

MOORS FOR THE FUTURE nAUDIO TRAIL - NATIONAL TRUST
MARSDEN MOOR ESTATE
YORKSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Marsden Moor Estate and this Moors for the Future Partnership walk.

I am Alan Schofield, a volunteer at Marsden Moor and I am your guide for today. Our walk of 12.5 kilometres will travel from the small township of Marsden at the head of the Colne Valley in Kirkstiles and rise onto the surrounding open peat moorland, part of which is in the Peak District National Park.

This section of the southern Pennines has been an important point for travellers crossing or travelling along the backbone of England and we will take time to look at the footprint that man has left on the landscape. Along the way we will glimpse the life style of the Mesolithic people from 9,000 years BC, hint at the later Bronze Age locals, imagine the Roman legions on their way to York, travel with the jagger and his train of packhorses carrying the fruits of the textile trade, follow in the footsteps of Blind Jack of Knaresborough building the turnpike roads and create images of the canal and railway tunnellers labouring under our feet. We will also see the way in which the present landscape is managed and the see some of the flora and fauna.

Please remember, the weather on the moors is very changeable so please ensure you are well equipped for all eventualities and don't forget a map and compass and more importantly, make sure you know how to use them. The information in this walk is intended to compliment rather than supplement navigational equipment. A final note of warning is that the moors are also a fragile ecosystem and we would hope you would not discard cigarettes onto the moors or light fires and barbeques

INFROMATION POINT ONE GR SE 01/11 046116

Here we are on Town Gate almost opposite the entrance to the drive to St Bartholomew's Church Marsden in the older part of this small township. The street sign for Town Gate is at our backs and the street runs down to our left and steeply up on our right to the modern A62 trunk road. Marsden, already a Norman land holding, was recorded in a document in 1177 as Marches Dean, a valley at the water shed. The valley was a hunting ground for the Lord of Pontefract in the 14th century and is logged as having 6 small dwellings and a farm. In 1499 it became a manor. A corn mill was in existence in 1548 when the population was around 400.

The first church built in 1462 was a chapel of ease and was sited about where we are stood. This was replaced in 1758 and again later on the existing site between 1895 and 1911. The remains of the 1758 building can be seen laid out on the ground behind us and the few gravestones are on the site of the cemetery which was raised three feet to accommodate the many bodies from the black death in 1798.

Town Gate was the main street and some of the older houses still exist on one side of the street, two with date stones of 1679 and 1738. The inns on Town Gate would have provided for travellers along the packhorse route that left up the hill for Derbyshire and Cheshire and later the first turnpike road built in 1760. Marsden initially grew as a dispersed farming community and when the textile trade began to flourish its farmers began to supplement their income through the weaving of woollen cloth. In time the industry became more and more centred in mills and the urban settlement as we see it today developed.

The most prominent gravestone is one belonging to Enoch Taylor and his family. Enoch was infamous for producing shearing frames, (mechanising the finishing of cloth), that put many of the skilled croppers out of business in the first decade of the 19th century and led to the Luddite uprising. Marsden played a major part in the saga. But that is another story!

page2

The next section of the route takes us up Town Gate and the steep first turnpike, turning off to follow a packhorse track, through the old farm stead which was once the manor house, dated 1616, up to our next stop on the track at the edge of the open moor. John Wesley stayed at the Manor House in 1746.

INFORMATION POINT TWO GR SE OI/II 043110

From here we can see the whole of the Colne Valley stretching away on our left and in front of us the Wessenden valley with its four turn of the 19th – 20th century reservoirs constructed to provide water for Huddersfield Corporation.

At the foot of the valley Bank Bottom Mills dominate and are a typical example of textile manufacturing that grew out of the cottage weaving industry that we mentioned earlier. The rows of worker's houses mark an important social development. This mill along with many others in Yorkshire and Lancashire has closed down and will hopefully continue to provide facilities for small businesses or even become fashionable apartments for the increasing numbers of local commuters to Leeds and Manchester. Bank Bottom Mills were owned by the Crowther family of "The Crowthers of Bank Dam" novel fame. Ottiswell Mill which preceded it had an important part to play in the Luddite movement, its then owner William Horsefall being murdered in 1812 as part of the campaign.

The hillside on which we stand would have had many of the first settlements/farmsteads in the area, being above the marshy valley bottoms and next to the ancient routeways. The existing stone farms date from 1671 and some would have been replacements for the earlier homes built with wooden cruck frames and wattle and daub walls.

The packhorse route continues across the moor land behind us, we are going to follow the track keeping to the left of the higher ground and above the golf course and the two turn pike roads that climb towards our next stopping point.

