

Walk into History

A series of walks curated by

Swaledale Museum

The Green

Reeth

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Walk 2

Old Gang Beck

Total Distance: 5.8 miles / 9.4 km

Total Ascent: 835 ft / 255m

Approx Time: 3 – 3.5 hrs

Grade: Easy/Moderate

Old Gang Beck (easy/moderate)

Dripping with mining history and evoking an intense remoteness, this walk leads gently up alongside Old Gang Beck past many points of natural and historic interest to reach the stark moonscape of Great Pinseat. The return journey offers sweeping views down to and beyond Swaledale. Pick a day with light winds.

Start

Parking area just south of Surrender Bridge on minor road from Low Row to Langthwaite at junction with road to Reeth/Healaugh.

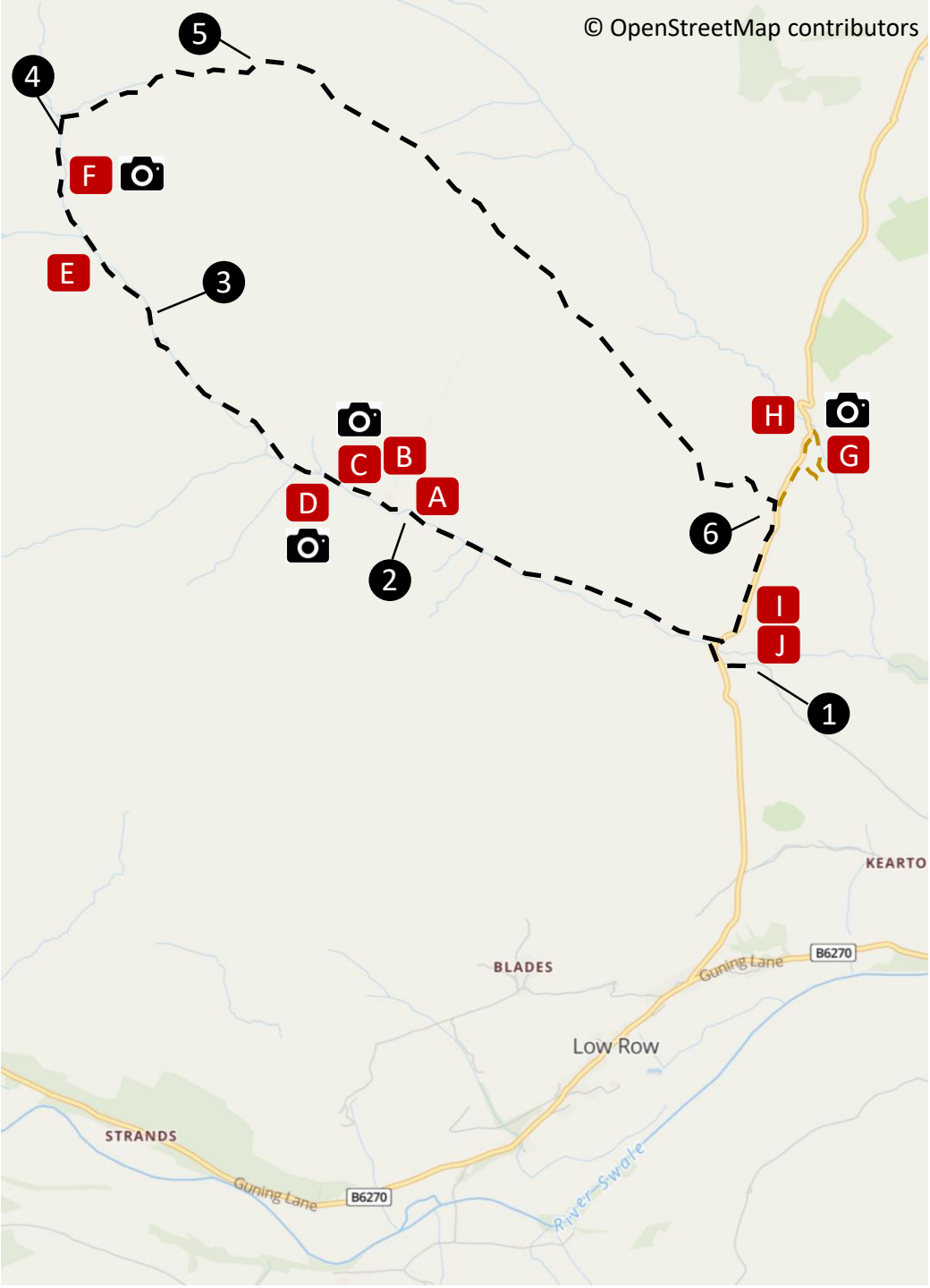
Grid Reference: SD 98931 99834

Refreshments

Pubs in Low Row and Langthwaite

Underground Photos

Hard Level, Spence Level, Brandy Bottle Incline, Barras End Level



- 1 From parking area, descend to and cross bridge, then take track on L signed 'BW ONLY NO VEHICLES'. Follow up stream to Old Gang Smelting Mill.
- 2 100m beyond mill, a small ravine on R leads up to Old Gang Peat Store. Explore, then return. Just beyond shooting hut (with sheltered wooden bench) on R is entrance to Spence Level. A little further, immediately beyond a small bridge on your L is the entrance to Hard Level, between the beck and the track. Continue along track to Level House Bridge.
- 3 Pass through gate then take R fork, avoiding bridge. After a dip/shallow ford, look out for the double entrance to Brandy Bottle Incline on your R.
- 4 After a gate, bear R on a clear path rising gently to the indistinct summit of Great Pinseat.
- 5 Strewn with mining spoil, Great Pinseat is a beguilingly eerie place. Stunning views across Calver Hill to the North York Moors accompany you all the way along the track back to the minor road.
- 6 At the road, turn R to return to the parking area, or optionally, turn L for a half-mile extension (see below). As you return, stop at a bridleway signposted to Healaugh and Level House Bridge. Immediately behind on your L is a section of chimney running under the road up to Barras Top. Continue across Surrender Bridge to complete the walk.

Extension (0.6 miles / 0.9 km)

Walk along the road for 200m then take track on R to descend through red metal gate.





After the gate, pick out a large pile of stones to your L. Descend a little further then cut across to these stones to reach the entrance to Barras End mine.

Continue beyond entrance on a grassy ridge above Bleaberry Gill, shortly descending to the watersplash. Turn L on road to complete extension.

