

Bonsall Moor Geocross V63

Text and photos for Facebook December 2025

Bonsall Moor

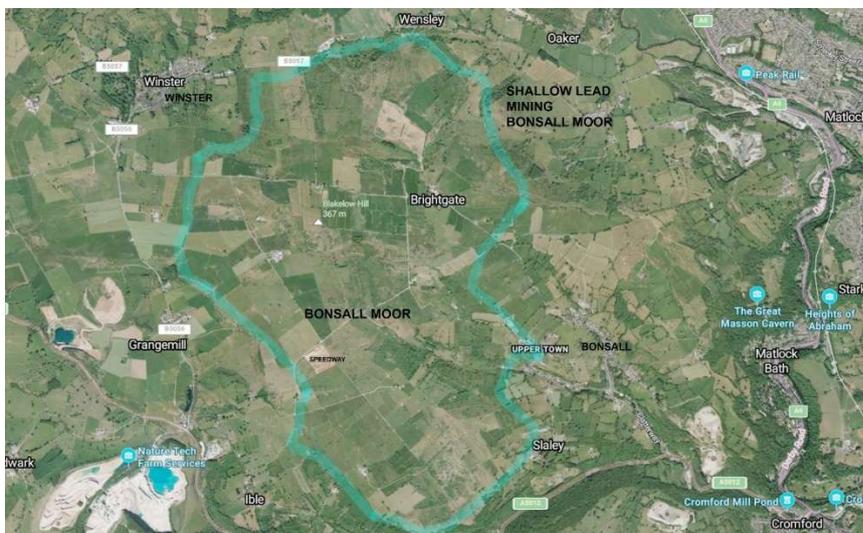
Bonsall Moor overlooks the valley of the River Derwent as it passes through the limestone gorge at Matlock.

Winstar village is on the north-west corner of Bonsall Moor. In the 18th century it was a prosperous lead mining village of over 2000 people. At that time it was one of the largest towns in Derbyshire. The miners small cottages were clustered on the bank of Bonsall Moor, linked by alleys known as ginnels.

Since 1890 it has slimmed down to just 700 people in 2025. Many of the cottages have been joined and enlarged to make very attractive larger houses, but it is no longer anauthentic Peak District village. It has become 'gentrified'.

The nearby ancient trade route, The Portway, gave miners in Winstar a means of sending their lead to markets for sale.

South-east of Winstar are the stone walled agricultural fields known as the 'Bonsall Leys'. These were small strip fields of agricultural land situated in the Derbyshire White Peak.



Farmers on Bonsall Moor had known for centuries that there were shallow deposits of lead ore under their fields . Lead mining first took place in 1540. From then the whole area of stone-walled sheep grazing farmland became known as 'Whitelow Mines'. 'Low' is the Derbyshire name for a hill. White Low is how it would have appeared when spoil from lead mining covered the hillside.

Lead Mining

This is a huge story, in astronomical time. Lead was not created during the Big Bang. It was formed later in stars by astrophysical processes, such as within dying low-mass stars or through the merging of neutron stars.

Natural formation of lead takes place by radioactive decay. Lead was formed by uranium and thormium decay. It was formed under great pressure and was pushed into fissures in limestone rock, forming 'veins' of lead ore.

There is no accurate way of predicting where these veins would be, so it was left to Derbyshire farmers to search. They did so, creating a small-scale industry which boomed for 400 years on Bonsall Moor

Lead mining has always been a small-scale extractive industry. The farmer-miner has to find the lead vein and follow it.

Miners were quite secretive about their lead deposits, and territorial disputes were quite common. Mines might stray below neighbouring land.

Extraction of the lead ore, called galena, was done with pickaxes, and brought to the surface for processing. Waste was left behind. This continued for 400 years until the late 19th century, by which time the Bonsall Moor shallow deposits were worked out.

The surface shallow lead mining workings on Bonsall Moor are characterised by their very small scale, and by the low-technology approach to extract the extremely shallow lead ore.

