

Gardoms Edge and Birchen Edge Geocross V6

Gardoms and Birchen Edges are the most southerly of the true Eastern Edges.

Further south the gritstone appears as tors and buttresses, and quite a number of quarries.

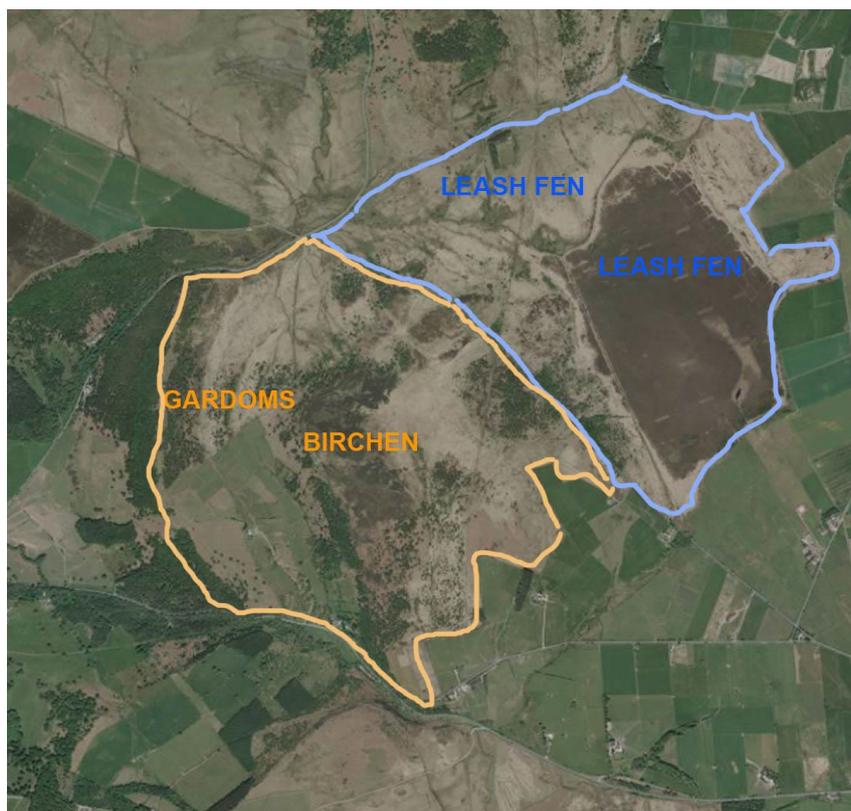
But before setting out onto Gardoms Edge, spare a thought for what you are about to leave behind. Leash Fen. It's a bigger area of moor than Gardoms and Birchen Edges.

Leash Fen – an unpopular moor

It is virtually unvisited except by wildlife.

I have deliberately bypassed Leash Fen because it has few historical features and it is not a pleasant place, unless you are a duck.

Leash Fen is a marsh which lies above the shallow Ringinglow coal seam, which is above the Chatworth Gritstone bed. Above the coal seam is a 6 metre deep peat layer. These layers are almost horizontal beds. My guess is that the people of the market town of Leash Fen mined the underlying coal by bellpit shafts as used at nearby Bucka Hill on Big Moor. As the bellpits collapsed the general ground level sank, probably by the depth of the now missing coal seam, about 1 metre. In a marsh one metre depth of water is quite deep enough to drown a town.



An old verse says that Leash Fen was once a 'market town'. Its probably true. There is an old guidepost in Shillito Wood, now hidden by trees, which gave travellers a direction to cross Leash Fen.

*When Chesterfield was gorse and broom,
Leash Fen was a market town;
Now Chesterfield's a market town,
Leash Fen is but gorse and broom.*

Until the 2001 CROW Act access to Leash Fen was denied, but now you can wander at will. Just don't expect to find well-worn tracks, or other people. You will be hard pressed to find someone who has positive things to say about Leash Fen.

I have crossed Leash Fen several times. My advice is not to go onto the fen alone. There are some very, very deep bogs. A very hard frost in winter when the vegetation has already been flattened by snow is probably best.

Underlying Leash Fen is a 6 metre deep peat deposit lying over the Lower Coal Measures (Ringinglow Coal Seam). Coal is impervious to water, due to the underlying gannister clay which formed the base of the swamps where trees grew and collapsed into the swamp to form coal seams.