INFORMATION POINT THREE GR SE 01/11036101

Standing just above the road next to the 'no unauthorised vehicle' sign we are in position to see the development of part of the transport system over what is one of the narrowest part of the southern Pennines. Facing the towering Pule Hill behind the sign, the packhorse track we followed earlier emerges part way up the slope as thin line along the contour. It was here under the track that the roman road running from Chester to York was discovered in 1983. The track that we are standing on runs up to Warlow quarry above which evidence of a roman signal station was also found. The Romans built two forts nearby in AD79, one at Castleshaw over the watershed in Delph and the other at Slack north east of Marsden near Huddersfield.

Facing across the road we can see the line of the second turnpike completed around 1800. Turnpikes were set up by acts of parliament enabling local people to improve the very poor transport routes whilst charging a toll for use by animals and vehicles. The first Austerlands to Wakefield Trust turnpike of 1760 was the very steep Old Mount Road we initially followed from Town Gate and rejoined at its junction with the new Mount Road. The second turnpike following a less steep gradient. The first turnpike runs along in front of us and when we set off if you look in the dip in front of us you will see the bridge still stands hidden in the undergrowth. These roads were difficult to build across what is potentially very soft ground for most of the year. The famous road engineer John Metcalf, Blind jack of Knaresborough, was engaged to do the work and he pioneered the use of laying bundles of heather onto the peat before building up layers of graduated stone to provided a cambered surface with water shedding properties into the side gullies. The second turnpike is in remarkable condition given it is around two hundred years old.

Long before the Romans came to Britain this narrow section of the Pennine chain, and indeed the very area we are now surveying was inhabited by hunter gatherers of the Mesolithic period some 9,000 to 4,000 years BC. The Pennines were covered by trees and the seasonal movements of the Mesolithic people would have been along the higher land such as this Pennine ridge. At this particular spot here, on the slopes of Worlow, artefacts of their life style of hunting have been found including flint scrapers and arrow heads possibly being held in a long disappeared skin bag. It is not difficult to imagine wild animals such as deer, aurochs (cattle), wolf etc roaming the scene in front of us, particularly when you realise that the late Mesolithic people had developed the method of tree clearance to encourage game to graze regularly on the door step. A little way along the turnpike we can see that the road cuts through a shallow cutting at Warcock Hill, it is here that many finds of flint tools and microliths have been made. Many of these are preserved in the Tulson Museum in Huddersfield.

Evidence of Bronze age inhumations with accompanying pottery have been discovered on the top of Pule Hill and flint scrapers at Worlow

However it is time to move on along the second turnpike and joining the Pennine Way footpath climb to Black Moss Reservoir. As we pass through the fenced-off land take notice of the heather growth covering the old Pennine Way near the top of the climb.

This next section is a loop bringing us back to the turnpike this side of Warcock Hill and as such can be omitted when short of time or to miss a short section of uneven ground.

INFORMATION POINT FOUR GR SE 00/10 033090

As we stand where the new Pennine Way cuts across the reservoir bank between the Black Moss and Swellands Reservoirs it is time to look at the conservation work that the National Trust is carrying out on the moorlands. Behind us the fenced area contains the evidence that makes the work worthwhile, what was an area with large patches of eroding bare peat is a covering of comparatively lush heather growth. This is one of the early re-vegetation plots where heather seeds and brashings (cut heather) brought onto the moor by an all terrain vehicle, were spread by hand over the bare patches and the effects of grazing reduced by fencing. Public access is maintained by stiles at every 100 metres. Heather cut from other Yorkshire moors is delivered by road and today is flown out by helicopter. Approximately 10% of the 5,683 acres of Marsden Moor Estate is enclosed for limited periods for re-vegetation.

Much of the moor is designated SSI (special site of scientific interest) and ESA (environmentally sensitive area) because of the importance of preserving this increasing threatened habitat. A habitat that encourages ground nesting birds such as red grouse, curlew, redshank, snipe, golden plover, meadow pipit, and skylark. The moor is one of the few sites where the rare little brown bird, the twite, breeds and special feeding programmes are provided. Merlin, kestrel, short-eared owl, raven, crow and visiting peregrine and harrier provide a raptor presence. Wheatear, stonechat, reed bunting, ring ouzel, wren, goldfinches are amongst the many providing the variety in the cloughs.

Fox, rabbits, weasel and stoats, mountain hares, voles and very occasional passing red deer make up the animal population along with of course the ever present flocks of lonk sheep. The estate is common land and local commoners have grazing rights.

