

THE ELEVEN GUIDE STOOPS OF BRADFIELD

A 17 ½ mile Anytime Winter Challenge Walk

This is a hilly walk with 2,989 ft of climbing, very scenic and mainly on quiet roads designed for those winter months as an alternative to wading through mud. It can of course be attempted at any time of year and indeed, there are 3 footpath alternatives (shown in red) for purists or those averse to road walking. These footpath alternatives are attractive and do not add any extra mileage. I have counted at least a dozen horse troughs by the roadsides, indicating that apart from a layer of tarmac, these byways have changed little since the invention of the petrol engine. There must also be a record number of seats on this route, most with extensive views – well done Bradfield Parish Council. I hope you will find the walk full of interest as you discover the 11 guide stoops of the Parish of Bradfield, reputedly the second largest in England.

I cannot, however, claim all the credit for this walk – the inspiration was a fascinating booklet entitled *The Guide Stoops of the Dark Peak*, published and printed privately by Howard Smith. The reason I took a walk to seek out these guide stoops for myself was due entirely to the foot and mouth epidemic of 2002 when, of course, footpaths were out of bounds.

What are Guide Stoops?

These are the earliest form of signposts which each Parish had the responsibility to maintain. They date from the 18th and 19th centuries and were usually carved from gritstone.

How long will it take?

I consider myself a very average long distance walker and the route via footpaths takes me about 7½ hours. This includes two 15 minute stops for a break in the morning and afternoon and ½ an hour for lunch. If you stick to road walking it should be a little quicker.

The whole walk is covered on the OS Outdoor Leisure Map 1 – The Peak District Dark Peak Area.

Warning!

Although this walk is on very quiet roads, modern transport is both fast and silent. You should therefore always ensure that you wear very visible clothing, carry a torch, face on coming traffic and, to use a phrase from the sport of boxing, “defend yourself at all times”. Enjoy the walk!

Parking

Locate the Sands Car Park, which at the time of writing has the advantage of being free. This is situated to the north of Low Bradfield behind the cricket pitch, off Fair House Lane (GR263920).

Route Description

From the car park cross the footbridge, then bear left for 50 yards around the edge of the cricket pitch before climbing 4 steps to go through a gate on to the road.

Turn right along The Sands, soon ignoring the turn off for High Bradfield and continuing for 50 yards to the road junction at Smithy Bridge Road. Here cross the road with care and keep ahead signposted Loxley (your first seat – far too early to stop), with the Smithy Bridge Garage buildings on your right, soon ignoring footpaths right and left, continue for a further 50 yards until reaching a footpath which forks to the left up a concrete track.

(Footpath alternative One)

If staying on the road, simply keep ahead soon passing an entrance to Damflask Reservoir on the right and then continue for ½ a mile ignoring a footpath on the right hand side 30 yards from a road junction.

Here turn right (**1 mile**) along Loxley Road signposted Loxley, Sheffield and in 250 yards take the next road on your left, Dalroyd Lane, signposted Holdworth. This lane is very pleasant and climbs initially through trees and then undulates for 2/3rds of a mile offering fine views of Damflask Reservoir away to your right.

When reaching a crossroads, turn left signposted High Bradfield and Ewden village. Follow the road as it twists and turns up hill, ignoring a footpath on your left after 250 yards and a road on your right after 300 yards (**2 miles**), eventually reaching the junction with Kirk Edge Road in a further 400 yards. (From time to time it is worth looking back at the views).

At the road junction (seat), turn right signposted Worall and Outbridge. After 50 yards, reach your first guide stoop at a left hand fork.

(Footpath alternative One)

Take this, following it up hill for 50 yards as signposted, turning left at the first junction and then immediately right over a wooden stile. Keep ahead for 20 yards and cross a stone step

stile with an ash tree on its' left. Once over, keep ahead following the right hand edge of the next field with Mill Farm below you on the right. At the end of the field, locate a stone step stile in the wall and climb over. Once over, turn immediately left and then right through a stone squeezer stile. Then, take a bearing half left across the next two fields passing through a gap in a wall and then locating a step ladder 100 yards away.

Climb over and follow the left hand field edge for 30 yards to meet a stone stepped stile in a recess which is surrounding by stinging nettles (you have been warned). Once over continue ahead through the stinging nettles for 20 yards to reach a wooden stile just in front of the post of a power line. Cross the stile and keep ahead along the right hand field edge, under the power lines and over a stone stepped stile at the end of the field. Now turn half left across the next field for 70 yards to reach a wall and climb over a wooden step ladder.