You can get close up to a lead mining wagon and rail (see pictures below) as used in these mines at Swaledale Museum which also has informative displays on lead mining, hushing and local geology.

The museum's book shop stocks publications on Swaledale lead mining.

For another perspective, enjoy an aerial fly-past of Surrender Smelting Mill using our specially commissioned drone video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtpj9IKmWHI>

- A** Old Gang Smelting Mill is one of best preserved lead mining complexes in the Pennines. Constructed in the 1840s, it replaced an earlier mill on the site. After 1885 production declined dramatically.
- B** At over 100m long Old Gang Peat Store is truly impressive. It consists of three sections, each able to store one year's fuel.
- C**  Spence Level was driven in the late 18th century and was also used as a water supply for the original mill.
- D**  Originally called Force Level, Hard Level was begun in 1777. It connected all the way to Gunnerside Gill from where ore was brought for smelting.
- E** North Rake is a 'hush': a ravine created by repeatedly releasing damned water to expose lead veins.
- F**  The steep tunnels of Brandy Bottle Incline were to be used to bring ore up from deep below using steam engines, but the engines never arrived.
- G**  Barras End mine was well under way by 1811 and development continued until 1875.
- H** The watersplash from All Creatures Great and Small.
- I** The flue from Surrender Mill is 745m long. Half way along is a condensor for extracting lead from fumes.
- J** Surrender Mill, built in 1841 replacing two earlier mills, is visible from the parking area. There is a peat store 100m beyond.





























Credits

All underground photos, David Harper and Paul Steggles (2010). Many more of their photos can be seen in the museum. Photos have been cropped for presentation.

Further Reading

Clough, Robert, *The Lead Smelting Mills of the Yorkshire Dales and Northern Pennines their architectural character, construction and place in the European tradition*, first published 1962 ^{1,3}
esp. chapter 5 on Swaledale

Gill, Michael, *Swaledale its Mines and Smelt Mills*, Landmark Publishing 1993 ³
see esp. 'The Old Gang Mines', pp.66-97
arguably still the best book on the subject, now out of print.

Hardy, John *Occasional papers on the Mines of Swaledale and Arkengarthdale*, 2006 ^{2,3}
see esp. 'That Other Engine', pp.11-13 and 'Eldorado' pp.18-19
about Hard Level.

Raistrick, Arthur, *The Lead Industry of Wensleydale and Swaledale*, vol.2, The Smelt Mills, Moorland Publishing Company, 1975
see esp. 'Old Gang Mill', pp.73-78 and 'Surrender Mill', pp.105-107.