Coal formed during the Carboniferous period due to a unique combination of environmental and biological factors. Extensive, swampy forests covered much of the Earth's tropical regions, and when plant matter from these forests fell into the oxygen-poor waters of the swamps, it didn't fully decompose. Over millions of years, these partially decayed plant deposits were buried under layers of sediment, and with heat and pressure, transformed into coal.

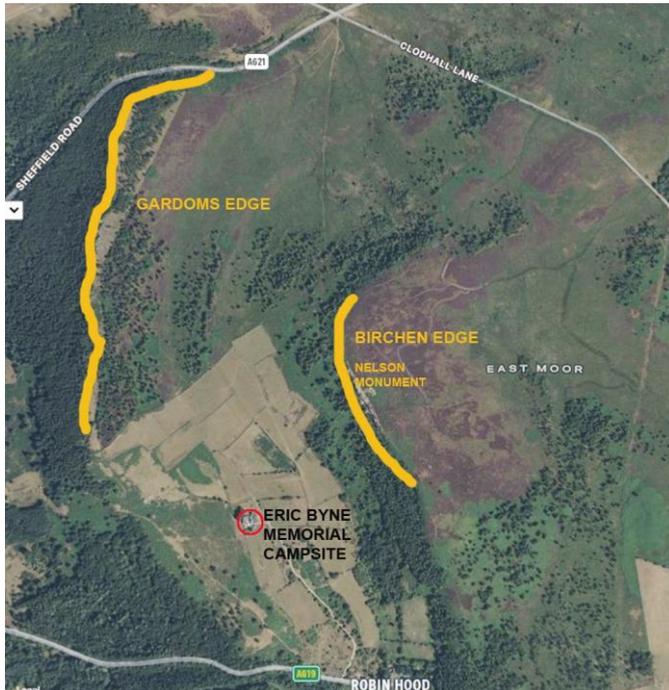
Prior to the formation of the peat layer the moors were covered by a mixed oak forest with occasional breaks in the forest canopy, where areas of damp heath and alder and birch carr developed. The onset of a wetter climate encouraged the 6 metre deep peat layer to develop.

Some years before the sale of his shooting moorlands in 1927, the Duke of Rutland had drainage ditches cut across Leash Fen. They are still present and quite deep, but they did not do the drainage job effectively. However, that the drain diggers found fragments of pottery and bits of buildings. The story about a sunken lost town on Leash Fen was probably true.

Some years before the sale of his shooting moorlands in 1927, the Duke of Rutland had drainage ditches cut across Leash Fen. They are still present and quite deep, but did not do the job effectively. It is reported that the drain diggers found fragments of pottery and bits of buildings. The story about a sunken lost town on Leash Fen was probably true.

Leash Fen today is low and boggy, a great sodden expanse of heather, gorse and coarse grass tussocks. Wildlife especially birds abound, and it's probably best left to wildlife.

After the second World War Leash Fen was used for experimental bomb disposal.



Gardoms and Birchen Edges

Gardoms and Birchen Edge were used for grouse shooting but were never owned by the Duke of Rutland, who owned seven moorlands to the north. The access gate to Gardoms Edge is therefore not another locked White Gate.

Instead it was well used by carts heading east over Gardoms Moor to Chesterfield. These moors are now managed by cattle and sheep grazing and are only slightly boggy.

There are no reservoirs on Gardoms or Birchen Moors. All the run-off water joins the Bar Brook above Baslow, and then into the River Derwent.

Birchen Edge is part of the Chatsworth Estate. The land ownership may explain why permission was readily given to erect a monument to Lord Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805. This was erected on top of Birchen Edge in 1810. The Duke of Devonshire was happy to celebrate an important war victory for Britain.

A second monument to the Duke of Wellington's 1825 victory at Waterloo was erected on nearby Baslow Edge ten years later. These two victories put an end to the Napoleonic Wars, a global series of conflicts.

Gardom's Edge is probably named after Thomas Gardom, a mill owner from Calver. He may have also been a blacksmith but it is unlikely that he owned the land; possibly just the right to quarry millstones on the edge.

The moorland above Gardom's Edge has a lot of prehistoric features. There was a large Bronze Age settlement with a Neolithic rubble stone and earth enclosure bank, and cairnfields from field clearance. It was settled for some 2000 years from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. The landscape features are best seen in winter.

Gardoms is famous for its Bronze Age settlements, a magnificent Standing Stone and the best example of prehistoric Rock Art in the Peak District.

Its very difficult to see the Gardoms Edge crag because the woodland below is unmanaged and dense.

