

Gunnerside and Old Gang Smelt Mill

We start at the small car park in the centre of Gunnerside. This is a popular area, and there are not many spaces available, so an early start is recommended during peak season. The car park is next to the stone bridge over the Gunnerside Gill, just off the B6270 and is payable via an honesty box. Sat nav users can use the postcode DL11 6LE, whilst What-3-Words tag **profile.scorch.revamped** pinpoints the car park itself. Paper map users will find grid reference SD95089822 matches.

Having parked and paid, we head across the stone bridge over the Gunnerside Gill, as if heading out toward Reeth. Our path, clearly signposted, is immediately after the bridge on the left, heading uphill along the side of the Gill. We soon take a detour to the right up some steps to walk around the back of a house before continuing to follow the gill upstream.

The path now heads North never far from the side of Gunnerside Gill, alternating between woodland and open pasture.

After a short while, we arrive at a small wooden footbridge over a stream and then take a stile into a more open area of pasture - still next to Gunnerside Gill. This is Gunnerside Pasture, and opposite are Gunnerside Gill Woods, and further back beyond them is Elias's Stot Woods.

Our path remains clear and for now remains at the side of Gunnerside Gill. We head North for a while until we start to see the first signs of the industrial past: The Sir Francis Dressing Floor.

From the Dressing Floor, we continue up the valley along a clear path – gradually moving further up the side of the valley until we are a good deal higher than Gunnerside Gill.

As we progress further up the valley, we arrive at another series of buildings, and an entrance into the mine workings. This takes the form of an open tunnel called the Bunting Level.

We progress a little further up the path before we find a fingerpost indicating a bridleway over to Old Gang Smelt Mill and Surrender Bridge. This takes us up a steep and rocky track between Friarfold Hush and Bunton Hush.

After a while, the somewhat barren vista of the hush is left behind and we enter an area of relatively unspoiled moorland – where we continue to climb, although now more gently. At this stage the paths are less than clear, so the route we took deviates somewhat from the path noted on the OS map – this is not a problem, as long as we continue to head generally West until we enter a flat and somewhat barren landscape where we find a very clear track that we take right to head down to the Old Gang Smelt mill.

The track now heads West and at this stage is mostly flat – we have grouse moor on the right, and a somewhat bleak moonscape on the left where lead and other toxins prevent anything but the most hardy species gaining a foothold.

We press on past the bridge, keeping the stream – which is now called Hard Level Gill – on our right following the flow downhill, until we see the road fork. We take the right hand side – keeping with the Gill.

A number of watercourses add to the flow of the Gill and the stream becomes Mill Gill or Old Gang Beck, at this point. Just after another track comes in from the right at Hard Level Force bridge, we

see the remains of the Old Gang Smelt Mill – just one of 15 such smelting mills between Muker and Reeth during the peak of the lead mining industry.

Having taken some time to explore the site, we carry on along the access track following the Gill downstream toward Surrender bridge. As we do so we start to leave the most toxic spoil behind and we see heather and often grouse on both sides of the track.

We soon approach Surrender Bridge and the road over to Arkengarthdale. On the far side of the bridge, toward Reeth we see further smelt mills, but we turn right to cross the bridge and then follow the road South toward Swaledale.

There is a road off to the left (signposted Reeth), we ignore this and carry on uphill until we see a clear track with a footpath sign leaving the road on the right. This takes us onto the grouse moor at Feetham Pasture, and we now follow a clear, but occasionally boggy track in a South-Westerly direction. We generally follow the contours here, so the going is easy, and great views soon open up across Swaledale. Ahead we look back down to Gunnerside, and beyond to Muker, and behind us is a good view over to Reeth and the North Yorks Moors.

After a good section tramping over open moorland, we approach a wall with a gate through into pasture with grazing. We continue to follow the wall – keeping it on our left as we start to descend. We soon see a Hamlet to our left, and downhill, this is where we head, making sure we ignore a smaller track that continues around the contours on our right.

The hamlet is Blades, and we make sure we follow the track down until it meets a metalled road where we turn right.

We follow this for a while – until the road runs out and becomes first a rough track, and finally a grassy route over flat pasture.

Eventually, the track starts to come round to the right, and we meet a drystone wall with a gate. Just through the gate, the path forks, and we take the steeply downhill route on the left. The path passes a couple of properties on our left, and remains clear as we head back down into Gunnerside.

Worth noting along the path are the remains of lead miners' cottages, and waterfalls at Staney Gill – dry on the day we walked this route. We press on downhill until the track narrows and passes a building where we meet a metalled road. Here we turn left and then walk down to the B6270 which takes back into Gunnerside.

- **Total distance 16.7 km (10.4 miles)**
- **Total Ascent 927 m**
- **Challenging walk**