Turning to the view, the reservoirs were built to supply water to the Huddersfield Narrow Canal in the early 19th century, strangely Black Moss feeds westwards and Swellands eastwards. Swellands burst its banks in 1810 causing deaths in Marsden and down the Colne Valley. The Pennine Way makes its way across the Yorkshire flag stones down into the Wessenden Valley and up to Black Hill which can be seen on the horizon surmounted by the huge TV transmitter mast.

Time to move on.

As we cross the flat land along side Swellands we can get a sense of the size of Marsden Moor because virtually all of what you see above the field walls for 360 degrees belongs to the National Trust and everything to the south is also in the Peak Park.

Once we have got beyond the reservoir wall keep to the top of the left side of the gully until you locate the catch water channel which was the means by which water from Swellands was taken to the next reservoir at Redbrook whilst catching water running off the moor in gullies.

INFORMATION POINT FIVE GR SE 01/11 024101

The National Trust omega sign provides local information. From this point coming down the hill is the 1760 first turnpike and looking carefully it can be followed down the gully in front to meet the embankment upon which is the third turnpike completed in 1839, the present trunk road the A62. Lifting our eyes we can see the road continuing away from us to the right of Pule Hill almost to information point three. It is easy to imagine why this is called Thieves Clough. Part way up the clough is another of the turnpike bridges built in 1760. As with many roads they are built on previous pathways and the Roman road also came down this Clough. Evidence of small dams to hold water can be seen to the right of the old road running down the gully, these and the mounds of spoil with round brick walls indicate underground activity. Here was one of the six sites that shafts were built down some 300 feet to create a working face to construct the four tunnels that run for over 3 miles beneath our feet creating the Huddersfield Narrow canal tunnel (1895-1811) and subsequently three railway tunnels, 1849, 1871 and a double track in 1894. All with picks, shovels and some black powder! The canal was 26 feet out of line and the first rail line dead straight. Across the A62 on the old turnpike is a settlement called Gilberts, a toll house where a row of cottages housed the labourers. Looking across the spoil towards the left of Pule Hill the next shafts can be seen topped by redbrick circular wall, also the inclined plane used to bring stone from the quarries along the edge.

As we set off for the next leg note:

A short distance down the wall side is the hidden Redbrook engine house with its two shafts for lifting spoil and ventilation, worked by steam and later more economical water balance engines.

For those with an enquiring mind a short deviation across the moor on the path adjacent to the engine house will bring you to another re-vegetation plot. Here in the small gully before reaching the plot you will find evidence of the forest that used to cover this part of the Pennines. About the end of the Mesolithic period the forest cover disappeared due to changing climate increasing the amount of rain, forming increasing amounts of sphagnum moss which formed the peat which lies above the previous soil level to depths of up to 15 feet. Where the peat has been eroded you will find the remains of the tree roots. It is at this level beneath the peat that the Mesolithic remains can be found.

INFORMATION POINT SIX GR SE 01/11 029103

Here amongst the bracken on the side of Pule Hill we can look across Close Moss towards March Hill and Buckstones. On the higher slopes of the Close Moss we are trying to dam the streams and gullies running through the peat in order to retain the peat silt and raise the water table. This is already proving successful on parts of the estate. For this work we use both heather bales and the bracken from this area here, which we cut and bail. In the cloughs to our right at the bottom of Close Moss we are reintroducing native trees such as birch, alder and mountain ash.

Fire is a real hazard in the drier months when a surface fire can burn the vegetation off the moor and create the danger of the plants that re-grow slowly being crowded out thus losing the variety affecting the value to animals, birds and insects. Deep seated fire can smoulder under ground in

the peat for months and destroys the habitat completely. The staff and volunteers at Marsden Moor estate are on 24 hour call in case of fire.

The path running along this side of Pule is on the line of the old Boat Lane where the barge horses used to travel over the hill between tunnel entrances in the absence of a towpath through the hill.

The A62 trunk road brought with it the need for refreshment and stabling and inns grew along the road in the mid 1800s. To your left is the Great Western which we passed earlier, to your right the extended white building was the Coach and Horses and just out of site is the Shepherds Boy.

Close Moss was once a kept moor and the land owner and local industrialists continued the previous medieval practice of hunting for game. It was on this moor that two of the keepers were murdered by an unknown assailant in 1903.

The estate was given to the National Trust in 1955 in lieu of death duties by the Radcliffes whose family held the position of Lord of the Manor from 1742. To finish our walk we will continue along the Boat Lane down to the tunnel ends and back on the tow path to Marsden Station.

I do hope you have enjoyed this walk and that the weather has been kind to you, perhaps you would like to try another listed on the website and find out more about the past, present and future of this special landscape. Please feel free to fill in the evaluation form on the website so we can improve these walks.

Thank you for your company and I wish you a safe journey home.