Foolow Geocross V36

Text and photos for Facebook

Foolow is a picturesque small village in the White Peak with a Village Green at its centre..

Its limestone buildings and field walls are typical of upland limestone plateau.villages.

It is situated on a moor at a height of 290 metres (1000 feet) on an undulating plateau.

Nearby there are similar areas named ‘Moor’ on the OS map. Moors were usually uncultivated uplands but the moor around Foolow today comprises grassland fields. The soil is very shallow and beneath it is the limestone plateau bedrock.

The fields around Foolow were created by the 1804 Enclosure Act. Most are now permanent grassland used for cattle and sheep grazing.

The winter season can be harsh with roads blocked by drifting snow. It is no surprise to see that 4WD vehicles are popular.

The Village Green has the genius loci which makes Foolow so memorable.

> *Genius loci is a phrase which describes the distinctive atmosphere, character, or intangible quality that makes a location feel unique and significant. The concept is used in landscape architecture, literature, and art, to discuss how places acquire meaning and significance for humans.*

The fine old buildings grouped around the village green complete with an ancient cross, bull-ring and pond make Foolow one of the ‘prettiest’ villages in the Peak.

Close to the village green are the Manor House and Old Hall which stand away from the humbler cottages. There is an 1888 tiny church dedicated to St Hugh and a slightly larger but now unused Methodist Wesleyan Chapel built in 1836.

People visit Foolow because the unchallenging countryside is a paradise for walkers. Paths lead up to Bretton and The Barrel Inn, and over the fields to Eyam and Great Hucklow.

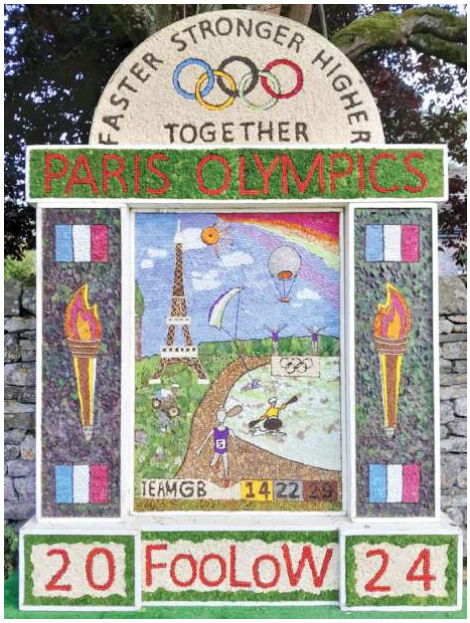
Nearby is a dry valley named Silly Dale, but there is no connection between ‘Silly’ and the ‘Fool’ of Foolow.

Foolow has a fine old inn, The Bull's Head which was originally a row of miners cottages.

Villages in the White Peak take their village wells very seriously. Water is scarce and there are no open streams in Foolow. Well Dressing has pre-Christian pagan origins. Pagan rituals included leaving gifts or sacrifices to water gods to ensure a continuous supply of fresh water.

Unfortunately the offerings didn't work and Foolow had to create a new well outside of the village because the original well became polluted.

Traditionally Foolow villagers decorates their well in late August to early September.



Well dressing is an ancient countryside custom in the Peak District where communities create large themed mosaic artworks from natural materials like flower petals, moss, and seeds to adorn wells, springs, and other water sources. Foolow chose the Paris Olympics theme in 2024.

These elaborate designs, often featuring pictures or scenes, are built on wooden frames packed with wet clay, which are then kept soaked to keep them moist and prevent cracking.

The tradition originated from pre-Christian times as a pagan ritual to thank water gods for keeping the wells flowing. The idea was later adapted by the Christian Church, with some villages also creating them in thanks for deliverance from historical plagues.

