The Pendle Witches Story

Pendle Hill rises majestically above an ancient hunting ground, once the home of wolves and wild boar, a wild and mysterious place. Beneath the hill lie pretty villages which tell a story of intrigue and witchcraft nearly 400 years old.

Many novels have been written about the world famous Pendle Witches but reality in this case turns out to be stranger than fiction.

The Pendle Witches lived in the early 1600s at a time of religious persecution and superstition. The Protestant king, James I, had just survived the Catholic gunpowder plot. Catholics and those suspected of witchcraft (sometimes thought to be one and the same) came under more scrutiny than ever, and the king brought in the death penalty for those found guilty of witchcraft.

The two are interrogated at Ashton House and, perhaps wishing to enhance their local reputation, try to outdo each other with their stories, including the story of meeting the devil in the quarry. On April 3rd, 1612 Demdike, Chattox, Device, and Redfearn are committed for trial for witchcraft at Lancaster Castle.

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Walking With Witches Trail

The Eastern Loop (3½ miles) starting at Barley Car Park.

1. From the car park follow the Pendle Way footpath along the river through the woods, passing along the outdoor education centre. Immediately after a small red brick building turn right into Well Head Road signposted Sabden Fold. After 400 metres there is Faugh's Quarry.
2. Continue past the house and take the stile on your right and follow the dry stone wall ascending steeply to the crest (frequent pauses to admire the view are recommended).
3. On reaching Drivers Height Farm pass the driveways to the house and continue up the hill. Follow the road to the right of the house and continue past Moss End and Bull Hole Farms seen in the valley below. Follow the Pendle Way down to Newchurch in Pendle, heading to the right of the church of St Mary’s, consecrated in 1544. If you look up at the church’s tower you will find the Eye of God, a mysterious “a thing in the shape of a hare” dug out of the church’s graveyard. Should you like a souvenir too, please use the stone pump house.
4. Cross the stream via a footbridge on the left and follow the footpath along the right-hand side of the quarry. Today's visitor with a wonderful piece of quarryman’s humour will forever be associated with the Pendle Witches, but the hill was also the subject of religious inspiration. In 1652 George Fox climbed Pendle Hill and had a vision on the hill which inspired him to form the Quakers. Heyan Hill is the likely site, is situated east of Blacko, at Malkin Tower Farm – where part of the wall of her home still exists.
5. From the bottom corner of the car park follow the Pendle Way footpath immediately after the bridge. Continue along the lefthand bank of Pendle Water. On approaching Whitehough Centre on your left over a number of small foot bridges.
6. Follow the road through the village passing Crowtrees. Turn right on the road uphill and turn right along a track. After 180 metres turn right over a stile and descend to Croft House Farm. Continue through the fields, crossing stiles and footbridge along the clearly marked Pendle Way to Roughlee. Turn right on joining the road, Roughlee Hall is on your right.
7. From the car park Roughlee Hall is on your right. Continue along the drive and left at the Pendle Way sign.
8. At the waymarked post turn left following the road towards Whitehough, keep a left. On reaching Devil's Hump Farm pass the driveways to the house and continue past the house.
9. Follow the footpath along the right-hand side of a field. After 200 metres turn right into Well Head Road signposted Sabden Fold. After 400 metres there is Faugh's Quarry.
10. Continue along the road passing Moss End and Bull Hole Farms seen in the valley below. Follow the road past Saddlers Farm (now Shekinah Christian Centre).

Acknowledgements

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It was a dangerous time for two Pendle families, led by two old maids, Demdike and Chattox. Long since widowed, their existence depended on exaggerating the cures they offered to local villagers. It would prove to be their undoing.

On a cold lonely road to Golme on a March day in 1612 a man collapses to the ground paralysed. His name is John Law, a pedlar from Halifax. Just moments before Demdike’s granddaughter, Alison Device, had cursed him. She would not give her grandmother what she wanted for a spell.

Abraham Law, the pedlar’s son, heard Alison in front of local magistrate, Roger Nowell. Alison, overawed by the situation, confessed and incriminates both her grandmother, Demdike, and her local rival, Chattox.

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The constable finds human bones and teeth stolen from a graveyard at St Mary’s and a clay image. James Demdike confesses to using the image to cause the death of Anne Redfearn. The others at the alleged “Witches Sabbath” meeting are all rounded up and imprisoned in Lancaster Castle.

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On August 17th the trial began. The prosecution’s star witness was nine year old Jennet Device who in court identifies those suspected of witchcraft. The others at the alleged “Witches Sabbath” meeting are all rounded up and imprisoned in Lancaster Castle.