

Blackdown Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

6 Circular Walks in the south western Blackdown Hills

Walk 2

In the footsteps of the whetstone miners

A lovely and very varied walk passing the site of some of the mines and the chapel where many miners worshipped. There are two steady uphill sections and some superb views. Approx 8 kilometres. 5 miles.

Parking at the northern end of Blackborough in a wide area of road alongside the wall of the former churchyard. Map ref: ST 095093

It's a good idea to start by reading the story of Blackborough and the whetstone mines, displayed in what was once the church notice board. Then cross the road to take the footpath on the left hand side of the end house. Almost immediately turn right, with the path running behind the houses. Follow it upwards as it becomes a higher woodland route. It was along here on your left that the entrances to many of the mines were situated.

When you are level with the last houses, you should see the road below on your right. Take the right fork in the path to join it and turn right. At the road junction turn left, downhill, passing the village hall (once the school) and the former Ponchdown Inn. Near the sign as you leave the village there are two gates on your left. Go through the second one and walk along the top of the field to another gate. Immediately beyond the little barn, go through a gate on your right. Drop down this lovely field to a gap in the hedge at the bottom. It's often muddy here, but keep ahead into and across the next field, aiming at the buildings in Sainthill. Go through two gates to emerge on the lane opposite the Baptist chapel. In the churchyard, many gravestones bear the names of the mining families. It's a lovely place in which to linger awhile.

Opposite The Manse take the lane uphill, passing the church hall. Now there's some harder work as you head uphill towards the woods, but a seat invites you to rest awhile. Good idea - the rest of the path becomes really steep as you enter the woods to join a wide and

level path. There were more mine entrances to left and right along here. Cross the path to a choice of bridleways and head to the left, uphill again. You soon find a field on your left and will come to a road. Cross it and take the wide track, slightly on your right.

This track is about half a mile long. At the end, bear left and walk a similar distance on the road. At the bottom of the hill follow the footpath sign which doubles you back to your left, but first stop and enjoy the view. When this drive bends left, take the narrow footpath on your right. You will see holiday chalets on your left. Climb the stile at the end and turn left along the edge of the field to a gate at the bottom. In the next field, head for the farmhouse, where a gate will bring you into the farmyard. After just a few steps turn left in front of a barn and proceed between houses. This peaceful and attractive spot is Bodmiscombe. In front of the modern bungalow, turn left.

It's now uphill all the way back to Blackborough. Sorry! However, the lovely countryside and sense of remoteness and quiet are good compensation for the effort. Hope you've enjoyed an encounter with a unique former industry.



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Walk 2 map