Named mines include Beans and Bacon, Old Eye, Fiery Dragon, Cod Beat,,Slack, Mount Pleasant and Barmasters Grove. All went bust.

The underground mining at Bonsall Leys left behind an extensive number of mineshafts and below-ground workings. Other remains which can be seen today include ruined structures, earthworks, and buried remains of the lead mining operations.

Lead mining is a small scale 'extractive' industry. Miners make holes in fields, remove the lead ore minerals and abandon their mine. If they own the land they might attempt to make it safe for farm animals, but at Bonsall Moor large areas of the 10 square kilometres were abandoned.

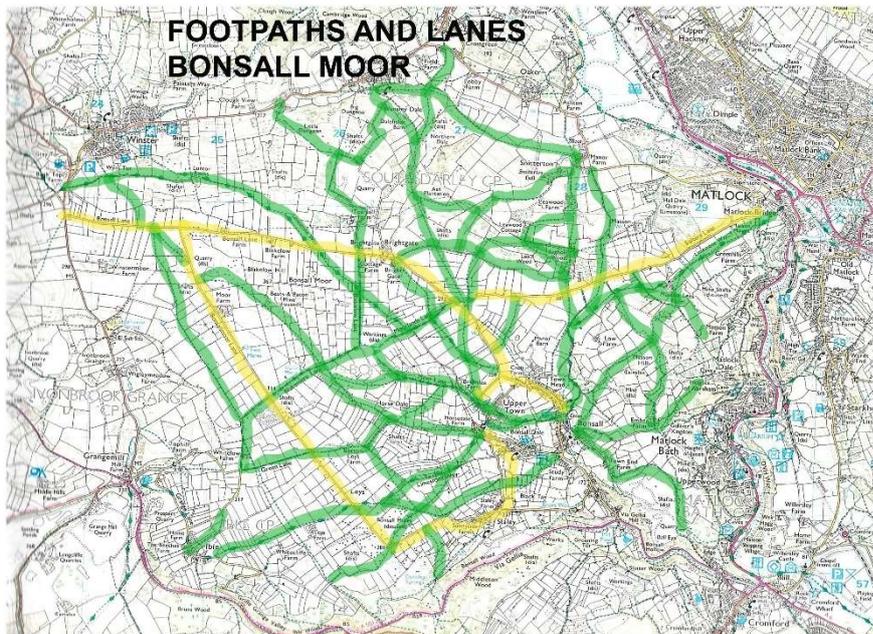
Traditionally, miners did not set some of their earnings aside to cover the costs of restoration. A big mining operation might, but the mining operations over 400 years on Bonsall Moor, didn't.

Sometimes a large scale mining operation moves in on abandoned lead mines and digs a bigger and deeper quarry to extract limestone for roadstone, or flourspar mineral. This has happened in small areas on Bonsall Moor, but hasn't resulted in land being restored to productive use. So 10 square kilometres of the Derbyshire White Peak lies derelict.

There are also two rusting cranes on Bonsall Moor from the more recent opencast flourspar mining. The opencast industrial approach has created shallow pits and parallel lines of opencast trenches following a vein close to the surface. The rakes are approximately 1-2m deep, 2m wide and up to 40m long. They were most likely worked by