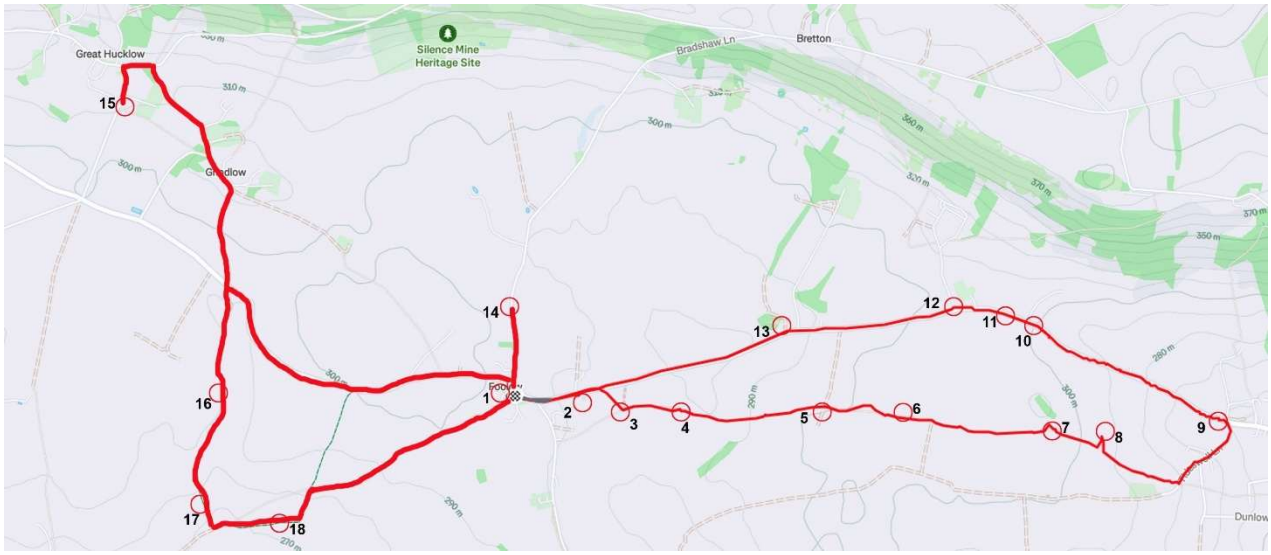
When you analyse the landscape around Foolow you will realise that there is no flowing water. Streams are absent.

Number	**OS grid reference**	**W3W**		
		First word	**Second word**	**Third word**
1	SK 19088 76804	status	broad	landlady
2	SK 19280 76811	excellent	rummage	searches
3	SK 19507 76779	noodle	grading	funky
4	SK 19747 76734	vital	stated	pelt
5	SK 20059 76779	earphones	sour	chatted
6	SK 20395 76737	concluded	slumped	slips
7	SK 20752 76711	freezing	arranger	cloud
8	SK 20842 76741	rattler	blizzard	workflow
9	SK 21317 76737	eradicate	fenced	upgrading

10	SK 20887 76929	hazlenuts	remarried	tips
11	SK 20761 77001	sums	loitering	hindering
12	SK 20454 77090	defectors	engine	enthused
13	SK 19926 77015	worldwide	cubed	frosted
14	SK 19064 77095	upward	sounds	intrigues
15	SK 17854 77704	paces	mastering	moped
16	SK 18164 76820	safety	springing	blackmail
17	SK 18095 76474	catch	save	downs
18	SK 18399 76411	serenade	books	closer

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

Start at Foolow Village Green.



Location 1 OS ref SK 19089 76803

Foolow Village Cross

W3W status.broad.landlady

Foolow's village green with duckpond, village cross, walled well, bull-ring, church, postbox and a pub.

The ducks can come and go the safe walled garden through the neatly made duck-sized hole in the wall. Local people open and close the duck gate in morning and evening. This takes them to Duckingham Palace. When last seen these were 'very posh' white Aylesbury ducks.

The circular pond was originally a traditional clay lined dewpond but is now paved.

It's a delightful setting and as good as any village green in the Peak District. Maybe better due to it being the perfectly placed focal point of a very small village which has a 700 year history. The village cross is a 15th Century Grade II Listed Monument, restored in 1868.

