



Region

Brown Willy from Jamaica Inn

Jamaica Inn, the pub made so famous by romantic Daphne Du Maurier, is one of the best known places in Cornwall. Today it might have a bit of a motorway-services feel about it - but it is situated in a wonderful wild bit of the county and there are excellent walks all around.

The great boggy prairie of northern Bodmin Moor stretches off towards the Atlantic on the other side of the A30 dual-carriageway from the celebrated smugglers' pub and is a wonderful place in which to explore.

Public accessibility to wide swathes of Bodmin Moor became a good deal more when the government improved access to moorlands across the UK. This walk has certainly benefited from those changes.

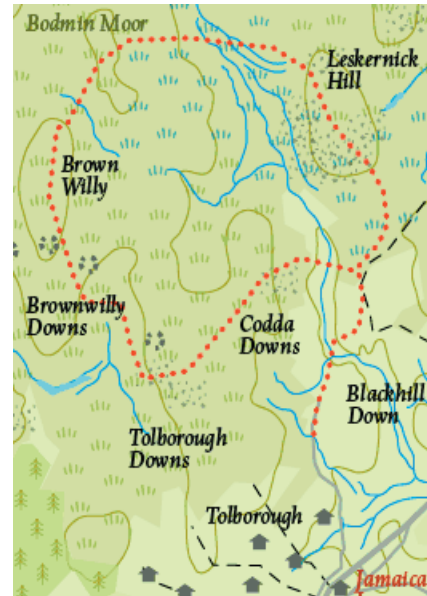
But we start by following the public bridleway that leads north east from Codda Ford. Reaching it from Jamaica Inn is a simple enough thing to achieve - all you have to do is drive under the dual carriageway, north of the pub, and take the small lane that heads off from the feeder road. It runs a mile or so directly north under Tolborough Tor before coming to an abrupt end.

This is where we parked on the small strip of greensward near the gate. When we were there a man and a woman were also preparing to go walking and, as I was a little concerned my map was out of date, I asked if they had a more modern copy of OS Explorer 109... «Explorer 109?» the man said with obvious distaste. «My map is dated from the 1700's and it will do me. Nothing much has changed up here.»

He was right. Even this small distance from the busy A30, you are plunged into the antediluvian world of the great high level plains. Which is a bit of a falsehood really, because quite a lot has changed up here down the ages.

To begin the hike, simply go through the gate at the end of the lane, turn right and follow the bridleway which descends along its ancient rocky bed to eventually cross the young River Fowey. It then continues north by climbing a knoll and introducing the walker to the huge shoulder of land between Hendra Downs and Leskernick Hill.

The latter is due north and, once you can see its rock clutter clearly, it's time to leave the bridleway and strike off towards the summit.



Basic hike: from Codda Ford just north of Jamaica Inn, up Leskernick Hill and onto Buttern Hill before turning west for Brown Willy. Then over Cornwall's highest peak to return across Catshole Downs.

Recommended map: Ordnance Survey Explorer 109.

Distance and going: six miles, can be rough and boggy in places.

Leskernick Hill is famed among archaeologists as being the location of some of the most remarkable early dwellings in the country. And as you walk up to the summit you'll see the rocky remains of some of the 50-odd prehistoric homes which once stood here. It was undoubtedly a busy community. Nearby there are stone rows, stone circles and goodness knows what else, where these early folk could have amused themselves doing whatever they did in such places.

Just north, between Leskernick and Buttern Hills, we came across the deepest groove in the Westcountry. The giant rut - which is some 50 feet deep and more than 100 feet across - is actually all that remains of the tin streaming industry which went on up here for centuries.

We walked around the western flank of Buttern Hill to find the source of the River Fowey before marching due west across High Tor to reach the northern buttresses of Brown Willy. It wasn't our original intended route, but some friends who'd never been to the roof of Cornwall before wanted to climb the county's highest hill.

Every Cornish person should do it. To live in Cornwall and say you've not been to the top of Brown Willy is something akin to a Cockney saying he's never seen Big Ben.

Brown Willy is a remarkable hill in many ways. Basically it's a great big whale-back shaped ridge that stretches, with a good many rocks, from north to south. The 420 metre high summit is situated more-or-less in the middle of the long thin ridge. From it you can see half the Westcountry peninsula.

On a clear day... On a murky day you can see flying ants. Or, at least, you could when we were there. Millions and millions of flying ants. So many in fact, that we could hear the collective swish of ten million tiny wings.

Our walk now took us south down over the ridge, then left over Catshole Downs and up to Catshole Tor. On the tor there is one singular rock and in the middle of the rock there is one indentation which happens to be the size and shape of a cat.

After pondering the name and the shape, off we went, east, to Codda Tor after which we crossed the stream to regain the bridleway we'd followed at the start.