From here, continue ahead to a wall end 20 yards away and turn left by it, keeping the wall on your left to meet a squeezer stile in 75 yards in the field corner. Now turn half right for 100 yards through a gap in the dry stone wall ahead then keep in the same direction for a further 75 yards to reach a wall and climb a wooden step ladder up to a road.

Cross the road half right and locate a stone stile to the right of a gate. Once over as signposted, walk up hill along the concrete path for 150 yards then follow the track as it curves abruptly left following a dry stone wall on your left up hill for a further 100 yards to meet a wooden stile left of a metal gate. Once over, keep forward for 10 yards and then turn right on another farm track in front of a derelict wooden bungalow. Follow this track for 75 yards and then upon reaching Cliffe House Farm, turn left to locate a stone step stile to the right of a metal gate. Once over, proceed ahead on a clear farm track following it up hill for 300 yards until reaching an electricity pole. Here turn half right across a field for 100 yards still up hill, aiming for the end of a wall.

Upon reaching a stone step stile, cross over on to the road and turn right. Follow Kirk Edge Road and enjoy the extensive views. Ignore a footpath on the right after 300 yards. Shortly afterwards pass a convent on your left and then ignore the road coming in from the right signposted Holdworth, Loxley (seat).

After this, keep ahead for another 50 yards and locate our first guide stoop where the road forks.

(End of footpath alternative One)

After inspecting the guide stoop, take the left hand fork which is straight down hill and continue for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile ignoring all turn offs left and right (after $\frac{1}{4}$ mile seat on your left). 100 yards after passing the Outbridge sign on your left hand side (3 miles) by the buildings of Gate Farm, locate a footpath sign **(Footpath alternative Two)**.

If staying on the road, continue for a further $\frac{1}{2}$ mile down hill. The road snakes past Bradfield cemetery on your right (seat). Ignore a plethora of footpath and road junctions left and right as you head into the small town of Oughtibridge. The road you are on eventually changes its name from Burton Lane to Church Street.

After passing the Hare and Hounds public house on your left, you come to the road junction with the A6102 signposted Wharncliffe Side and Stocksbridge (triangle of grass on your left with seats).

Turn left along Langsett Road North. In 150 yards the road bears left at a junction around the White Hart pub, keep ahead for a further 30 yards then left into Cockshutts Lane. Proceed up hill (seat), soon ignoring Bedford Road on the right (4 miles) and 200 yards later reach your second guide stoop on the left at a road junction.

(Footpath alternative Two)

Turn left as indicated, descend the stone steps and cross a wooden stile. Continue ahead down hill half right under power lines passing through a gap in the wall and dropping down into the field below.

Continue ahead following the right hand field edge for 50 yards to a wall and cross a small ladder stile which descends into another field. Again, continue ahead on the right hand side of the field for 40 yards until reaching a stone wall which we step over and descend into the next field.

Here descend half right for 100 yards to reach a wooden stile to the right of Coumes Wood. Once over, turn right descending stone steps into the next field and continue down hill along the right hand field edge for 150 yards. Upon reaching a footpath sign turn left downhill for 50 yards to cross a footbridge. Once over, turn half right and in less than 20 yards, cross a wooden squeezer stile on to the road.

Turn left and follow the road as it corkscrews steeply through Coldwell to the road junction at Onesacre in just under $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile (in 100 yards pass a seat). At the road junction turn right and in $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of a mile reach your second guide stoop on your right at a road junction (extensive views of the Don Valley). Turn left along Cockshutts Lane (seat on the left).

(End of Footpath alternative Two)

Keep ahead along the road for 1 mile ignoring all turn offs on the left and right, passing through the village of Black Ashop. When our road bears right (seat), keep ahead along Storth Lane signposted Glen Howe Park. Shortly ignore Slackfields Lane on your left and soon on your right pass a picnic spot and car park (a good place for your morning break).

30 yards later when our road swings left into Glen Howe Park, keep ahead over a bridge immediately ignore the footpath on the right and continue on a clear track up hill (5 miles). After nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile, ignore a footpath on the left and 150 yards later, join a road coming in from your right (seat). Follow this road left for 300 yards (ignoring two right hand footpaths) as it bends slowly through the delightful hamlet of Brightholmlee and locate your third guide stoop at a road junction.