The very small church of St Hugh came quite recenty in Foolows long history. It was opened on 17 November 1888. The front vestibule was a later addition.

Foolow, like most upland villages in the White Peak, was a farming and lead mining community. The large landowners would have employed the local population to work on their farmland and in their lead mines. Lead mining here goes back over 2000 years to before the Roman era. In the 18th century the lead mining industry was booming and the population of Foolow was much larger than today. After the 1804 Enclosure Act, many new landowners could farm and do a bit of lead mining. This might explain the various piles of mining debris at headlands and on field edges on the newly enclosed strip fields. Headlands would be chewed up by annual ploughing. As the least useful land for farming, it was worth trying to see if there was any lead beneath. Mining, like quarrying, is skilled work and it is worth looking at the stonework on houses and in gardens to see examples of the miner's craftmanship.

The village houses were not always the lovely cottages with gardens that we see today. Most of them were simple small cottages. The Bulls Head pub was once a row of lead miners cottages. The ancient bull-ring, embedded in a stone block on the village green, was historically used to tether animals before they were used in blood sports, such as bull-baiting by dogs.

This ancient bull-ring has been moved to the foot of the cross and is no longer used.

Victorian postbox on Village Green. This is cast iron and is an early type, made after 1871. They were designed to be very secure and built into the wall. This one is no longer in use.

Foolow old well is on the village green where cattle would have grazed and drunk from the duckpond. The well is walled off to prevent contamination by animals. This well was abandoned in favour of a new well 200 metres north of the village and clear of any pollution by animal or human waste.

Foolow has a high water table with several natural springs, so was able to sustain a large population of lead miners. A thirsty population and hard-drinking: there were five pubs in Foolow at it's peak. Now just the Bull's Head remains.

Piped water did not reach Foolow until 1932.

Lead mining declined in the mid 19th century and the population reduced to that of a farming village. It has now declined further and Foolow now has about 75 houses and a handful of large farms, mainly grazing sheep. Some of the houses comprise several miners cottages run together.

Not many homeowners work in Foolow these days.

Location 2 OS ref SK 19280 76811

Foolow Reed Beds

W3W excellent.rummage.searches

Foolow has a very small reed bed for village sewage treatment. Great Hucklow also has a reed bed filter. Reed beds are visually attractive natural filtration systems that treat wastewater by using plant roots, filtering substrate, and microorganisms to break down pollutants. This is a sustainable, low-maintenance, and cost-effective alternative to conventional sewage treatment plants.

Reed beds function by percolating sewage through layers of gravel and sand where bacteria remove contaminants like organic matter, nutrients, and pathogens before the cleaned water is discharged.

Wastewater first goes through a primary treatment process to remove solids. It then enters the reed bed by a piped inlet distribution system. The roots and rhizomes of the common reed (Phragmites australis) provide oxygen into the substrate, where bacteria digest organic matter, nutrients such as ammonia and contaminants. The filtered water which has been cleaned to near river quality is collected by drainage pipes at the bottom of the reed bed and discharged.

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Location 3 OS ref SK 19507 76779

Stone step stile

W3W noodle.grading.funky

The field walls with their parallel sides were all constructed after Foolow's 1804 Enclosure Act. A new type of wall crossing was invented, the squeeze stile.

This is the first of many step stiles, gates and squeeze stiles. There may have been at least 22 wall crossings of this field footpath which connects Foolow to Eyam. These are one of the highlights of this Geocross. The gates are a recent addition and not as durable as the stiles which are over 200 years old.

Walled fields changed the way of life for most Foolow villagers. They lived in tiny cottages and didn't have much space for gardening. Walled fields enabled them to grow crops, keep animals and try a bit of lead mining. Lead mining could take place at night, when farm tasks couldn't be carried out. It meant longer working hours but the possibility of better rewards.

On a dull and windy day in September 2025 I passed at least 30 other walkers crossing these fields, mostly with dogs. If you multiply this up for a year you get at least 50,000 user per annum. No wonder the stiles and gates are a little dilapidated.

