

Bleaklow Geocross V54

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Bleaklow Geocross

As its name suggests, Bleaklow is high, bleak, and boggy. Kinder is equally high, equally bleak, equally boggy. But it sounds kinder.

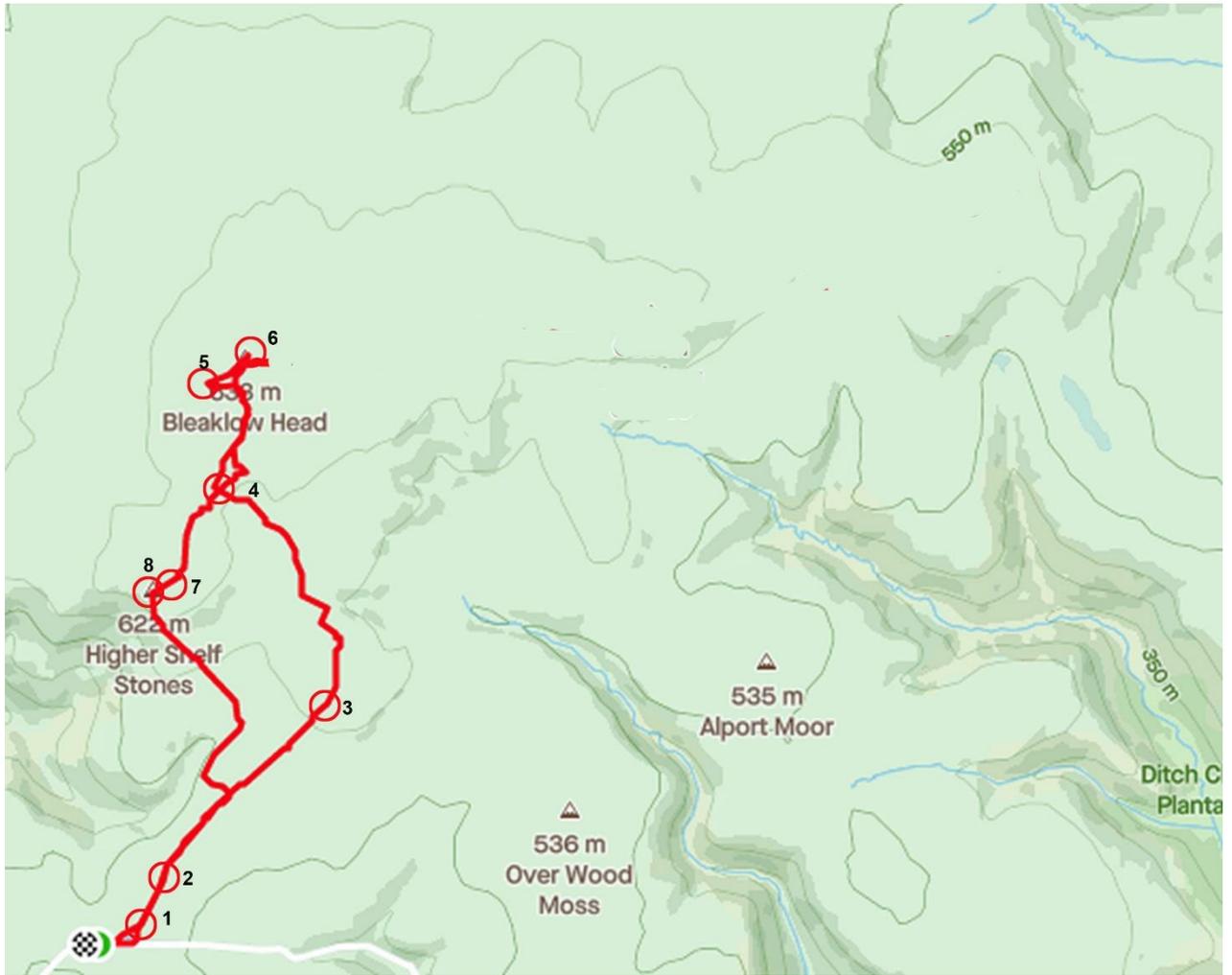
Both are on the long distance Pennine Way footpath, and many intrepid ramblers have found themselves tested in misty conditions.

This Geocross V54 has several useful locations which will get you safely to Bleaklow Head.

It then takes you away from the Derwent Watershed to the Peak Districts third highest summit, not a plateau prominence like the equal 633 metre high points of Kinder and Bleaklow but a true mountain top of Higher Shelf Stones, 621 metres height, with sloping sides.