After inspection turn left signposted Bradfield and follow the road up hill (6 miles) (ignoring all footpaths left and right and Bent Hills Lane on the left hand side after $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile) for just over a mile, and reach your fourth guide stoop at the next junction.

Your guide stoops now come thick and fast. Turn left for $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of a mile (7 miles) and locate your fifth guide stoop at a crossroads.

Turn right, ignoring a footpath on your left after 80 yards and then later Delf Road on the left, just after which you will come across your sixth guide stoop at the road junction with Peat Pits Lane.

Once inspected continue ahead along Onesacre Road (seat) for $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile to reach the road junction with Bolsterstone Road (8 miles). Here turn right up hill for $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile, ignoring a footpath on your left after 500 yards and then locate your seventh guide stoop at the next road junction.

(You will probably have noticed two radio masts in the vicinity of Peat Pits Lane and Bolsterstone Road. At 1300 feet these signify the highest points of the walk).

Turn left now for just over half a mile as the road twists around to the right down hill passing Swan cottage on the left hand side (ignore footpath) and in 200 yards reach a crossroads with your eighth guide stoop on the left hand side (9 miles).

Turn left at the cross roads, passing Walker Edge Farm in just over ¼ of a mile (ignore footpath on the right). In 100 yards the road bears left (great views of Broomhead reservoir down on your right) (seat) and then in a further 80 yards with our road now running down hill, locate a ladder stile over a stone wall on your left hand side. Once over, you will find yourself in a plantation. Follow the right hand edge with the stone wall on your right soon passing through a gap in a wall and in a further 100 yards crossing a wooden ladder stile over a wall. Continue ahead still on the right hand side of a wood which has now turned coniferous (10 miles). Continue in the same direction for ¼ of a mile before finally skirting left around a marshy area and spilling out on to the Penistone Road via a stone squeezer stile. Your ninth guide stoop is situated 100 yards up the road on your left hand side.

Once inspected, retrace your steps and follow the road down hill for 1 mile shortly ignoring a crossroads and in ½ mile pass Cowell House on your right hand side. Finally, the road begins to bear right and in 300 yards we locate our tenth guide stoop on the left hand side at a road junction (11 miles).

Turn left for 200 yards and just before the road drops, locate a public footpath on your left. (Just before this on your right hand side there is a seat 50 yards away on the bridle path).
(Footpath alternative Three)

If I was to recommend one of the footpath alternatives this would be it for two reasons, one the fine views and secondly, although this is a minor road it is probably the busiest and the most lengthy. However, the choice is yours and if keeping on the road you follow it for nearly two miles, initially down hill ignoring the left hand turn Agden Side Road after 1/3rd of a mile. The road then bends right down hill into the sylvan setting of Agden Bridge, then it is left up hill (12 miles) back to the tops for a further mile. Finally, the road bears left again and 150 yards later, we reach another road junction. Ignore this and keep ahead for 100 yards to meet a bridle path on your left at a wooden gate.

(Footpath alternative Three)

Turn left along the footpath for 15 yards, then turn right through a wooden gate. Our route is now ahead for 1/3rd of a mile through the heather and ferns on a clear footpath with way

marking posts until reaching a redundant wooden stile to the left of a walled enclosure. Continue ahead with the wall on your right for another ¼ of a mile following an indistinct cart track through the ferns.

When the wall swings away right, our path curves round to the left passing under power lines and in less than 100 yards, cross wooden planks to reach a wooden stile to the left of a metal gate. Cross over and bear half right for 20 yards to reach and cross a ladder stile over a stone wall onto a road.

Cross diagonally left as public footpath signposted and proceed downhill with a wall on your left to reach a wooden kissing gate on your left hand side in less than 50 yards. Cross over and keep ahead with the stone wall on your left for just under ½ a mile (the views on the right just get better and better). (seat).

Just before meeting the edge of a wood (felled 2010), our delightful ridge walk comes to an abrupt halt as we bear half right downhill amongst the ferns to reach a wire fence in 20 yards. Here plunge downhill with the fence on your left for 100 yards to reach a stone wall. Here locate a wooden step stile on your left, cross over and continue downhill with the wall now on your right for another 80 yards. At the bottom of the hill we then turn left with the wall down hill to meet a cross track in 100 yards.

