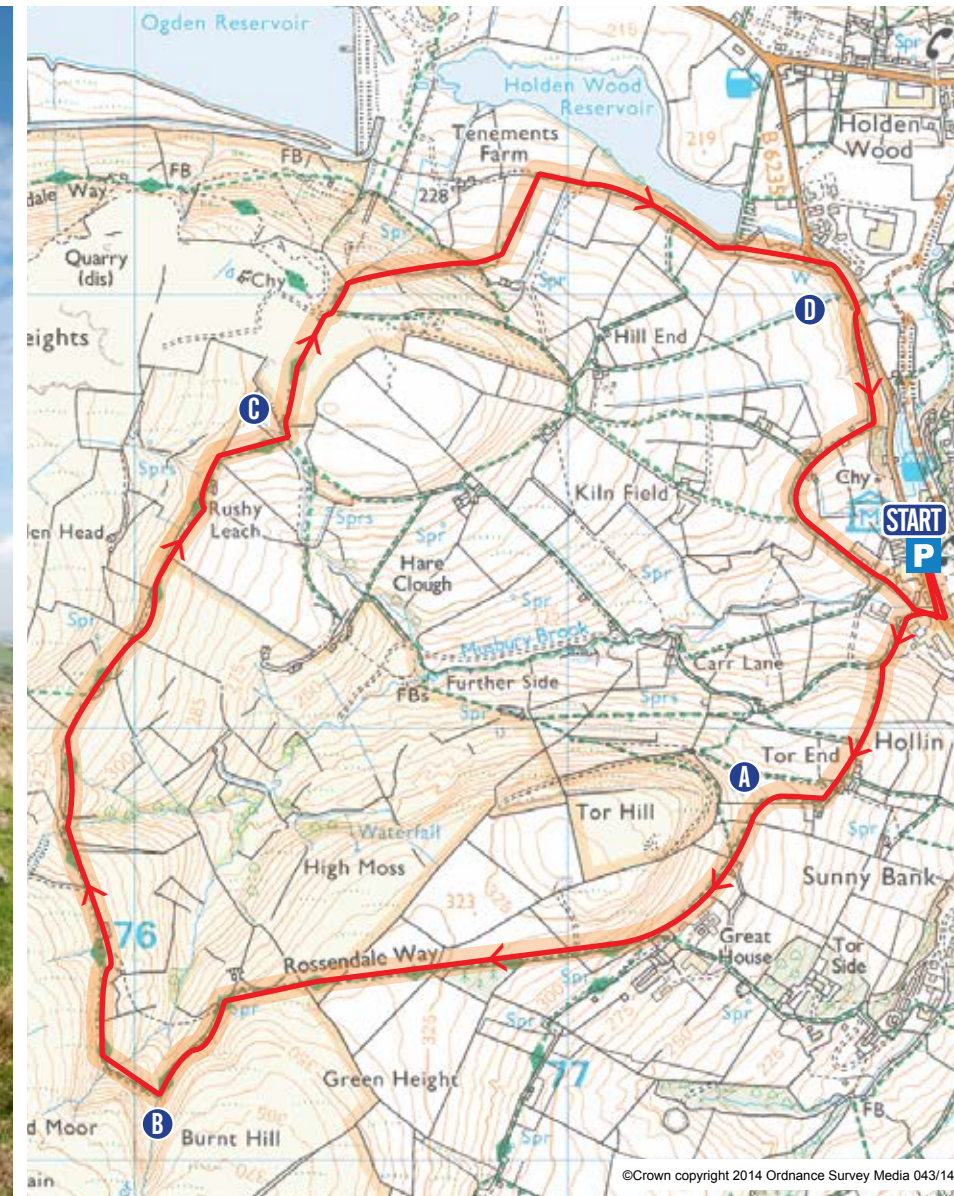
Cut out this page and take with you...

5 Musbury Heights and Helmshore

HOLCOMBE ROAD, HELMSHORE, LANCASHIRE, BB4 4NP

Enjoy stunning scenery and fantastic views on this four and a half mile, Helmshore-based walk.

Please ensure that all dogs are kept under control on this route, especially at this time of year.



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5 Your walk, step-by-step

START From Helmshore Mill car park, cross over then turn left along Holcombe Road. After reaching the garage, turn right up Park Road and pass Albert Mill Antiques on your right. Take the signed public footpath between some conifers and a stone building, and follow the track as it gradually ascends the hillside.



Pass through the green gate and continue on for a few metres to the fence on your left, which rises up the side of the hill. Follow this fence line up the side of the hill. At the end of the fence, continue across the field in the same direction and pass through the gap in the wall beside two stone slabs set into the ground. Carry on through the next field and go over the stone steps in the wall. Continue down the track and as it bends to the right, take the stile straight ahead beside the house.

Follow the stone wall on the left, then take the stile on the left. **A** Keep the newly planted trees on your left and then follow the wall once it begins. Pass over the stone stile and continue on. After reaching the hard track, follow it away from the farm and up the hill. Go through the stile and continue

in the same direction, passing a group of trees on the left. Go through the gap in the wall and into the next field - aim for the orange marker post in the distance directly in front of you.

Go over the stile in the fence on the left and continue on towards the orange marker post. Go through another stile and then through the gate. Turn left along the path. Pass by a marker on the left for the Rossendale Way and continue to follow the path over the broken down wall and over to the right. The path soon becomes clear again and joins a stone wall on the right.

"From this point, the path is obvious as you continue to follow the Rossendale Way around the valley and over to the other side."



After reaching the foot of the valley beside a stream, **B** continue along the track as it bends to the right and leads you over to the other side of the valley. Pass by various derelict stone buildings along the way as you carry on along the path.

The path eventually leads to a wooden fence with a wooden gate to the left. Pass through and follow the wall on your left. A new tree plantation appears on your right. Go through another wooden gate and follow the wall on your left once more to arrive at another of the stone ruins.

Continue to follow the path past the buildings and along the top edge of the fields down to your right. Ignore the stile on the right, which leads to an enclosed footpath running alongside the stone wall, instead keep going along the current path until you reach a wall corner and stile. **C** Cross over and bear left, following the direction of the Rossendale Way marker post. When the path seems to fork, keep left again.



The path leads through the remains of the stone quarry and eventually out onto a junction of paths. A tall chimney can be seen over to the left. Avoid the paths to the left and the right and take the faint path directly in front, which passes to the right of a wooden post. Follow this path around to the right and continue on past the gully on the left. Carefully follow the path down the hillside, keeping the wooden and wire fence on your right. Holden Wood reservoir sits in the valley below.

After reaching the foot of the hill, cross over the stile into the field and bear right to cross over another stile. Aim for the trees in the distance, keeping them on your right. Find the ladder stile at the bottom of the field and cross

over before turning right along the track. Stay on the track until it bends to the left and passes over one end of the reservoir. At this point, take the path ahead which runs up and alongside the fence. Go over the wooden boardwalks and continue on to the woodland ahead. The path eventually leads out of the woodland and to a stile beside Holcombe Road. Go over the stile and cross the road to the pavement on the other side. Turn right along the road to reach the track on the opposite side of the road, which leads up behind the row of cottages. **D**

"At this point you can either follow Holcombe Road back to the start of the walk or continue up behind the cottages and avoid the final road section"



Carry on behind the cottages and up the steep incline. Follow the track around to the right and cross over the stile. Cross another stile a bit further on and head down the track ahead. Keep going along the track to eventually arrive back at Albert Mill Antiques on your left. From here, retrace your steps back to the start of the walk.



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