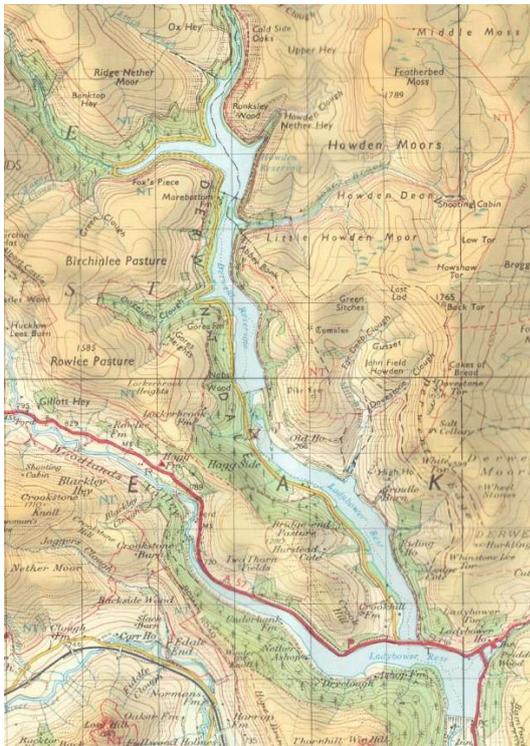
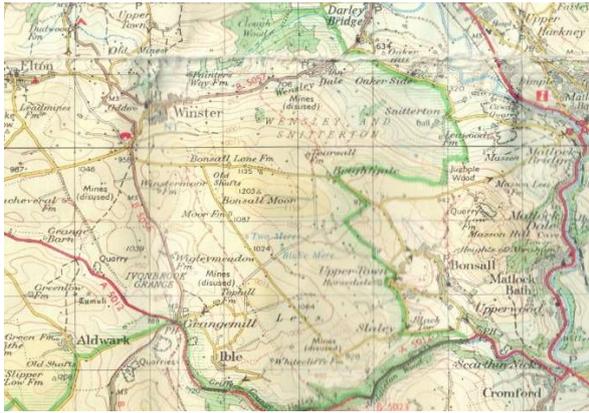
farmer smallholder-miners working the area in teams. No attempt has been made to restore the land for agriculture.

There are quite a number of paths and lanes crossing Bonsall Moor, shown on the OS map. Possibly the densest concentration of paths in the White Peak. But beware. Some are hardly used. Access points may be fenced off, and some of the land has been abandoned and is dangerous with grown-over mine workings and shafts.



Bonsall Moor is the most visually 'derelict' limestone moor in the Peak District National Park.

The area of 'derelict limestone farmland' on Bonsall Moor is about 10 square kilometres.



The area of the Derwent Reservoirs is about 6 square kilometres.

Two villages were 'drowned' in the formation of the Derwent Reservoirs.

The lead-mined derelict land on Bonsall Moor has no villages, very little water and is on top of a hill.

Maybe in the future an imaginative engineer will find a better use for Bonsall Moor.

Blakelow Hill

Blakelow Hill is the highest point on Bonsall Moor, but an unimpressive summit. This is marked by a trig point, one of 81 trigs in the Peak District National Park. The majority are on Access (CROW) land. Many of these 81 OS trig points are also listed as one of the

95 Ethels, named after Ethel Haythornthwaite, an environmental campaigner and access rights pioneer in the 1920s..

Blakelow Hill is a rarity, a 'No public access' Ethel. There is no footpath.



If you are passionate about ticking the Ethels you will have to find your way to this trig point.

To access the Blakelow Hill trig point, follow a track leading west from Blakelow Lane. Continue over three metal gates, and then climb over a low wall into the final field where the trig is located. The path can be muddy and overgrown. Some parts of the route may be on private land or blocked by obstacles like cows.