Birchen Edge is more visible as a skyline feature and is now famous for much more recent modifications to a monument, although most visitors won't have noticed.

Rock Climbing on Gardoms and Birchen Edges

Rock climbing pioneers J W Puttrell and W J Watson visited in 1890, climbed two routes and never returned. The crags were left untouched for 40 years, until the 1930s.

The production of the first definitive gritstone climbing guidebook to the Eastern Edges began in 1933 by Eric Byne, Secretary of the Sheffield Climbing Club. It took 18 years to complete because his mind was on greater things. He was writing the definitive history of climbing and walking in the Peak District, 'High Peak'.

In 1951 Climbs on Gritstone Sheffield Area was published. Gardoms Edge had 84 recorded climbs and Birchen Edge had 67.

The naval connection to Nelsons victory at Trafalgar inspired rock climbers to use 'nautical terminology' in naming their Birchen Edge climbs.

Bynes 1951 guidebook recorded that :-

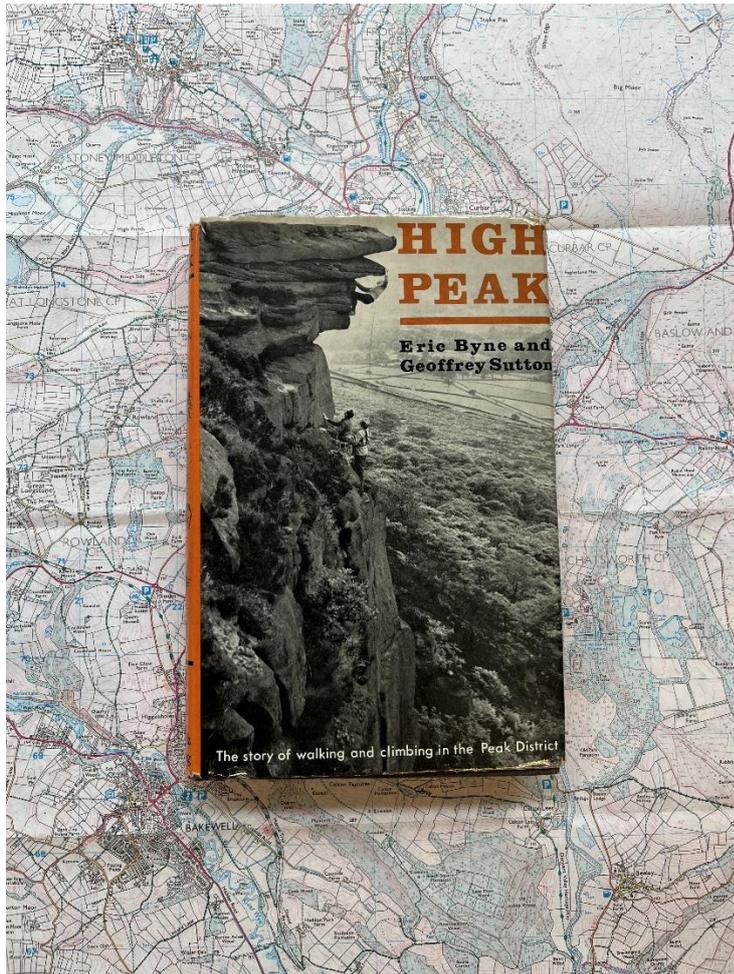
'Unfortunately Froggatt and Curbar Edges were closely guarded by gamekeepers and it was not possible to secure permission to explore.'

This tongue in cheek comment belies the fact that climbers were already very familiar with Froggatt and Curbar Edges, as well as the more freely available Gardoms and Birchen Edges.

Exploration without permission had in fact proceeded through the 1930s and 1940s.

Nearby Chatsworth Edge was also explored and 32 climbs were recorded. The story goes that the Duke of Devonshire was riding past Chatsworth Edge and saw climbers in action. His comment was that 'rock climbers were doing no harm, let them continue'.

Whilst writing the definitive climbing guidebook to Gritstone climbing in the Sheffield Area, Eric Byne was also preparing his major opus 'High Peak' in collaboration with Geoffrey Sutton.



High Peak wasn't just a rock climbing history. It was the comprehensive story of walking and climbing in the Peak District. The book is highly sought after today and a very important memoir. The cover picture features Peter Biven climbing Hearse Arete on Gardoms Edge.. The name of the climb, angle of the rock and the waist tied climbing rope with no visible protection tells a story about the confidence and skills needed to climb this route in 1956.