Why? To witness a unique phenomena of masses of tourists visiting an aircraft wreck site, 76 years after the crash took place. These people are not typical moorland walkers. Many lack basic navigation equipment or the means to use it, and many are inadequately clad without protective clothing. And many lack common sense.

This is the 1948 crash site of B52 Superfortress bomber. In the year to May 2024 it was by far the 'hottest' place to visit in the Peak District. It suddenly became a must-see visit from 2018 when a video was published on the Internet, and special measures have since had to be put in place to protect the landscape from the inadequately clad tourists, and to protect the inadequately clad tourists from the wild landscape.



Start from Snake Pass A57.

Location 1 OS ref SK 08833 93004

Snake Pass Pennine Way gate

W3W gifted.weeded.crinkled

Location 2 OS ref SK 08978 93323

Doctors Gate Old Woman – path junction

W3W natively.walked.monks

Location 3 OS ref SK 09851 94244

Start of flagstones at north of Trench Path

W3W tamed.procure.tomes

Location 4 OS ref SK 09230 95353

Hern Stones - east

W3W exulted.squabbles.afternoon

Scout Memorial by River Alport – left bank

SK 12428 92706

W3W shut.incisions.monitors

Scout Memorial below Grindlesgrain Tor

SK 12223 92829

W3W hazelnuts.flamingo.observer

Location 5 OS ref SK 01983 95911

Wain Stones – The Kiss

W3W evoke.crawler.kings

Location 6 OS ref SK 09412 96068

Bleaklow Head

W3W caravans.impaled.absent

Location 7 OS ref SK 09063 94874

Superfortress Wreck

W3W badge.nuptials.zip

Location 8 OS ref SK 08893 94767

Higher Shelf Stones - graffiti

W3W blanking.twinge.standard

Location 1 OS ref SK 08833 93004

Snake Pass Pennine Way gate

W3W gifted.weeded.crinkled



Location 1 OS ref SK 08833 93004

Snake Pass Pennine Way gate

W3W gifted.weeded.crinkled

The turnpike road over the Snake Pass is now the A57 and was opened 200 years ago. It is not a reliable road though. Typically it is closed an average of 70 days each year due to severe weather and landslips. That is probably more closed days than any other A class road.

The Pennine Way long distance footpath crosses at Snake Summit. It was opened in April 1965. This 260 mile footpath starts from Edale and finishes at Kirk Yetholm in Scotland. Most walkers will complete it in 10 days but the running record is 2 days 10 hours.

The once boggy path has been much improved over the years. The route from Snake Pass to Bleaklow Head is well marked and not steep, but the short section that meanders up Hern Clough is rocky and muddy, and can be snow-filled in winter.

Location 2 OS ref SK 08978 93323

Doctors Gate Old Woman – path junction

W3W [natively.walked.monks](https://www.nativelywalked.com)



The Romans built a fairly direct road to link between their forts at Glossop and Brough. The route was followed by a late medieval pack-horse trail but it was a difficult and dangerous crossing of wild moorland.

Doctor Talbot was the vicar of Glossop between 1494 – 1535. He financed improvements to the highest and boggiest part of the path, straightened it out and it became known as 'Doctors Gate'. The old edge stones can be seen here. The OS map names this junction as 'Old Woman'. There was an Old Woman guide stone which served as a path marker on Bamford Moor, now sadly vandalised by gamekeepers in the 1920s. If there was an Old Woman Stone here it is long gone.

Location 3 OS ref SK 09851 94244

Start of flagstones at north of Trench Path

W3W tamed.procure.tomes



The first kilometre follows a trench path, a man-made hollow-way which eventually climbs out onto the moorland where stone signs guide the Pennine Way route. This short section of Hern Clough is where it has, in the past, been easy to get lost.

There are a second set of signs which appeared in 2020 in response to a record number of Mountain Rescue call-outs being needed to rescue lost visitors to the aircraft wreck. This was probably due to social-media spreading the word about the B29 bomber which crashed on Higher Shelf Stones in 1948. These new signs are labelled 'Wreck Site' and have been placed to improve the safety of thousand of tourists who are lured to the wreck of a B29 Superfortress.

Many still get lost and the terrain on either side of the Pennine Way is tough. These aircraft wreck tourists are mostly inexperienced in hill-walking, so Mountain Rescues are sadly too frequent.

The Strava Heatmap for the year to May 2024 shows that this is the most popular place to visit in the Peak District.

There is now a bus stop at the summit of the Snake Pass. A bleak place to stand waiting for a bus. There are no bus shelters. Yet.

