

Burbage West Geocross V3

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WEST BURBAGE - OVER OWLER TOR

This is the third of four Geocross Trails around the Burbage Valley.

The prominent gritstone summit of Over Owler Tor is the largest skyline feature you first see from the A625 (later A6187) as it reaches Parsons House Farm travelling west from Sheffield.

This trail features several wind eroded gritstone tors and stone features.

This land is now Countryside Rights of Way (CROW Act) free access but 100 years ago it was private and strictly managed by gamekeepers who were under instructions of the Duke of Rutland to keep people off his shooting moors. They were closed to the public until 1928.

The Duke had extensive game shooting moors covering 12,280 acres and seven gamekeepers lodges:-

Longshaw Lodge and Park 747 acres

Houndkirk Moor

Burbage Moor

Totley Moor

Big Moor

Froggatt and Curbar Moors

Ramsley Moor

Leash Fen

After the sale of the Longshaw Estate some of the moors changed hands. At the founding of the Peak District National Park in 1948, several moors became the property of the PDNP. Today the Eastern Moors Partnership of the National Trust (NT) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Birds (RSPB) have a 15 year renewable lease on all these moors except Longshaw, Houndkirk and Burbage Moors.

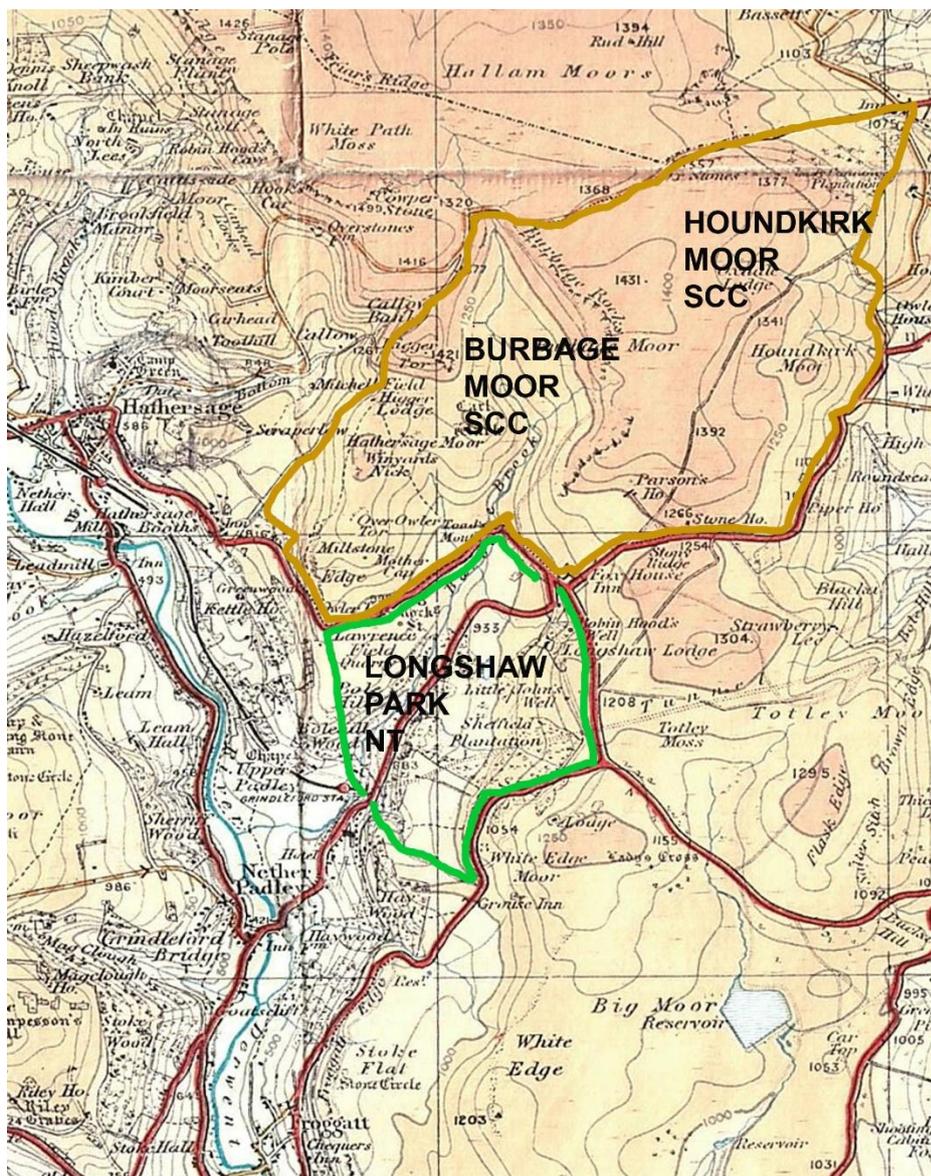
After the First World War (1914 – 1918) most large country houses in Britain were having great difficulty in maintaining their pre-war lifestyle due to lack of servants and increasing maintenance costs.