Birchen Edge Nelson Monument

Nelsons Monument is the flat topped 3 metre slender stone pinnacle which was erected in 1810 to commemorate Nelsons Victory in the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar. It stands on top of Birchen Edge.



The British Fleet at Trafalgar was just 27 'ships of the line', against 33 ships of the combined Franco-Spanish fleet. Admiral Lord Nelson employed a bold tactic of dividing his fleet into two columns to break the enemy line and engage in close-range combat, where the British excelled.

The British achieved a resounding victory, destroying or capturing 19 enemy ships without losing any of their own. Trafalgar secured British naval dominance. France and Spain had no capability of replacing the lost 19 ships, thereby preventing Napoleon from challenging British power at sea and effectively ending his plans for invasion of Britain.

Near the Nelson Monument are three massive rocks with carved names of three of Nelsons ships from the Battle of Trafalgar which took place on 21 October 1805 off Cadiz, Spain.

The Birchen Edge Three Ships were Victory, Defiant and Royal Soverin (spelling error).

The cost in casualties was high; 1500 British seamen were killed or wounded. Nelson lost his life to a snipers bullet.

Nelsons fleet defeated the combined navies of France and Spain and ensured that Britain would remain the dominant naval power for many years to come.

This naval victory paved the way to the Duke of Wellingtons land victory at Waterloo in 1815. The Napoleonic Wars with the French were over within 10 years.

Don't take my word for it, here is an AI Chatbots assessment of Nelsons Victory.

The significance of Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar for Britain cannot be overstated. The battle, which took place on 21 October 1805 off the coast of Spain, was a naval victory for the British Royal Navy over the combined forces of the French and

Spanish fleets. It was a decisive moment in the Napoleonic Wars and one of the most significant naval battles in history.

Nelson's victory at Trafalgar ensured that Britain would remain the dominant naval power in the world for many years to come. It also prevented Napoleon from mounting a naval invasion of Britain, which would have had disastrous consequences for the country. The battle marked the end of any serious threat from France to Britain's maritime supremacy and enabled Britain to continue its global trade and colonial expansion.

However, Nelson himself was killed during the battle, which was a great loss for Britain. Nevertheless, his heroic leadership and tactical brilliance contributed to the victory and cemented his status as one of the country's greatest heroes. His death also added to the sense of national pride and resolve that the victory at Trafalgar inspired, and his memory and legacy continue to be celebrated in Britain to this day.

Within 5 years of the victory, in 1810 the Nelson Monument was erected on top of Birchen Edge by a local man from Baslow, John Brightman. His vision of The Battle of Trafalgar was symbolised by naming the three rocks after Nelson's Three Ships of the line. The name of his flagship Victory is engraved on the north of the three massive rocks, then Defiance, and Royal Sovereign (spelling error, it should be Sovereign) on the south rock.



It wasn't until 1840, thirty years later, that Londoners raised Nelson's Column in the renamed Trafalgar Square.

Nelson's column also has a tradition of being climbed!

In 1977 BBC TV Blue Peters resident stunt man John Noakes was taken up Nelsons Column the hard way.

The Nelson Monument stands on top of the crag, close to the Three Ships.

This area is known to climbers as Monument Buttress. Below the monument is a very hard climb, Orpheus Wall HVS 5c. Classicists will remember that Orpheus descended into the Underworld.

The Nelson Monument stands 14 metres above the start of the route.

When first erected the monument was flat topped. A very small flat top, no more than 6 inches square.

From the early 1900s climbers came along looking for rocks to climb. By the 1970s there were 124 climbs recorded on Birchen Edge, mostly with nautical names. The rock climbing guidebook also states:-

“The Nelson Monument is climbable, and people have stood on their heads on its summit.”

Climbers had already risen to this challenge. In 1965 a very bold and fearless young climber scaled the 3 metre stone pillar, solo, unroped, in primitive PA climbing boots, and teetered into a standing position with the prospect of either a 3 metre drop or a 17 metre drop, (a possible re-enactment of the fatal descent of Orpheus into the Underworld).



He put his hands in his pockets for a picture to be taken. And he then climbed back down; you don't jump 3 metres onto a flat gritstone landing if you can help it!

He graded the ascent as 6c, and 6c+ if you are cool enough to put your hands in your pockets for the summit photo.

Only a few years later in the 1970s that fearful Health and Safety Monument Guardians re-engineered the top of the Birchen Edge monument after 150 years of service by adding a stone ball.

It is not known if there has been a repeat ascent since, but there probably has.....