Location 4 OS ref SK 09230 95353

Hern Stones - east

W3W exulted.squabbles.afternoon



There are many groups of wind-eroded stones on Bleaklow. Hern Stones is a landmark gritstone tor which can help to guide walkers down Hern Clough.

The short section of the footpath that meanders up Hern Clough is rocky and muddy, and can be snow-filled in winter.

The rock here is Kinderscout Gritstone laid down in the Carboniferous Period 350,000,000 years ago. It is up to 170 metres thick and interspersed with layers of fine particle shales and mudstones. These softer layers have weathered out resulting in a 'stack of pancakes' appearance. Typically they are more heavily sculpted than the harder Millstone Gritstone of Stanage Edge.

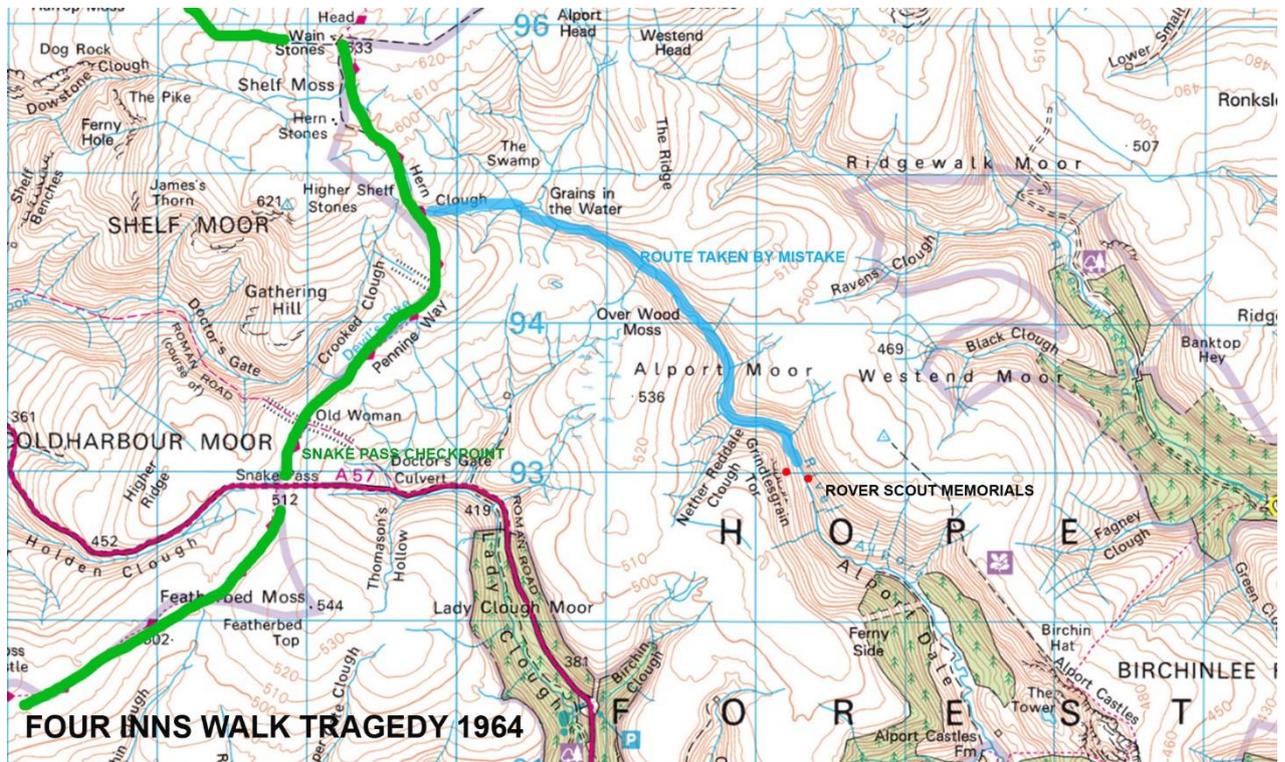
Compare the vertical faces of Millstone Gritstone edges like Stanage and Froggatt with the collapsing jumble of Kinderscout Gritstone at Hern, Grinah and Barrow Stones.

Hern Clough begins at Hern Stones and was always the tricky navigational part of the path heading to the Snake Summit crossing. Today there are markers but in 1964 there was little to direct inexperienced navigators. The essential turn right and out of Hern Clough is 1km south of Hern Stones, and here the River Alport begins. This is where a tragedy began to unfold in March 1964.

The Four Inns Walk Tragedy of 1964

Four kilometres down Hern Clough the River Alport runs through a steep valley where there are two memorials to three Rover Scouts who died while taking part in the Four Inns Walk in March 1964.