Belvoir Castle in Rutland is the Dukes main residence but the family also own Haddon Hall near Bakewell.

In October 1922 the Marquess of Granby, heir to become the Duke of Rutland, exercised his right to close the Burbage Green Drive by walling up the entrance at the North Bridge. This did not go down well with the rambling community. 'Angry Passers By' threw the walls down in November.

Sheffield Clarion Ramblers were very keen on 'Ridding the Green Drive of the 'instructed' gamekeepers'.

By 1927 the Duke of Rutland was forced to sell his Derbyshire Eastern Edges shooting estates. Negotiations took place with interested parties.



Sheffield Clarion Ramblers were at the forefront of campaigning for access to moorland, and one of the closest areas of moors to their base in Sheffield was Houndkirk and Burbage moors. Their founder, George Herbert Bridges Ward was prominent in helping secure public access to this land. He encouraged Ethel Haythornthwaite to raise public money to help buy Longshaw Estate. The Sheffield Clarion Ramblers contributed to the appeal for funds

Peak District and Yorkshire Branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was set up as a countryside charity. Ethel Haythornthwaite was born into the Sheffield Ward family, daughter of one of the largest industrialists in the Steel City. She was very well connected and passionate about the countryside. She was also well educated and she knew how to use her connections to make things happen. One of her first major achievements was to raise a public appeal to purchase the 747 acre Longshaw Estate which was threatened with development.

In 1927 - 1928 the purchase of The Longshaw Estate was concluded. Ethel Haythornthwaite immediately gave Longshaw Hall and Park into the ownership of the National Trust.

Frequent visitors to this part of the Peak District know this story.

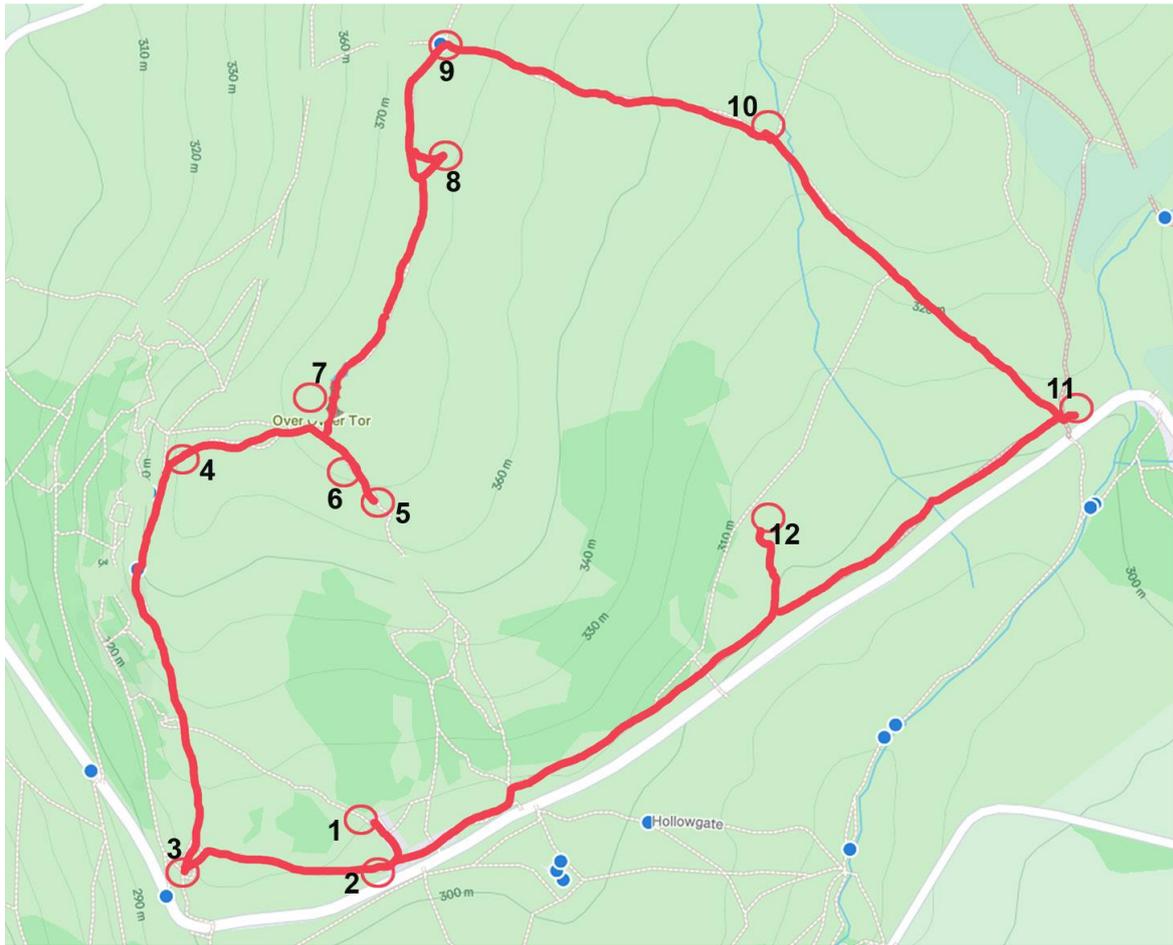
What most people don't know is that Sheffield City Council bought Houndkirk and Burbage Moors in 1928 and still own them. In 1928 SCC had long term plans for a reservoir and a housing estate.

