



North Dartmoor

Sticklepath-Belstone Circular



The foundry is a symphony of water-power - a living working example of how the energy of our fast-flowing streams can be harnessed to make beautiful and practical objects. And in this case it is the River Taw that does the muscle work, issuing - as it does - from the bowels of Belstone Cleave.

It is the Cleave, or gorge, which is the venue for this walk. The village of Belstone sits handsomely at the top of the ravine, Sticklepath at the bottom, and in between there is as dramatic a corner of landscape as you'll find anywhere in the moors.

My advice is to call in at the foundry for a visit before starting the hike, then you can use the trust's car park as a place to leave your vehicle. Blades were big thing at the foundry in days of yore - fine, gorgeous, practical and exceedingly sharp blades of all shapes and sizes. These things were the Samurai swords of the Westcountry.

Blades for harvesting, blades for cutting peat, blades for thatching, hedge-laying, coppicing, reed-cutting and a plethora of other jobs - all were made here under the leaking launders which provided water to three water-wheels, linked to the machines within.

Having admired the fantastic workmanship of the foundrymen, find the beginning of the hike by following the signposts to Belstone situated across the green at the rear of the car park by the river. The path wends its way, very pleasantly indeed, all the way up the riverside and there are countless private shady spots for waterside picnics along the way.

Skaigh Warren rises steeply towards the great heights of Cosdon Hill to the south of the gorge - and it's around this

Basic hike: Up Belstone Cleave from Sticklepath along riverside path before ascending to Belstone, back along higher path skirting northern edge of the gorge.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer OL28 Dartmoor.

Distance and going: 3.6 miles fairly easy could be muddy during wet periods.

To find out more about the Finch Foundry telephone 01837 840046

eminence to the west that the valley makes a sharp turn into the moors just under the rocky ramparts of Belstone Common. This column has been into the massive hinterland of the higher Taw before - and found it to be one of the most striking and lonesome corners of the entire Westcountry.

But this time we swing north by crossing the river at a new looking footbridge and taking the path that leads diagonally up to the village of Belstone. It looks as though it's going to be quite a climb, but on one of the hottest days of the year last week I mooched up without breaking into too much of a sweat.

The whole distance between Sticklepath and Belstone is 1.6 miles - the latter is a quiet, scenic village full of the joys of mountain air - a highland community that is forever witnessing the donning of walking boots. Because of its close proximity to the A30 and is ideally located as a portal to the lonely and utterly empty northern moors, it is one of Dartmoor's premier walks villages.

Every time I've been there, the village pub has been full of folk either fresh from the hills, or bound for them. Probably the best known feature of the village is the Nine Maidens - a stone circle which marks the remains of a Bronze Age burial chamber.

Belstone somehow exudes a sense of times past. The history books state how it was given rights of «Venville» sometime in the 13th century - these allowed villagers to take such things as turf and bracken from the moor as well as graze cattle, ponies and sheep, in return for paying rent to the Duchy of Cornwall, which owned the Forest of Dartmoor. Some of these rights still exist today, under the control of the Dartmoor Commoners Council and the national park authority.

Having enjoyed a cool real-ale shandy in the pub, we returned back down the Cleave by the higher route. This runs along the northern edge of the gorge, just under the hamlet of Skaigh, and eventually joins the Belstone lane on the outskirts of Sticklepath. From there it's a short walk of about ten minutes back to the old main road where you turn right to walk along what was once (before the A 30 was transformed into a fast dual-carriageway and moved south of the village) a hellishly noisy street. This takes you back to the foundry.

It's a shortish walk of just 3.6 miles, but eminently scenic and satisfying. Ideal, in fact, for the busy motorist who has an hour and a bit to spare and wants to plunge into the depths of the wilderness.