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

Start and finish at Clod Hall Lane crossroads at the junction with A621 Baslow Road

OS ref SK 27440 73805

Gardoms Edge north - Cantilever roof shallow basin

W3W [attaching.logbook.evening](https://www.what3words.com/)



Gardoms Edge begins where the A621 Sheffield Road begins to descend to Baslow. It is the first visible roadside gritstone crag on the A621. All the other famous rock 'edges' such as Stanage and Froggatt are set back from the road.

OS ref SK 27250 73230

Gardom's Standing Stone

W3W damp.joined.lawfully



This ancient guide stoop was once an important waymarker to help travellers cross Gardoms Moor. It is now hidden in a birch woodland.

There are usually offerings of coins in the hollows on top.

The moorland above Gardom's Edge has a lot of prehistoric features. There was a large settlement and a Neolithic rubble stone and earth enclosure bank, and cairnfields from field clearance. It was settled for some 2000 years from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

The best time of year to see these landscape features is in winter.

OS ref SK 27132 73257

Millstones just below top of Gardoms Edge

W3W unwraps.chose.shears



Gardoms Edge and the rocky slope below has been extensively quarried for millstones. Calver mill owner Thomas Gardom may have worked these stones. His name is given to the edge.

The Eastern gritstone edges were an important source of gritstone millstones. They were perfectly located to deliver to the cornmills of the Derwent Valley or the industrial mills of Sheffield.

But the bottom fell out of the gritstone millstone market when British people gained a liking for the white bread that soldiers had eaten in France where they fought for Britain at the Battle of Waterloo in 1825. There they milled their bakers flour using white millstones. From 1850 most cornmills in Britain had a pair of French Burr millstones to make white flour.

Heaps of unwanted millstones abound beneath Stanage, Burbage, Froggatt and Curbar Edges. But the biggest stockpile is at Lawrencefield Quarry at Bole Hill.

OS ref SK 27149 72787

Three Men of Gardoms

W3W fury.canal.charcoal



Three Men of Gardom's are situated on a prominent location above the crag of Gardoms Edge.

The three small piles of stones were placed in the 18th century on top of an old, low mound or barrow dating back to the Neolithic or Bronze Age (4000 years ago).

The stones were rearranged in the 18th century in three mounds as a memorial to three shepherds or three priests who died in the snow on this moor.

They are often rearranged; sometimes there are 5 or 6 Men of Gardoms.

OS ref SK 27280 72627

Cat Rocks Hermit's shelter

W3W sleeper.scrapped.takes



A well used track passes over the moor heading east to Chesterfield. To the west is the Derwent Valley, and notably, the two neighbouring villages of Froggatt and Curbar. Both have Wesleyan Chapels.

The Wesleyan Church opposes the production, sale, and purchase of alcoholic beverages.

This is the high point of the moorland road and travellers might be thirsty.

It is not surprising that a Hermit was recruited to live in a shelter at Cat Rocks. He was paid to recite religious texts to passing travellers. The alcoholic temptations of the Robin Hood Inn at Birchen Edge is less than 1 mile away.

OS ref SK 27596 72556

Eric Byne Camp Site

W3W remake.rural.coder



You can see this simple camp site from over the moorland wall, so no need to walk there. Its just a grassy field. But it has Location Location Location!

Eric Byne occupies a significant place in the history of gritstone climbing. Originally from the Black Country, he started his climbing on gritstone and became a driving force in the loose association of working class climbers known as the Sheffield Climbing Club. This was in the depression years of the 1930s. Sheffield Climbing Club members had to walk from their homes to get a day's climbing, thus concentrating on the Eastern Edges.

These climbers were highly competent and between 1930 and Byne's death in 1969 they developed the nearby crags of Gardoms and Birchen Edges with high quality routes.

The book 'High Peak', is the history of Peak District climbing and long distance walking, written by Eric Byne and Geoff Sutton. It was published in 1966 and remains a classic account of British climbing.

Eric Byne died in 1969 and the British Mountaineering Council helped establish a 'walk-in' campsite below Birchen Edge. For generations of climbers used to arriving for a weekend's climbing in vans or on motorbikes, all they needed was a camping field close to the crags. There was a nearby pub at the Robin Hood and a car park. Today the idea of a walk-in campsite may seem a bit odd but it was fit for purpose in the 1970s.

The small area of field for the Eric Byne campsite was leased. The lease came up for renewal in 2011. The campsite still exists so I assume that the lease was renewed.