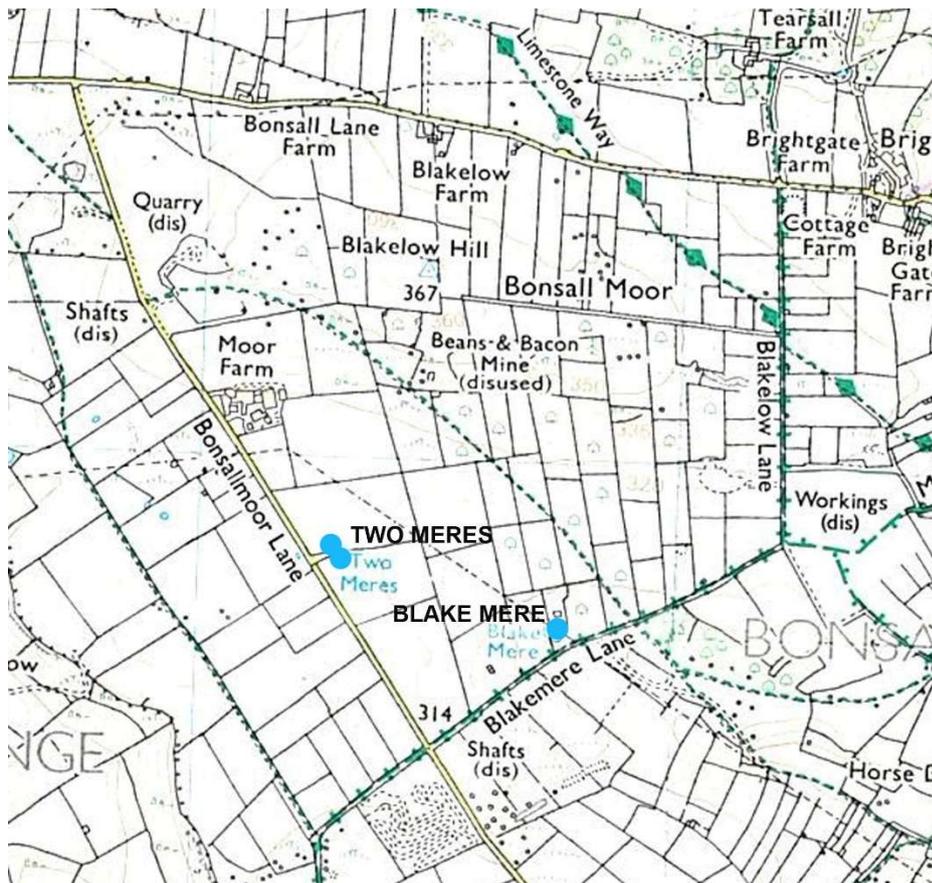
Blakelow Meres and Mires

Standing water is scarce on the free draining limestone plateau of Bonsall Moor. There are some man-made dewponds for grazing animals, which are still in use.

There are three 'naturally occurring' named meres shown on the OS map of Bonsall Moor. These are silt lined hollows, originally man-made to provide water for grazing livestock.

One is Blake Mere. Nearby on Bonsallmoor Lane is Two Meres. Curiously, Blake Mere is in fact two separate meres, and Two Meres is just one mere.

In total that makes three meres, quite close together.



There are several other un-named ponds on Bonsall Moor, usually close to farms.

Mere or mire wetland habitat is more commonly associated with the high gritstone uplands of the Dark Peak which have less permeable ground that allows peat to build up.

The White Peak has very few mires. The most well known 'mire' place name in the White Peak is Wardlow Mires near Foolow at the north end of Cressbrook Dale. This grassy dry valley sometimes floods, but it doesn't meet my ecological definition of a mire as bog or fen wetland habitat.

Bonsall Motorcross Circuit

To add to the very disturbed condition of Bonsall Moor there was, until recently, the very noisy Bonsall Motorcross circuit. Motorcross is 'off-road motorcycle racing'.