Location 4 OS ref SK 19747 76734

Linen Dale stile

W3W vital.stated.pelt

Linen Dale is a dramatic landscape feature. Many people mistake it for a road.

In ancient times it carried a substantial stream. The stream is still there but it now mainly flows underground, leaving a shallow dry valley. About 600 metres south it becomes Middleton Dale which is also dry until joined by underground streams which emerge near Eyam.

Underneath Linen Dale and Middleton Dale is the subterranean stream from Waterfall Swallet. The volume of water in this stream fluctuates from trickle to torrent throughout the year.

Middleton Dale was once a treeless canyon in 1803, like Linen Dale is today

Number 5 OS ref SK 20059 76779

Gate and fingerpost

W3W earphones.sour.chatted

Some of the signposts have recently been sprayed white, making them stand out against the dark limestone wall when looking across the field. A very good idea. How often have you headed out across a field in Derbyshire and not been able to see the stile on the opposite side?

All footpath fingerposts should look like this.

Location 6 OS ref SK 20395 76737

Squeeze stile

W3W concluded.slumped.slips

Three squeeze stiles in sequence. Some are tricky for large people. This one is gritstone.

The field wall has gone but a pair of limestone squeeze stile pillars remain.

The third squeeze stile below has a second pair of pillars set into the wall. Both are gritstone.

Location 7 OS ref SK 20752 76711

Gritstone gate posts

W3W freezing.arranger.cloud

These two small copses are above Eyam House. There are large gritstone gate posts between the two copses and I guess this was a rear entrace to Eyam House Farm. Most of the gateposts around Foolow are gritstone, which is more durable than limestone.

The old field barn is no longer used and the roof has fallen in.

Location 8 OS ref SK 20842 76741

Eyam House Park – windblown beech tree

W3W rattler.blizzard.workflow

Where the foopath enters the park there is another squeeze stile. This one has a cast iron ‘cross’ set into the path, possibly the base of a turnstile.

This windblown mature beech tree stood in the ‘Park’ of Eyam House. It was blown over by the prevailing south west wind in 2025. The shallow root-plate, no more than 500mm deep, is not surprising. Tree roots are usually quite shallow. In this case they don’t go any deeper because the underlying rock is limestone and impervious.

A closer inspection of the lower stem shows that this, and other trees in the park, were protected by iron cages. These were to protect the tree bark from animals rubbing or nibbling the bark.

Location 9 OS ref SK 21317 76737

Eyam Townhead Factory

W3W eradicate.fenced.upgrading

Townhead Factory began as a silk printing mill in 1735, where Ralph Wain discovered a technique to print patterns on both sides of silk material.

The pigeon loft high in the gable wall was for carrier pigeons which were used to carry messages to the Macclesfield Mill who marketed the silk.

Macclefield began ‘throwing’ silk yarn in the 1600s, sending it down to Spitalfields in London for finishing. Several silk factories were set up in Derbyshire and by 1857 this was one of three silk workshops in Eyam.

Townhead Factory achieved worldwide fame in 1977 as the place where ‘Friends’ were made. Not the TV Friends. These were Climbers Friends and they have saved many a climbers life!.

Parcels of ’state-of-the-art’ climbing equipment were manufactured here and despatched to every corner of the world where rock-climbing was carried out.

Peak District rock-climber Mark Vallance met American aerospace engineer and top rock-climber Ray Jardine. Ray had a closely guarded secret which he wouldn’t show to other climbers, because they helped him climb faster, harder and more safely by using his ‘Friends’.

