

Into the heart of Three Peaks Country from Gearstones

Introduction



January can be a great time of the year to go walking, but as we have seen over the last couple of weeks, snow and ice can make some routes inaccessible or unsafe. No such problems this week, and it's great to get back to our published programme.

We start at Gearstones and then set out up the Cam Road on the Dales Way, as far as Cam End where we pick up the Pennine Bridleway which we follow down to the lovely Ling Gill bridge, and the nearby Ling Gill nature reserve. The bridleway contours around Cave Hill to High Birkwith, where we take the Ribble Way over to God's Bridge, then Nether Lodge, before crossing Thorns Moss on the way back to Gearstones.

- **Total distance 10.9 km (6.8 miles)**
- **Total Ascent 279 m**
- **Easy walk**

The walk

We start at Gearstones – this is on the B6255; the main road between Ingleton and Hawes. We are looking for a layby about 1200m (3/4 mile) northwest of the railway bridge at Ribblehead. The layby is just before you get to Gearstones Lodge. If parking is not available there, then head back to roadside parking nearer to Ribblehead and walk carefully back along the road to our start point. If you are using Satnav to get to the start, use the address of Gearstones Lodge: Blea Moor Road, LA6 3AS. If you prefer paper maps, then the OS grid reference is SD77867993, which corresponds to the ominously prophetic What-3-Words tag

warned.snowstorm.muddy



We start out by walking up the main road toward Hawes for 300m or so. This needs some care as the road is busy, and there are no defined pavements – although there are ample grass verges on both sides. We pass Gearstones Lodge on our right: Back in 1792 this was a busy, if not entirely reputable pub, catering to the needs of Drovers and Grouse shooters. Nearly a century after that it was an important watering hole and residence for many of those involved in building the Settle to Carlisle railway and the magnificent Ribblehead Viaduct. Early in the 20th century it thrived as a

shooting lodge, but post war it fell into a significant decline. Many similar buildings within the Dales have been lost, but fortunately Gearstones was purchased by a Charitable Trust based in Mirfield West Yorkshire in 1972, and since then a series of improvements and restorations all aimed at making the Lodge a valuable community resource for the long term future have been implemented.

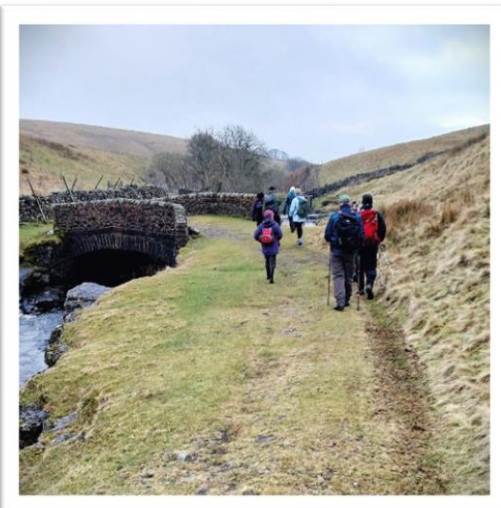
Amongst the groups using the lodge are cavers – there are a number of caves in this area that are worth exploring. As a group, Bentham Footpath Group has no expertise in caves and potholes, so we steer clear, for those who do wish to explore, Ribblehead Cave has two accessible entrances here.



Just past the Lodge, the main road bears right, then left again, and as it does so we need to look for a clear broad track leaving on the right and heading arrow-straight up the hill. This is the bottom end of the Cam Road, the Roman Road from Ingletton to the fort at Bainbridge (Virosidum). It is now used as an access route for forestry operations at Langstrothdale, which has necessitated the bridge over the Gayle Beck being more robust than we might

otherwise anticipate – it also means that the track is probably wider than in Roman times, although the line has been preserved. There are ditches on each side of the road, and during the spring these are full of frog and toad spawn, and all the other wildlife that thrives in shallow fresh water, such as Dragon and Damsel flies.