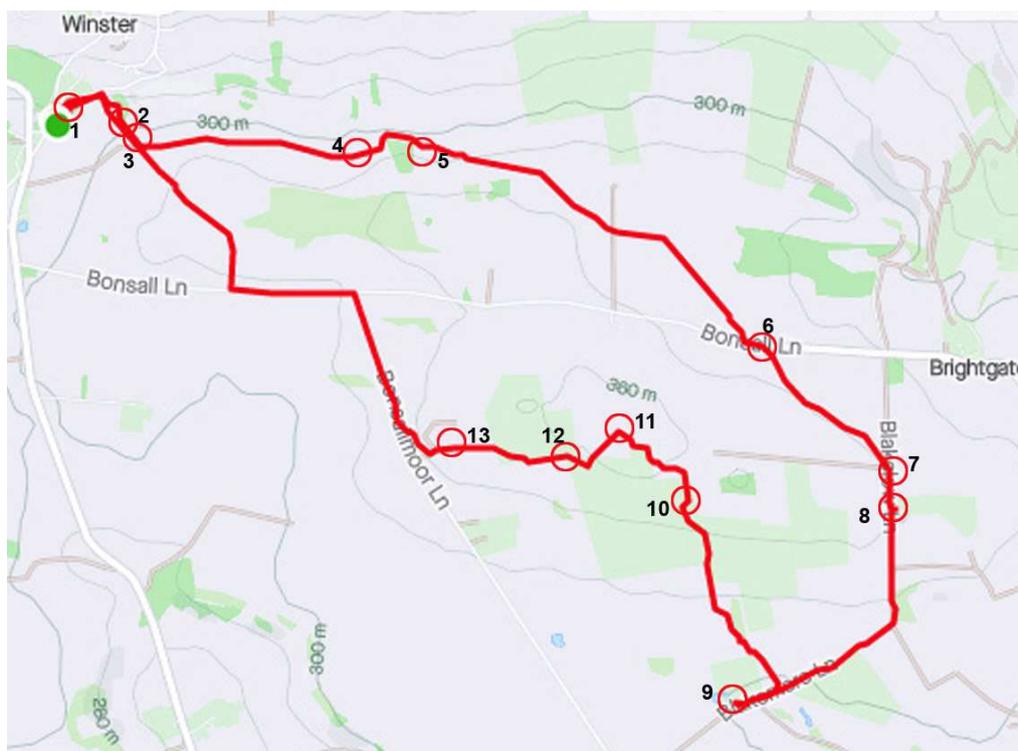
The Bonsall Motorcross Circuit (BMC) is positioned well away from habitation. It is on land which was probably used for lead mining. It is not known for its scenic qualities, but if you are looking for exciting action in the countryside, motorcycle racing delivers. It does however trigger a question.

'Is this noisy land-trashing activity appropriate in the Peak District National Park?'

The answer is no, and in 2024 the Bonsall Motorcross Circuit closed. The farmer who owns the land is restoring it to agriculture.

The Bonsall Moor Geocross V63 follows the route shown on the map below.

Location	OS grid reference	W3W		
		First word	Second word	Third word
1	SK 23880 60252	washroom	showrooms	measures
2	SK 24063 60260	servants	producing	jukebox
3	SK 24107 60186	running	drove	asterisk
4	SK 24712 60169	album	unsigned	crescendo
5	SK 24963 60177	thread	gadget	alert
6	SK 25862 59633	unscathed	unzips	typist
7	SK 26219 59158	wake	dazzling	aviators
8	SK 26227 58960	appraised	maybe	rang
9	SK 25779 58634	heads	perfumes	moons
10	SK 25625 59179	statement	emailed	highbrow
11	SK 25454 59397	intend	spearing	infinite
12	SK 25199 59312	prune	amid	remind
13	SK 25025 59344	youths	cliff	bitters