They could not have foreseen the need to provide Burbage Valley for military training during the Second World War, and Houndkirk Moor for a Starfish Fire Decoy Site.

Sheffield Clarion Ramblers simply wanted free access to Houndkirk and Burbage Moors. They achieved this with agreement from Sheffield City Council in 1928 with a token right of the landowner, SCC to be able to close the moors for one day each year.

I cant recall this ever having happened in the 50 years I have climbed and run there.

Each of the locations can be found on the route below.



Start and finish at the Surprise View car park

Location 1 OS ref SK 25111 80129

Public access gate at Surprise View car park

W3W pull.paid.translated



In 1928 Sheffield Clarion Ramblers hoped that 'bus holiday' crowds will not be allowed to become so thick or so foolish as to require the paid service of a wheelbarrow trundler of waste paper.

This hope has been narrowly avoided so far, but only because volunteers provide free labour. I have seen busloads of voluntary litter-pickers being dropped off at Longshaw Estate, and the British Mountaineering Council organise 'Clean up the Craggs' days .

This is one of many gates welcoming visitors to the Burbage Valley. Over the years the signs have become increasingly abundant.

The signs today tell visitors:-

No fires

No fireworks

No barbeques

Protect nature

Respect wildlife

No litter

No camping

Sadly all these things have happened

Sheffield Clarion Ramblers were correct – the ‘holiday crowds’ are often thick and foolish.

During the Covid crisis in 2021 I came across a large party of Eastern European migrants who were living off the land in a remote corner of Burbage Valley. They had tents and cooking equipment and had been living wild for long enough to have captured, butchered and roasted a sheep; maybe more than one!

Location 2 OS ref SK 25137 80059

Dark Skies sign

W3W solved.gentle.edges.



Surprise View car park has no lighting, and the lights of Sheffield and the Hope Valley are far enough away. It's a popular site for stargazing.

Location 3 OS ref SK 24867 80054

Surprise View bench

W3W funds.join.flippers



Surprise View! The road bend on which the whole Hope Valley becomes visible.

To the south of the A6187 is the Longshaw Estate, and the Bolehill Quarries which were originally worked for millstones, but then quarried on an industrial scale to supply stone to the Derwent Valley Water Board for the Howden and Derwent dams.

Location 4 OS ref SK 24845 80592

Millstone Edge summit rock

W3W [skippers.sinkhole.perusing](#)



Millstone Edge is visible from all the Hope Valley. It has been heavily quarried.

It is now a popular rock climbing destination and had a few testpiece climbs that are world renowned.



I wonder if this arrangement of drill holes is another Quarrymans Canon like the one a kilometre away in Burbage South quarry?

Location 5 OS ref SK 25137 80528

Mother Cap

W3W glove.income.smiles



The sort of cloth cap that a mother might have worn hundreds of years ago. There is a moderately easy way to the top. On its top are quite a few carvings of initials and dates.

I once organised a Score Orienteering Race around Burbage. The runners had one hour to collect as many written numbers as possible. I had in mind road signs, mileposts and other printed notices. What I hadn't foreseen was that one of the runners was a climber and he climbed onto the top of Mother Cap and 'hoovered up' thousands of dates, easily beating those who counted milestones.

Location 6 OS ref SK 25049 80625

Pancake Stone

W3W suits.they.hopeless



Thinly bedded gritstone

Similar to the Druid Stone on Crookstone Moor, Kinder. whose dense bands of lower bedding are quite distinctive..

Location 7 OS ref SK 25062 80706

Over Owler Tor Basin Rock (the left rock)

W3W [watched.slimmer.routes](#)



A gritstone tor on a prominent summit.. Very popular for scrambling.