I am not suggesting taking a detour from the Bleaklow Geocross, but as the memorial to this tragedy of 70 years ago is within the River Derwent catchment, it might be a visit to take in the future. Please be aware that the Upper River Alport valley is mainly trackless and strenuous walking.



There are two Memorials:-

OS ref SK 12428 92706

Scout Memorial by River Alport

W3W shut.incisions.monitors

and

OS ref SK 12223 92829

Scout Memorial below Grindlesgrain Tor

W3W hazelnuts.flamingo.observer

The Four Inns Walk is a 40 mile hike/run organised by the Scout Association. The inns are the Isle of Skye Inn (site) in Holmbridge, the Snake Pass Inn, Nags Head Inn Edale and the Cat and Fiddle Inn near Buxton.

In March 1964 three Rover Scouts aged 19 to 21 were one team amongst 80 teams of participants in the Four Inns Walk. They became lost in a snowstorm and missed an important turning in Hern Clough on the Pennine Way which would have taken them to a checkpoint and safety at the summit of the Snake Pass.

They failed to check in at Snake Pass.

Wintry weather conditions in March 1964 were extreme and the equipment carried by the Scouts would have been inadequate for deep snow and the swollen River Alport which they had to cross repeatedly. They were finally too exhausted to continue, probably with no idea of where they were. Ironically they had almost reached Alport Farm where they would have found safety.

The newly formed voluntary Buxton Mountain Rescue Service was called out and they found one of the three young men, but he was already close to death. The other two bodies were found two days later in the bottom of Alport Dale, just 2.5 kilometres from safety at Alport Farm.

A hand built memorial stands by the River Alport, and a second memorial is on a brass plaque below Grindlesgrain Tor. The brass plaque has the Four Inns logo. It reads:-

RIP IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO DIED FOUR INNS WALK 1964

I am not enthusiastic about memorials in the Peak District National Park. There are too many, at least 50 on the banks of the Ladybower Reservoir. However, I do think these in a wild landscape setting are perfectly appropriate.





Location 5 OS ref SK 01983 95911

Wain Stones – The Kiss

W3W evoke.crawler.kings



Wain Stones probably means 'Wagon Stones' This pair are well known as The Kiss.

The line of bedding is clearly visible, tilting south and east. The rear rock has shifted and lies un-naturally with puckered lips reaching up for a kiss which isn't going to happen for a long time.

Location 6 OS ref SK 09412 96068

Bleaklow Head

W3W caravans.impaled.absent



This pole on a massive cairn is a welcome sight especially in winter.

From here the Pennine Way continues north then turns west down Wildboar Grain to Torside Clough.

Bleaklow Head is the highest point on the Bleaklow Moors at 633 metres. A turn east leads to Bleaklow Hill which is slightly lower at 630 metres. Neither of these high points merit a trig point which seems a bit mean as Kinder has three trigs..

Interestingly the high points on both Bleaklow and Kinder Moors is 633 metres. How can 350 million years of wind and water erosion be so accurate as to create matching high points 10 kilometres apart?

Location 7 OS ref SK 09063 94874

Superfortress Wreck

W3W badge.nuptials.zip



On 3 November 1948 this B29 Superfortress bomber 'Over-Exposed' was on a routine daytime flight to deliver \$17,400 of wages to an American air-force base near Warrington. The B29 was the type of plane used to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War Two.

This plane had 'state of the art' technology and the pilot was flying by instruments and descending through low cloud. He misjudged the starting point of the descent by a matter of seconds and flew into the summit of Higher Shelf Stones (621 metres) at a speed in excess of 200mph. All 13 people on board were killed. The plane broke up and debris was scattered over a large area.

If the pilot had held his height for another 30 seconds he would have crossed the summit safely.

American Military Police secured the wreck site and the money was recovered.

After more than 70 years the engines and parts of the fuselage are easily seen today. Hundred of visitors can be seen on clear days. Thousands have been visiting each year and numbers are still increasing. Many more people visit the wreck site than walk the Pennine Way.

How can a 76 year old aircraft wreck be the 'hottest' tourist destination in the Peak District National Park?

Location 8 OS ref SK 08893 94767

Higher Shelf Stones - graffiti

W3W blanking.twinge.standard



Higher Shelf Stones is the third highest summit in the Peak District at 621 metres. It has the most distinctive 'summit', where the land slopes away on all sides, unlike Bleaklow and Kinder which are high points on a moorland plateau.

Visitors since the 18th century have carved graffiti on the summit rocks.. A lot is from 1940s wartime, but goes back to 1732.