Here turn right through stone gateposts with a redundant wooden stile to the left (seat) and continue along a track through woods. Soon ignore a Yorkshire Water permissive footpath on your left and 100 yards later, our track turns left over a bridge (seat) and continues gently uphill (seat) before levelling out in 150 yards time at a pair of redundant gateposts with a stone step stile to their left. (seat). Our track continues through the gateposts and in 10 yards splits left and ahead. We keep ahead passing the edge of a stone wall on a gently rising gradient which levels out after 100 yards. Keep ahead on our clear track with a stream away down to the left, pass a redundant gatepost and then 10 yards further on swing left to a bridge over the stream and follow our track now nice and wide up hill until reaching a road in 100 yards at a wooden stile to the left of a wooden gate.

Once over, turn right and follow the road up hill for 1/3rd of a mile to reach a road junction. Turn left along the road for 50 yards to meet a public bridleway coming in from your left at a wooden gate.

(End of Footpath alternative Three)

Turn left through this gate down an enclosed track and in 50 yards pass through another wooden gate with a stone step stile to its left. Once through (13 miles), continue down hill on a wide track to meet Dale Road in just under ½ a mile. There seems to be one or two alternatives you can take, all heading the same way. Purists can take the sunken lane – I prefer to keep ahead along the slight rise reached shortly in front of you and then once over, head for a white marker post 75 yards ahead downhill by a sign for gas mains at a wall gap. Once past this, keep ahead downhill for 150 yards to reach a metal farm gate. Once through this, the road is downhill 30 yards ahead of you.

Upon reaching the road, turn right for 50 yards and then pick up a public footpath on your left. Cross a stone step stile to the left of a wooden gate and proceed downhill along a clear metalled track, shortly coming across a memorial on your left hand side in memory of those who lost their lives owing to the breaching of Dale Dyke Reservoir on March 11th 1864. After this, our track swings right and in 100 yards forks left at a public footpath sign. The track descends slightly downhill before turning sharply left for 100 yards then bearing right to cross a wooden footbridge over a tributary leading from Dale Dyke Reservoir. Once over, our track bears right and very soon reaches the outflow of Dale Dyke Reservoir.

Here turn left up some stone steps soon ignoring the wooden stile on the right. At the top of the steps, finding yourself in a wood bear right for 30 yards before locating and climbing some more steps and then bearing right on a footpath through the trees to shortly meet the dam wall and reservoir on our right. Keep ahead with the reservoir on our right hand side, soon passing a water works building on our right and 200 yards later meet a footpath sign (14 miles). Here turn left over a stone step stile and then proceed up hill between decaying stone walls to reach another footpath sign after 100 yards.

Here turn right on a wide track for 250 yards then climb a stone step stile in front of you to the right of a metal gate. Now turn left and head steeply up hill for 120 yards following a decaying wall and wire fence on your left. Shortly a large rock is seen ahead and some steps to the right of this aid progress to finally reach a road at a ladder stile.

Once over turn right along the road for ½ a mile. *Notice in front of you Boots Folly, constructed by Charles Boot between 1926 and 1927 who lived at Moscar Lodge.* When a road junction is reached, turn left (15 miles) ignoring a road on the left hand side after 200 yards and continue ahead for a further 200 yards to at last see our 11th and final guide stoop on the right. Look closely or you will miss it, as this one is unrestored to the right of a

wooden farm gate at the entrance of unmade Stake Hill Road. After all the others, it is a bit of a disappointment but it is the 11th and you have now got the set! Lower Bradfield is less than 2 miles away, mostly downhill.

Having made a final inspection, continue ahead along the road for 50 yards and then pick up the public footpath signpost on your left hand side and turn left over a wooden step stile.

Follow the footpath ahead with the wall on your left and a metal fence on the right protecting what was once a coniferous plantation. In 400 yards the footpath bears right to meet the road to the left of the metal gate.

The next 1¾ miles back to Lower Bradfield need very little explanation. Simply keep ahead on Hoar Stones Road (16 miles), ignoring a right hand turn after ½ a mile (noting the obelisk on the left hand side just before this) and continue for a further ½ a mile to a road junction where we turn left along Mill Lee Road signposted Bradfield (seat on your left but far too close to the finish to stop now). Simply descend the ½ mile down Mill Lee Road (17 miles) back into Bradfield. Upon reaching the village, Mill Lee Road runs into Fairhouse Lane and 50 yards later, turn right into The Sands. Congratulations, you have reached the end of your road of discovery!

An attractive woven badge and certificate are available upon successful completion for £5.00.

Please make your cheque payable to Mike Warner and send to Redland House, Clifton, Near Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 2GJ.