Location 8 OS ref SK 25208 80992

Bumblebee cage

W3W crowds.groom.waiting



The air photograph for the east facing slope of Over Owl Tor shows lines of shooting positions, 100 years after shooting stopped.

The leggy tall heather hasn't changed, so land managers have introduced bilberry seedlings within these rusty cages. The hope is the bumblebees will visit the bilberry flowers and spread the pollen to create new plants.

Location 9 SK 25208 81163

Winyards Nick

W3W eggs.opens.heap



An important packhorse trail crossing Burbage Moor towards Hathersage. Winyards means Wind Gates.

Location 10 OS ref SK 25653 81042

Bench on corner

W3W card.agent.dig



It's a fine spot. Margaret Edward's favourite corner of the Burbage Valley

Location 11 OS ref SK 26089 80685

Toads Mouth

W3W tonic.stir.kicked



Popular local landmark

Location 12 OS ref SK 25668 80492

Shooting beater path and penny

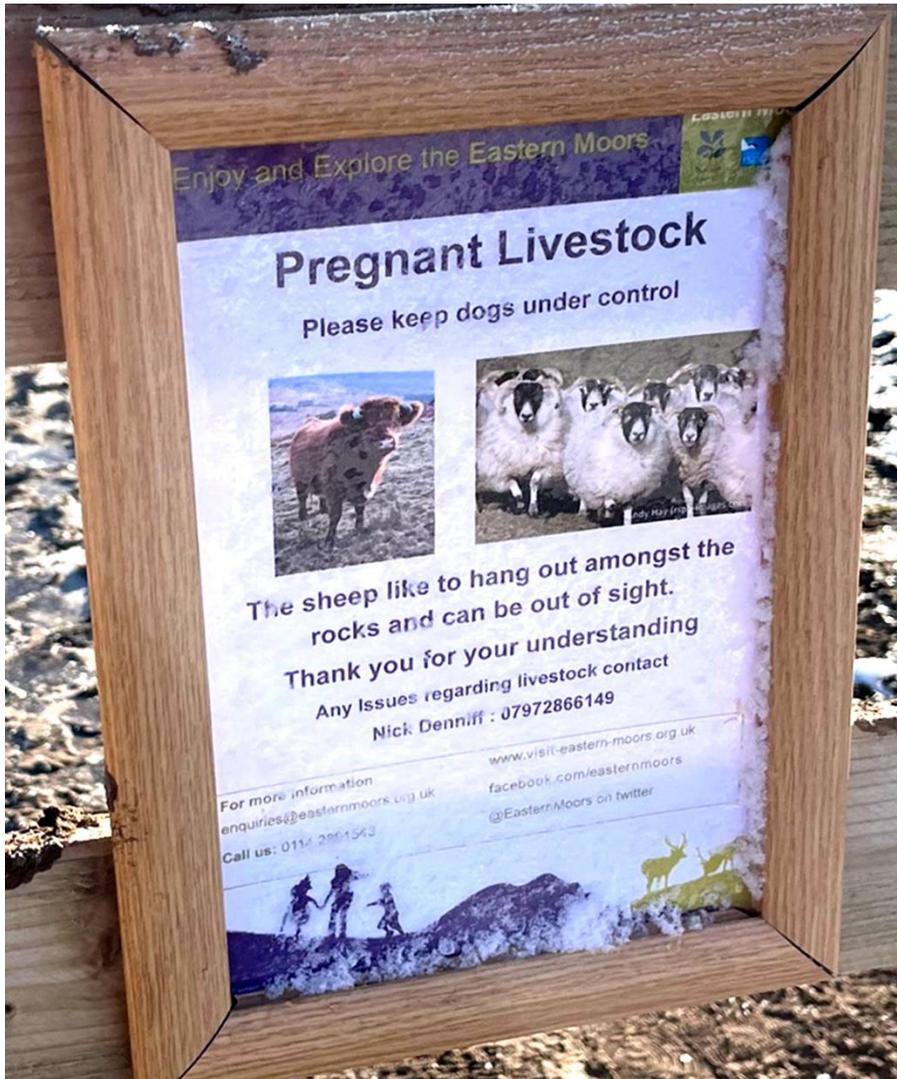
W3W pose.causes.curve



This path is hardly noticable but it must have been well trampled once. I found this 1926 King George V penny in the mud in 2018. It has worn very thin and has nicked edges which suggests its been tramped over by many nailed boots. Perhaps from 1928 to 2018?

I'd like to think it was one of the last gamekeepers dropped it in 1928, just before the land was handed over to Sheffield City Council. He would have lost more than his job in 1928.

Whoever dropped it lost about 50p at todays value.



This warning sign appeared at Higgarr Tor in 2023. I don't think sheep 'hang out' as the writer of this sign would understand it!