

A WALK IN THE WOODS



WTP/L/Robin Weaver

Bitholmes Wood, South Yorkshire, home to the last remnants of an ancient herd of red deer

Bitholmes, Firth and Wantley Dragon Woods

THIS DIVERSE LANDSCAPE ON THE EDGE OF THE PEAK DISTRICT CELEBRATES ITS NATURAL, CULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE WITH GRIT AND CHARM

Bitholmes Wood in South Yorkshire is an ancient woodland, home to the last remnants of the Wharnccliffe red deer herd. The underlying millstone grit is never far from the surface and, with locals exploiting the coal measures in the 1920s and subsequent large-scale quarrying in the 1940s and 1950s, there are some impressive crags and cliff faces to admire. To mark the millennium the Woodland Trust planted 250 community woods as part of its Woods on your Doorstep project, and Wantley Dragon Wood

is one of these. Its name derives from a 17th-century satirical ballad describing the slaying of a mythical creature by a brave knight. The story unfolds on an information board adjacent to an impressive wood and stone sculpture of the dragon, expertly crafted by two local artists and funded by Biffaward. Pick up the numbered trail from Firth Wood to explore all three Woodland Trust properties before retracing your steps back up an old packhorse track to Townend Common, a Local Nature Reserve containing wetland and valuable heathland habitats. The majority of the walk is described in detail in a leaflet produced by Stone to Steel. This particular route is number 3 (Parsonage Farm and Townend Common), part of the Steel Valley Heritage Trail series of six walks. For more details on the project visit www.stonetosteel.org.uk



Bitholmes, Firth and Wantley Dragon Woods

5 MILES
2½ HOURS
MODERATE WITH SOME STEEP SLOPES

A START

From car park on the edge of Stocksbridge, go through gate and pass community wildlife area on R with bench, meadow, ponds and woodland to enjoy. Follow 'Easy-going Trail', keeping football pitches on R. At corner turn R before gate, to follow surfaced trail past Parsonage Farm, a 700-year-old house once owned by the local church and originally thatched with local heather. (For short detour to benches and sculpture follow white arrow just after farm.) Look L for great views of Wharcliffe Craggs. Turn L on to main track through Townend Common, taking time to read information board on R. At Hollin Edge Farm take public byway up to R and, just past barns, take gate on L up to drystone wall.

B ½ MILE

Turn L and after 50 metres bear L and turn immediately R to follow public

footpath between two drystone walls. Pass through gate along edge of woodland and take care when following public footpath down to R.

C 1 MILE

At break in wall on both sides of path turn R into Firth Wood, an ancient woodland that the Woodland Trust is gradually restoring to reveal bluebells, dog's mercury and other characteristic species. At bench, follow path down to L and pick up numbered post trail along level track out of woodland. Stop to admire the dragon and read about its exploits. Follow white posts in front of sculpture, past wooden seat to rejoin Hare Hills Lane. At intersection of paths, follow route marked with post 2, keeping drystone wall on L. Enter Bitholmes Wood and turn R past post 3 along track through centre of wood, with steep bank on R.

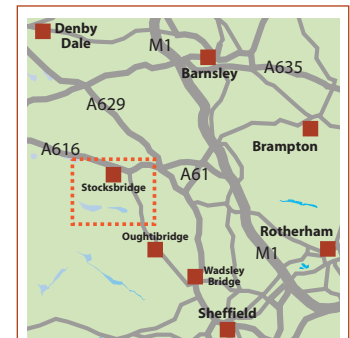
D 2 MILES

Where path splits take R fork past post 4, taking care as grassy path becomes steep down the hill. Cross small stream, pass under overhead wires, and turn L before roadside gate. Climb gently uphill and follow path as it bends to L just before post 5. Continue on over small ditch with sleeper bridge and head back through mature open woodland dominated by beech and sycamore. Cross small ditch and second sleeper bridge and bear R before spotting post 4 to retrace steps back to post 3. Take path to R to post 6 and climb short steep hill using steps. At top turn L and continue on, past post 7, to Hare Hills Lane (point C). Turn R and retrace steps back up steep hill towards Hollin Edge Farm. On approach to farm remember to turn L and then R to rejoin route at point B. Pass through gate and follow public byway between two drystone walls, admiring expansive views to L. Go through next gate and then follow lane downhill with views of Broomhead Reservoir ahead. Just before track path meets road, turn R on public footpath and pass through small woodland. Where track forks, bear L to reach grass field. Follow path across lower side of field, keeping old boundary bank immediately to L. Pass through old gate posts and cross next field. Pass by old

stile and over next meadow.

E 4 MILES

Turn R before Cote House and follow path all the way up edge of meadow, ignoring stile on L. Cross into next meadow over stile in drystone wall and follow edge of next field, keeping wall on L. Monument to L is Walder's Low, believed to date from late Neolithic or early Bronze Age, but possibly reused as a burial chamber for Walder, a Saxon chief. Climb over one more stone stile and follow footpath straight down through golf course, keeping ditch with Hawthorns on R. Golf course was originally part of Townend Common and later quarried for sandstone. Head for narrow path to L of bungalow and go over stile. Turn R on Royd Lane to head back to Parsonage Farm car park via Common Lane.



TERRAIN

The route follows a quiet road, surfaced tracks, woodland and grassy paths. The path leading to and around the Woodland Trust's woods is steep in places and may be slippery in wet conditions. There are three stiles on the route.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Regular buses run every day along Townend Lane, Stocksbridge. The nearest train station is at Penistone, 3 miles away. For information on train, bus and coach services visit www.travelsouthyorkshire.com or call Traveline on 01709 515151.

PARKING

Free public car park on Common Lane, Stocksbridge (grid reference SK284971).

REFRESHMENTS

The Castle Inn, Bolsterstone S36 3ZB (telephone 0114 288 6300), serves food every day (grid reference SK272968).

ACCOMMODATION AND TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Information Centres in Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham (telephone 0114 221 1900) or visit www.yorkshiresouth.com. The nearest youth hostel is at Hathersage in the Peak District (telephone 0845 371 9021 or visit www.yha.org.uk).

MAPS

Ordnance Survey Explorer OL1; Landranger 110

OTHER WOODS TO VISIT

Go to visitwoods.org.uk or see the *Exploring Woodland* guide for the Peak District & Central England