The campsite is in pleasant moorland countryside on a working farm and about 500 metres from the road. It is walk-in only, so no cars. Birchen Edge is 1 km away

It is situated on Chatsworth's doorstep, this no-frills tents-only campsite is perfect for those wanting to escape from town to the countryside.

It has a sanitary block with water, toilets and washing up facilities. Pets are allowed. Nearby attractions are a pub restaurant and climbing and walking.

I have camped in much less pleasant camp-sites!

It helps if you visualise how this location would have appealed to countryside visitors 50 years ago.

OS ref SK 27281 73042

Cup and Ring Carved Stone

W3W last.conveying.paddock



This is probably the best example of Bronze Age rock art in the Peak District.

Unfortunately due to its remote location it has to be a replica of a 4000 year old Bronze Age cup and ring markings on a flat slab. The two ovals each have ten holes symmetrically spaced. The third ring has a deep cup.

The original rock is around 4000 years old but this is a glassfibre replica installed because the original was eroding quickly.

There are two stories about the whereabouts of the original. It is either buried nearby or in a museum.

OS ref SK 27668 73138

Basin Rock below Birchen Edge

W3W nightfall.declares.weeds



A wind and water worn gritstone boulder. The basin has been carved out by pebbles swirling in water for many thousands of years.

OS ref SK 27910 72946

Birchen Edge Three Ships

W3W looms.tiles.broker



Near the Nelson Monument are rocks named after three of Britains 27 'ships of the line' from the Battle of Trafalgar which took place on 21 October 1805 off Cadiz, Spain. Britain defeated the combined navies of France and Spain, but Nelson lost his life to a snipers bullet. Victory was Nelsons flagship. Defiant and Royal Soverin (spelling error) are the other two.

This naval victory paved the way to the Duke of Wellingtons land victory at Waterloo in 1815. The Napoleonic Wars with the French were largely over within 10 years.

OS ref SK 27880 72942

Birchen Edge Nelsons Monument

W3W length.delay.mainframe



Lord Nelsons naval victory at Trafalgar, against the combined fleets of France and Spain, took place in October 1805. Nelson was killed by a snipers bullet. The victory at Trafalgar ensured that Britain would remain the dominant naval power for many years to come.

Within 5 years of the victory, in 1810 the Nelson Monument was erected on top of Birchen Edge by a local man from Baslow, John Brightman. His vision of The Battle of Trafalgar was symbolised by naming the three rocks after Nelsons Three Ships of the line. The name of his flagship Victory is engraved on the north of the three massive rocks, then Defiance, and Royal Soverin (spelling error, it should be Sovereign) on the south rock.

It wasn't until 1840, thirty years later, that Londoners raised Nelsons Column in the renamed Trafalgar Square. And it wasn't until the 1970s that fearful monument protectors re-engineered the top of the Birchen Edge Nelsons Monument by adding a stone ball to stop any climbers standing on the true summit.

It is not known if there has been a repeat ascent since....but there probably has!

When we were younger we all did some daft things. In 1965 one of the young climbers of my generation did something so daft that it caused the Nelson Monument on Birchen Edge to be substantially re-engineered, after 150 years of service.

The monument sits on top of the crag, close to the Three Ships. This area is known to climbers as Monument Buttress. A popular but difficult climb named Orpheus Wall HVS 5c, above which stands the Nelson Monument. In fact the Nelson Monument stands 14 metres above the start of the Orpheus Wall route.

Classicists will remember that Orpheus descended into the Underworld.

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Circa 1965 a young, bold and fearless climber aged 19 (and three-quarters) scaled the 3 metre stone pillar, solo, unroped, in primitive PA boots, and teetered into a standing position with the prospect of either a 3 metre drop or a 17 metre drop, (a possible re-enactment of the fatal descent of Orpheus into the Underworld). He then put his hands in his pockets for this picture to be taken. And climbed back down; you don't jump 3 metres onto a flat gritstone landing if you can help it!

He reckons the ascent was technically hard at 6c, and 6c+ if you are cool enough to put your hands in your pockets for the summit photo.



The monument is now topped by a stone ball and is rumoured to await a repeat ascent.



Three Ships of the line, Victory, Defiance & Royal Sovrin



Nelsons Monument as it is today

OS ref SK 27825 73095

Birchen Edge trig point

W3W cleans.voting.reefs



Birchen Edge has a little visited trig point requiring a bit of scrambling. To be honest, most people settle for the Nelson Monument as being the summit.