



## MELBECKS MOOR and SURRENDER BRIDGE

from Gunnerside 9 miles (14.5km)

**T**he contrast in scenery on this walk is superb. It begins with luxuriant woodland, sparkling streams and limestone scars before the devastation of the lead mining period is encountered. The paths were once used by miners as they trudged wearily to and from work.

Like many of the villages in Upper Swaledale, Gunnerside is of Norse origin, supposedly taking its name from a Viking warrior called Gunnar who settled in the valley at the start of the eleventh century.

The early part of the walk follows lovely becksides and woodland paths to the ruins of the Sir Francis crushing mill. Spoil heaps and a water-wheel pit are all that remain of the crushing mill. The row of bunkers seen here were known as bouse

teams and were used for storing the ore prior to crushing and washing. Each of the bunkers held the ore of one partnership of six to eight miners. The number of bunkers in a bouse team gives an indication as to the size of the mining operation and the number of miners who worked there.

From the crushing mill our path climbs high above the beck. Across the valley Jingle Pot Edge, Black Hill and Botcher Gill with its attractive waterfalls, make their contribution to this deep, confining valley.

Many of the huge gullies on the valley sides are the result of an early open cast mining technique known as 'hushing.' This involved the construction of a turf dam above the suspected vein. When sufficient water had been collected, it was released so that the sudden torrent swept

down, tearing away the soil and exposing the vein. The miners then used picks and crowbars to loosen and remove the ore. This operation was carried out repeatedly, creating deep fissures in the hillside.

At Bunton Hush we join the Coast-to-Coast footpath and, after a scramble onto Melbecks Moor, the landscape becomes very bleak and austere. The ground is completely covered by gravel from the spoil heaps of the mines in the area. This is gradually being reclaimed, so the odd tractor may be seen. Continuing through the spoil heaps, we descend to cross Level House Bridge, and then follow the stream to the Old Gang smelt mill.

The remains of the smelt mill are impressive and well worth exploration. One prominent feature is the large intact chimney. The long building nearest the track is where the smelting took place. It used to have four ore furnaces, producing 2000 tons of lead per year. Much of the stone from these buildings was removed in the 1930s to build a new Methodist chapel at Muker.

On the moor above, the double row of pillars belonged to the peat store. This was an immense structure some 390 feet (119m) long and 21 feet (6.5m) wide, capable of

storing enough peat for up to three year's smelting. The mill has recently undergone careful consolidation by English Heritage to prevent it from deteriorating further.

Our route continues alongside the stream to Surrender Bridge, and after a short climb on the road, the devastation caused by the mines is left behind. The scenery becomes less austere as we begin to cross Feetham Pasture, and the descent to the hamlet of Blades is quite stunning.

John Wesley preached at Blades on his first visit to Swaledale in 1761. In his journal Wesley wrote, "The Society is one of the most lively I have met in England." The area soon became a Methodist stronghold. Further along the hillside is the turning for Smarber, where the Puritan sympathiser Philip Lord Wharton allowed his shooting lodge at Smarber Hall to be used for Nonconformist worship.

We continue along a green bridlepath above the limestone terraces of Barf Side Scar. Looking towards the head of the dale there are excellent views of Great Shunner Fell and Muker. During our descent to Gunnerside, we have a bird's eye view of the field barns and walls in Gunnerside Bottoms. This patchwork of enclosures dates from the sixteenth century.

Start/Parking:	Gunnerside, in the village square near the literary institute or near the river bridge.
Location:	Gunnerside lies on the B6270 Richmond to Kirby Stephen road 6 miles (9.5km) west of Reeth.
Grid Ref:	951 982.
Distance:	9 miles (14.5km) circular. Allow 4¼ hrs.
OS Maps:	Explorer OL30 (1:25,000) or Landranger 98 and 92 (1:50,000).
Refreshments:	The King's Head Inn, The Ghyllfoot Tea Rooms.
Public Toilets:	Gunnerside, by the side of the King's Head Inn.
Other:	Post Office, Methodist chapel, literary institute, telephone, bus service.

# 1 Melbecks Moor and Surrender Bridge

**1** (GR: 951 982) Leave Gunnerside heading over the bridge towards Reeth and turn immediately left onto a track opposite the King's Head Inn (SP Gunnerside Gill). Follow the track for about 150 yards (135m) to a large white gate, turn right and climb up some steps. Pass through a small gate, turning left to join a clear path, continue over a broken wall staying close to the beck side.

**2** (GR: 950 987) Go through a gated stile and pass through a small wood. Continue along the beck side through an area with large boulders and after 300 yards (270m), go through a gated stile on the right, climb up some steps and continue to a signpost (SP Gunnerside Gill Woodland Path). Follow the path over a wooden stile and through the wood.

**3** (GR: 944 993) Leave the wood via two gap stiles and turn left. Stay with the left wall through two more gap stiles to reach the remains of the Sir Francis Crushing Mill. Keep to the left of the ruins, following the yellow waymarks.

**4** (GR: 941 998) Cross a wooden step stile and follow a path up through the bracken. Go over another wooden step stile and through a gap stile to join a well defined track. Follow this track for about ¼ mile (1.2km) to reach the ruins of the Bunton Mines.

**5** (GR: 940 013) 200 yards (180m) past the ruins, a cairn/signpost is reached. Turn right here (SP Surrender Bridge) and climb the Bunton Hush onto Melbecks Moor. (This section is difficult to follow although nearer the top the route becomes obvious.) At the top, head half left to reach a broad stone track. Turn right onto this track and follow it for about 1¼ miles (2.6km), passing through a line of grouse butts and the ruins of the Old Gang Lead Mine, to reach Flincher Gill.

**6** (GR: 964 013) Cross the gill over Level House Bridge, turn right and go through a gate, joining Gruvers Trod (an old miner's track) with Hard Level Gill to the right. After about ¼ mile (400m) a slight detour right leads to Hard Level Force. Return to the stone track and continue for a further 1¼ miles (1.8km) passing two shooting huts and the Old Gang smelt mill. A gate leads onto the road at Surrender Bridge.

**7** (GR: 989 999) Turn right and continue over Surrender Bridge. Follow the road over a cattle grid and climb steeply uphill. At a footpath sign on the right leave the road and follow a clear green track across the moor. Continue along this track for about 1 mile (1.4km) across Feetham Pasture keeping right at a fork.

**8** (GR: 981 989) After crossing a ford, go through a gate and continue downhill, staying on the track, to pass through the tiny hamlet of Blades.

**9** (GR: 980 984) Turn right onto the road. When the tarmac surface becomes a concrete track, follow it to a bend (which leads left to Smarber), continue straight ahead on a green bridlepath keeping to the left wall. When the wall ends continue on the same heading along the top of Barf Side Scar.

**10** (GR: 964 983) After going through a wooden gate turn left, descend on a clear green path. The path becomes enclosed after passing by Heights. Continue descending, crossing over a beck to reach a tarmac lane, turn left and follow the lane downhill through a gate leading onto the main road at Gunnerside. Turn right and follow the road back to the village centre.