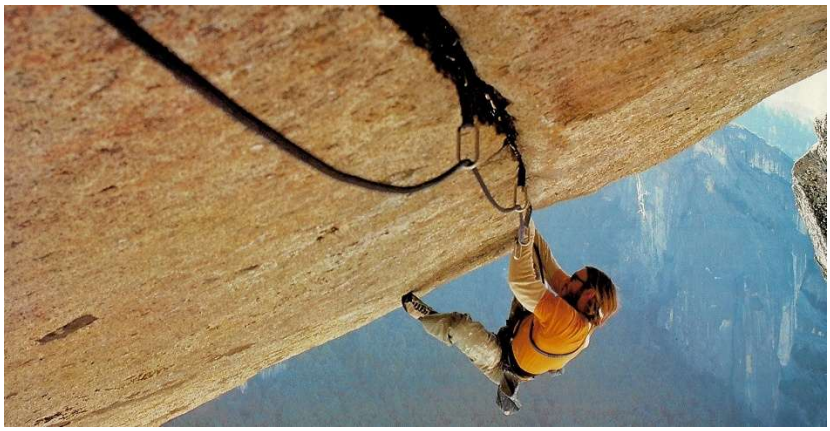
Ray was looking for a partner to manufacture and assemble his new spring loaded camming device. In summer 1977 the international Mountain magazine (printed in Sheffield) featured a cover picture of Ray climbing the seemingly impossible roof of Separate Reality in Yosemite Valley. Ray was using his ‘Friends’ to protect the climb. Worldwide climbers were awestuck.

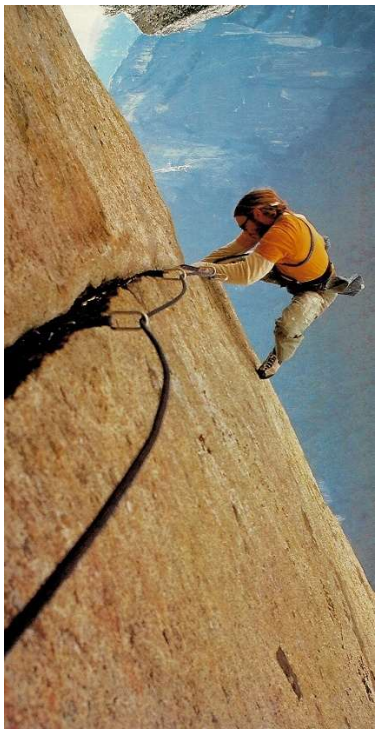
Many turned the magazine around to view the climber from a more normal angle.

Mark Vallance agreed to set up a company in Britain to manufacture Friends.

Townhead Factory was where innovative rock-climbing equipment manufacturer ‘Wild Country’ started. Mark lived nearby in Great Hucklow, and later moved to Foolow where he lived in The Yard.

In its early days Wild Country only manufactured ‘Friends’, a revolutionary camming device which enabled climbers to quickly ascend steep cracks by inserting these spring-loaded devices into cracks.





In those days I climbed with Mark Vallance. He asked me to help with Wild County's world-wide advertising campaign because he knew I could draw. He had pre-booked advertising space and needed to deliver new adverts to the magazine every month. I lived close to Mountain Magazines' offices and I could produce professional quality 'camera-ready artwork. The advertising in international magazine Mountain reached many more people than Mark had expected, and his fledgling company was swamped with more orders than he could cope with.

Within their first year, 5000 Friends were sold world wide. The quantity sold doubled every year for five years. This invention changed the rock-climbing world. The word 'Friend' was soon known to climbers of every nationality.

Later the company Wild Country moved to Tideswell and is still based there, although their name has changed.

Mark Vallance went on to become a Board Member of the Peak District National Park.

He also served a term as President of the Climbers Club, and as President of the British Mountaineering Council.

Friends were always very expensive. The originals cost £7.50. Today they each cost over £75. A climber today would typically carry a range of sizes, so a rack of gear could cost upwards of £500.

Well over 1 million Friends have been sold worldwide by this tiny Peak District based company.

Location 10 OS ref SK 20887 76929

Eyam House Farm pigeon loft

W3W hazelnuts.remarried.tips

Eyam House and Eyam House Farm are the last houses in Eyam Townhead on the Foolow road. Like Townhead Factory this building has a similar east-facing pigeon loft high up on the east side of the building. There may be a silk manufacturing connection.