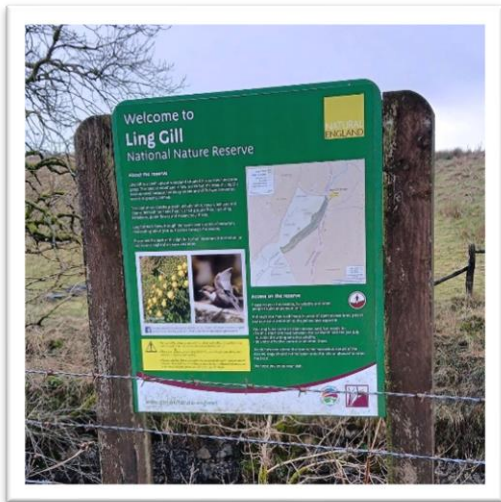
We head up the obvious Roman Road, on the Dales Way path for about a mile, until we get to a fingerpost showing us where the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway leaves on the right.



We are now on a lesser track – though still very clear and obvious, and the steep climbing that we have been engaged in for the last mile or so is largely over.

The Pennine Way heads consistently south for the next 1200m to bring us to a rather attractive stone bridge over Ling Gill Beck (also known as Cam Beck). This is a great place to sit and enjoy a brew. As you do that, take the time to find the engraved stone showing that the bridge was repaired by public subscription in 1765 – indicating that this was once an important packhorse route. You might also explore the rock

pools on both sides of the bridge and if you are lucky might see a white clawed crayfish (which



confusingly has brown coloured claws). This is our endangered native species, and rather like the red squirrel, has seen a catastrophic decline due to a competing introduced species. So, if you do see one, look but don't touch.

Beyond the bridge, the track continues, and we soon find ourselves walking along the side of a steep ravine down to the Beck: This is the Ling Gill Nature reserve, owned and managed by Natural England. It is a rare example of a sub-alpine ash woodland, and consequently a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a national nature reserve. The harsh and potentially hazardous terrain means that it cannot open to the public, but there are some views from the path, and an

interpretation board giving more information. There is also a public footpath on the other side of the Nature reserve which is worth coming back to explore – it's not part of our route today though.

After a short while, the path peels away from the edge of the nature reserve and heads south contouring around Cave Hill (with a trig point at 384m), then on to Old Ing where the Pennine Way and the Pennine Bridleway take different routes.

The Pennine Way footpath leaves us on the left and goes on to Sell Gill Holes – where we walked in October 2024, whilst the bridleway continues south toward High Birkwith which we last saw on our Horton-in-Ribblesdale walk.

Just before we get to High Birkwith, we look for a fingerpost showing us the Ribble Way leaving the bridleway on the right – this takes us down hill and to a small beck which we cross.

Beyond the beck we keep the drystone wall on our left and walk through two fields to get to "God's Bridge". We might expect that a natural feature with such an odd name might be unique, but it's not. There are at least three God's Bridges in Yorkshire, the other two by an even stranger coincidence crossing river Greta – though not the same Greta.

So, what is God's Bridge? In reality it's a sinkhole where water flowing down Brow Gill Beck has erodes a route through limestone to emerge lower down leaving a natural "bridge" that we walk over. Our route continues Northwest beyond God's Bridge, but some may wish to explore upstream of the beck – there are waterfalls and caves no more than 100m away.



Our next significant landmark is Nether Lodge – about 300m away. Finding it is not an issue, but identifying the right path onward might be as there are a good number of paths come together here. To play safe, we recommend taking our GPX recording with you on a suitable device, but if that's not possible, start by crossing the beck at the footbridge (this is Ling Gill Beck again) then take the middle of the three paths ahead – it is the larger and more used of the three so it should be clear.

The walking for the next kilometre is potentially a bit wet – although always passable, and we are rewarded by an interesting agricultural building that is no longer used, but which has been stabilised to preserve the evidence of the farming practices that once dominated this landscape.



Beyond this we continue northwest to Thorns where we find a very atmospheric derelict farm building. Once we reach the green lane here, there are options both to the right (which we take, staying on the Ribble way), or to the left.

If you parked closer to Ribblehead, it might be worth taking the left hand route up to the main road, whereas if you are able to park near Gearstones Lodge, the path to the right is better.

Assuming you are on the Ribble Way path, we simply continue onward to the main road: The Ribble Way goes through the Gearstones Lodge site, but you will see from the GPX trail on the OS Map that we took a smaller path on the left to approach the road – this was simply to get back to our cars with less road walking.

Bentham Footpath Group walks are graded according to length and change in elevation. At just under our 12km threshold, this walk is classed as easy, but if you are specifically looking for easier walks, please be aware that parts of this walk can be muddy, and therefore feel more challenging.

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