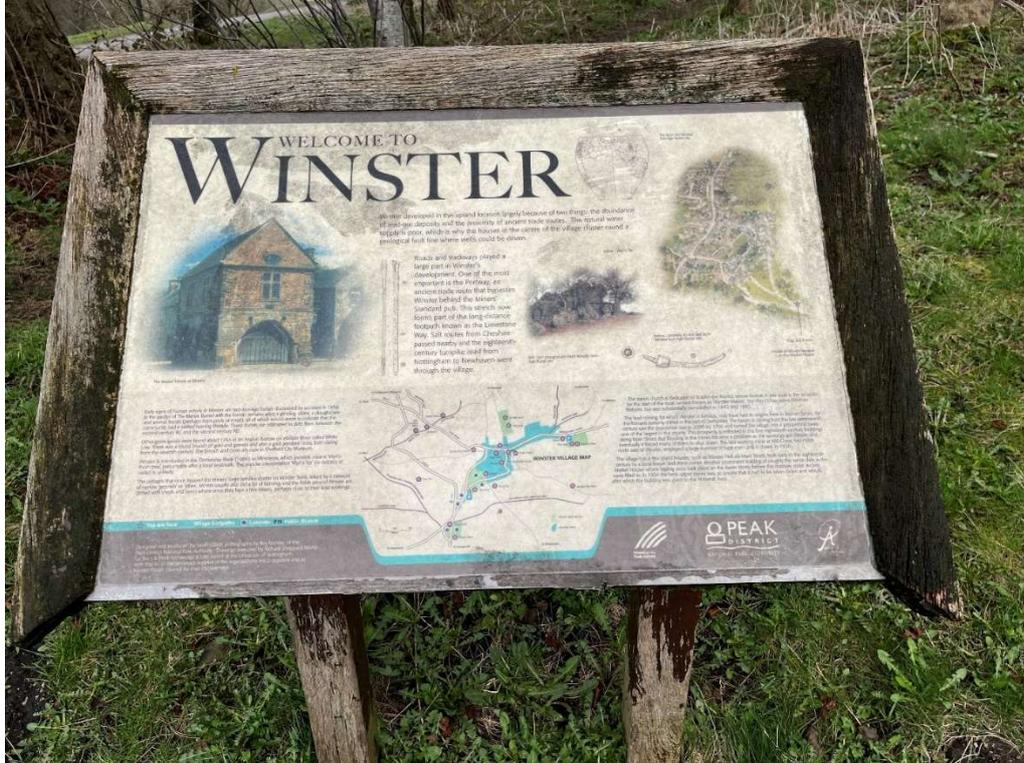


Start from Winster south car park.

Location 1 OS ref SK 23880 60252

Winster sign

W3W washroom.showrooms.measures



Winster was a prosperous lead mining village of over 2000 people in the 18th century. At that time it was one of the largest towns in Derbyshire. Since then it has slimmed down to just 700 people in 2025. Many of the cottages have been joined and enlarged to make very attractive but not authentic village houses. The miners small cottages were clustered on the bank, linked by ginnels.

The nearby ancient trade route, The Portway, gave miners in Winster a means of sending their lead to market.

In the 1086 Domesday Book it was called Winsterne. The name Winster comes from this word which means Wyn's Thorn Tree. It is not thought to be derived from the rock formation above the village, Wyn's Tor.

Lead mines reached their peak in the late 1800s, and the last mine, which employed a lot of Winster men, closed in 1938.

Location 2 OS ref SK 24063 60260

Wyn's Tor – tree at south top

W3W servants.producing.jukebox



Formerly Wildmister Tor. This is an isolated Dolomitic Limestone Tor, just a few hundred metres south of the outcrops of gritstone at Stanton Moor, Birchover and Cratcliffe Tor. There is a major fault nearby, the Great Bonsall Fault.

Dolomitic or Magnesium limestone (magnesium carbonate) is more erosion resistant than the grey Carboniferous Limestone (calcium carbonate). This rock was formed when soluble magnesium was forced through the limestone by water pressure.

There are several outcropping limestone 'tors' near Winster but none are used for climbing. Six kilometres south at Harboro there are several limestone tors which are well known to rock climbers.

Wyn's Tor was vandalised by unknown persons in January 2022. They brought industrial quantities of red paint, and unseen by locals, managed to cover most of the south face of Wyn's Tor with it.

Location 3 OS ref SK 24107 60186

Squeeze stiles

W3W running.drove.asterisk



Where the footpath crosses an old lane, which is now part of The Limestone Way, the stile on the north is made from slabs of limestone. The stile on the south uses pillars of gritstone.

Location 4 OS ref SK 24712 60169

Dew pond – west side

W3W album.unsigned.crescendo



Water is scarce on the limestone plateau above Winster. This is a concrete lined dew pond near the top of a large grazing pasture.

Many of the fields are being colonised by hawthorn, indicating a low density of grazing livestock, mainly sheep.

Location 5 OS ref SK 24963 60177

Luntor Rocks – stile to east

W3W thread.gadget.alert



Luntor Rocks is another jumble of Dolomitic Limestone tors and boulders, fenced off from grazing pasture and planted with conifers and hardwoods.