Location 11 OS ref SK 20761 77001

Remnants of gritstone trough

W3W sums.loitering.hindering

Between Foolow and Eyam there are a number of narrow strip fields, parallel sided and dating from the 1804 Enclosure Act, when the Open Fields shared by villagers in common were allocated to individual newly made landowners. The footpath crosses at least 17 fields.

This layout of long thin fields is particularly striking when viewed from above, for example from The Barrell Inn at Bretton.

The pattern of the fields around Foolow is similar to those around other limestone villages in the Peak District. Long narrow fields are normal here, whereas in the English Midlands larger rectangular or curving fields are more usual.

Limestone land has an abundance of shallow limestone, so drystone walls became the field boundaries.

However, these White Peak fields have no natural supply of water. The few troughs that exist are filled by piped water.

Location 12 OS ref SK 20454 77090

Fine Grinding old grindstone

W3W defectors.engine.enthused

A toothed grindstone, a remnant of the lead mining industry.

Fine Grinding Ltd is on the site of one of the biggest Derbyshire lead mines, Black Hole Mine.

The steep escarpment above Foolow is known as Eyam Edge and Hucklow Edge. This edge is formed by shales which overlie the limestone. The shales are well known for their instability, and landslips are commn. The landslip feature known as Little Switzerland in Bretton Clough is just over Eyam Edge.

There are over 439 lead mines recorded within 5km of Eyam. The deepest are on Hucklow Edge and go down 210 metres to reach the Hucklow Edge Vein. Extracted lead ore was ground in a mill at the minehead before being taken to be smelted in cupolas, well away from habitation.

The peak of the mining industry was reached in 1820 and then quickly declined. Between 1860 – 1880 almost every mine was closed.

Location 13 OS ref SK 19926 77015

Waterfall Swallet

W3W worldwide.cubed.frosted

The farmland to the north-west drains into a large shake hole. This is a huge pot-hole, 100 metres diameter and 9 metres deep. The ‘swallet’ or swallow-hole, is a feature of limestone geology where a surface water stream disappears into a subterranean stream. The water level in the swallet fluctuates throughout the year and in summer the volume of water reduces to a trickling stream across the floor. In a hard winter the waterfall freezes and ice-climbers will climb it with ice axes and crampons..

The cave at the base of the swallet is 43 metres deep and often flooded. Even when dry it is very difficult and dangerous to access.

Location 14 OS ref SK 19064 77095

Foolow well

W3W upward.sounds.intrigues

The well on Foolow Village Green was not safe to use as drinking water as it was used by animals and ducks. A new well was built outside the village n the road to Hucklow Edge, 100 metres north of the village. Like the well on the village green, the entrance is not accessible to cattle. The craftmanship shown in the fine gritstone copings of the village green well is not present here.

Location 15 OS ref SK 17854 77704

Great Hucklow Old Chapel

W3W paces.mastering.moped

Memorial plaque for Mark Vallance, climber and manufacturer of Friends, a climbing device which made climbing safer.

Remembered with love and admiration by Jan, Jody and all his Friends.

Location 16 OS ref SK 18164 76820

Silly Dale

W3W safety.springing.blackmail

There is no connection between the ‘Fool’ of Foolow and ‘Silly’ of Silly Dale. The Low of Foolow means a hill and with the prefix means ‘hill frequented by birds’. Low in Derbyshire actually means a high point.

Silly means ‘pretty’ in Old English. Silly Dale is a pretty dry valley and has remains of lead mining.

Location 17 OS ref SK 18095 76474

Silly Dale lead rake

W3W catch.save.downs

Silly Dale is crossed by at least two lead rakes where miners dug deep open-cast trenches to reach shallow lead deposits. This one is now being used as a farm tip.

Location 18 OS ref SK 18399 76411

Dewpond

W3W amaze.paves.quit

The fields around Foolow have no streams so livestock is dependant on man-made ponds. Most dewponds are now concrete lined and have a piped water supply.