Location 6 OS ref SK 25862 59633

Limestone Way sign

W3W unscathed.unzips.typist



The Limestone Way is a long distance footpath through the White Peak, starting at Castleton and finishing in the Dove valley at Rocester. It was originally devised by the Rotary Club of Matlock, and finished in Matlock.

It opened in 1986 as a way-marked trail using a ram's head logo. In 1992 it was extended south to link up with the Staffordshire Way in Rocester.

Location 7 OS ref SK 26219 59158

Blakelow Lane lead mine shaft

W3W wake.dazzling.aviators



Bonsall Moor has hundreds of pits, shafts and sealed mines. Before mining the land was previously agricultural with well made dry stone walls and small fields. It has never been restored after lead mining.

Evidence of lead mining goes back to pre-Roman times, and boomed in the late 1600s through to the late 1800s. From the Bronze Age, traders used the ancient Portway which crosses south to north close to Bonsall Moor.

Restoration back to farmland, heath or woodland would be very worthwhile.

Location 8 OS ref SK 26227 58960

Derelict Field Barn

W3W appraised.maybe.rang



Field barns are abundant on Bonsall Moor. Some have been restored but many are derelict. They are an essential part of the local landscape character, yet they are fast disappearing. Simply built of local limestone and a slate roof, they are not protected by law. Stripped of their roof slate roofs and good quality gritstone quoins and lintels, they are being recycled into other building projects.

In 2006 The Bonsall Field Barn Project was awarded the Greenwatch Award in acknowledgement of the environmental benefits of restoring and reusing local rural buildings.

Location 9 OS ref SK 25779 58634

Blake Mere

W3W heads.perfumes.moons”



Water is scarce on the free draining limestone of Bonsall Moor. These naturally occurring meres are silt lined hollows, providing a wildlife habitat and water for grazing livestock.

This is Blake Mere and nearby on Bonsallmoor Lane is Two Meres. Curiously, Blake Mere is in fact two meres, and Two Meres is just one mere.

Location 10 OS ref SK 25625 59179

Beans and Bacon Mine lead rake – loading platform

W3W statement.emailed.highbrow



This loading platform within a worked out lead rake is one of hundreds of mining remains. This one is a Scheduled Ancient Monument of the oddly named 'Beans and Bacon Mine'. This was a large operation which began in 1740, and boomed between 1920 – 1925. There are many shafts, down to 55 metres. Some are capped and sealed. Amongst the quirkily named lead veins are Old Eye, Fiery Dragon and Cod Beat. These are all just to the north of the Great Bonsall Fault.

The landmark topping the moor is a conifer dominated woodland, probably planted to ensure a local source of pit props.

From here there is a distant view south-west to the Bonsall Motorcross circuit. Now closed, this was a noisy intrusion into an otherwise quiet backwater of the Peak District National Park.

Location 11 OS ref SK 25454 59397

Blakelow Hill trig

W3W intend.spearing.infinite



Blakelow Hill at 367m height is a rarely visited trig point. The approach from the south is from a public footpath off Blakemere Lane, which is tortuous, mainly unsigned and heavily trampled by cattle. Stiles, if there are any, are hard to find.

In the southwest corner of the field there is a low barbed wire fence which can be stepped over.

Just to add confusion, there is another Blake Low trig point two kilometres west.

Location 12 OS ref SK 25199 59312

Squeeze stile

W3W prune.amid.remind



The final, and possibly the only, stile on the public footpath which crosses seven fields. The drystone walls which once enclosed these fields have been abandoned and lie in a state of collapse. Some token barbed wire strands make some of these fields stockproof.

Location 13 OS ref SK 25025 59344

Limestone boulder

W3W youths.cliff.bitters



Large solitary limestone boulders are dotted along the hillside on the east of Bonsallmoor Lane. They appear to have been placed deliberately, and there is a sign discouraging access, so possibly to deter parking or camping.

Bonsall Moor is possibly the most bleak and unattractive moor in the Peak District.