

# Belper, Milford and Blackbrook

**A walk through the countryside around Belper, a little south of the National Park. The going is fairly easy all the way and the walk is full of interest, both man-made and natural. Belper was at the heart of the industrial revolution and many of the buildings, if not the actual industries, remain. Once outside the town, however, you find open countryside and small villages which are just as pretty as anything the National Park has to offer. This walk is special to me, as Belper was where I grew up and where my love of the countryside began.**

## Walk Facts:

Start	Car park at Belper River Gardens off the A6 Matlock Road, on the north side of Belper at SK 346 481. The OS map you'll need for this walk is Explorer 259 - Derby, Uttoxeter, Ashbourne & Chedale.
Terrain	Tracks, lanes and field paths, with a little road walking
Length	About seven miles
Time	Around four hours
Food/Drink	Lots of shops, take-aways and pubs in Belper.
Toilets	Belper.

## Route

The car park is just off the A6 road at the north end of Belper, on the Matlock Road. The entrance is on the left about 100 yards after the traffic lights at the junction with the A517 to Ashbourne. If the car park is full there are lots of others in the town centre a short distance away.

From the car park, walk out onto the main road then go back to the traffic lights and turn right to follow the A517 road until the bridge over the river Derwent is reached, passing under an enclosed stone bridge over the road along the way.

The imposing buildings on your right are the remaining parts of Belper Mill. The tall brick structure is the East Mill and the older stone structure just after the stone bridge is the North Mill, the oldest part of the complex. It houses a heritage museum which is open most days. The stone bridge you pass under used to connect the North and East mills with the West Mill which stood on the other side of the road, where the modern factory is now. It was a unique building, partly circular, but was demolished in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

At one time, the Belper mills made up the largest industrial complex in the world. They were thread mills, using the power of the river to spin raw



cotton into thread, a process which continued until the 1980s when government incentives prompted the owners to move production to Scotland, leaving the Belper workforce jobless.

Anyway, that's enough of the history lesson - on with the walk! After taking a look at the weir, which controlled the river for the benefit of the mills, cross the road and locate the riverside path with green railings (in need of a lick of paint!) on the opposite bank to the factory buildings.

Follow this path alongside the river. After passing a small brick building (a pumping station for sewage!) the path becomes a track between fields and shortly after this a small stream is crossed and you go through a stile into a field with a number of houses, and a track leading off to the right. Don't take this - instead, continue straight ahead to walk through the field, still with the river on your left.

Follow the path through several more flat riverside fields, which are mainly grassy and grazed by cattle and sheep, though some may contain crops. This area is called "the meadows", for obvious reasons! It's a beautiful quiet spot just a short distance from town. As a youngster I spent many hours walking the various footpaths around here with my grandfather during school holidays, developing a love of the countryside which remains with me to this day.

Always keep the river on your left, though the path runs a short distance away from it at times. It is curious that the large town of Belper is built almost entirely on the eastern side of the river, when it might be expected to straddle the waterway like most other towns. This is due to the fact that the land on this side was, like the mills, owned by the Strutt family and they kept it as farmland.

Eventually you come to a point where the footpath becomes sandwiched between the river and the high fence surrounding the sewage works. Keep to the path, passing under a metal bridge (ignore the signposted footpath which crosses the river by way of the bridge), to eventually find yourself on the access road to the works. Walk up this for a short distance to reach a minor road near some cottages.

Turn left and walk along this quiet road until the village of Milford is reached. Immediately before the village you cross the railway line - there's a good view of the dark portal of Milford tunnel just here.

Continue to walk through the village until, near the school and just before the main A6 road is reached, a road called Sunny Hill joins on the right. Walk up Sunny Hill, which certainly lives up to its name as height is quickly gained! Eventually the road levels off and turns into a track. Just here there's an interesting stone tower to the right. No-one really knows its history but it is generally thought to have something to do with surveying during the construction of the railway, as the tunnel passes through this hill.



Continue along this track, which varies in width and quality but is always obvious, for about a mile and a half. Initially it passes through the Chevin golf course, so watch out for stray balls! There are excellent and extensive views all along this stretch. At one point a high stone wall is reached - this is one of several in the area which were used for target practice by local regiments in the first half of the last century.

Eventually the track turns left, passes a house and emerges onto a road. Turn right and follow the road for about 100 yards then cross to the other side and follow a finger post which is marked for the Midshires Way and the Derwent Valley Walk. It looks as

though you are walking up a private drive but fear not, it **is** a footpath!

At the end of the drive, cross a track to go straight on into a field (still signposted for the Midshires Way). Walk along the right-hand side of the field to the top-right corner, where there is a stile (which was very overgrown when I was there!). You now walk along the top of a steep-sided wooded gorge which looks quite

mysterious. The gorge (which should be on your left if you've gone the right way) is called the 'depths of Lumb' locally and is reputed to have been the haunt of a witch called Padge Barber. We do not descend into the gorge for this walk.

Eventually you emerge into a field with extensive views of the countryside ahead. Walk across the field, veering slightly left. Cross a stile and then a gateway to gain access to a track. Turn right and follow the track to the road (the A517), crossing Black Brook by a bridge. The village you are now in is called Blackbrook - no prizes for guessing the origin of the name!

Turn right and follow the road for about 100 yards until Longwalls Lane can be seen opposite. Cross the road and walk up Longwalls Lane.

The lane climbs up to reach a line of houses which is at right angles to the lane, on the right. Just after passing these, leave the lane by a stile on the right (marked by a finger post) to enter a field. Cross this field diagonally left to find a stile in the middle of the side wall and go through this into a second field. Keep walking in the same direction to locate a stile in the centre of the wall at the top of this field. It's masked by trees (actually an overgrown hedge) and can be hard to spot so take care. Its position is marked by two small standing stones set into the ground before the trees. This field has a good array of wild flowers in summer and usually contains friendly horses.

Go through into another field and continue on your diagonally-left course, keeping a line of gorse bushes on your right. You eventually leave this field by a stile in the side wall. You now follow the path through several more fields via stiles, gradually descending along the way until you eventually find yourself on another minor road. The route is clear on the ground and each stile can be seen from its predecessor so you should have no trouble finding your way.

Cross the road, which is called Dalley Lane, and walk down the access track to a line of cottages. Go through the stile at the end of the track, after the cottages, and head diagonally left up the field. This path is initially paved with stone flags in a manner fairly common in Yorkshire but much less so this far south.



Go through a stile in the wall under a line of trees so regular they must have been planted rather than being natural, then go straight on through three fields, for some of the way using a level path cut into the sloping hillside. There are good views ahead here and you may see a hare if you're lucky.

Eventually you reach a stile by a gate. Cross this onto a track and head right, finding yourself on a road called Shireoaks.

Follow this road (ignoring Mount Pleasant on the left) to eventually find yourself on a main road. This is the A517 again. Cross the road carefully (you're on the brow of the hill and drivers can't see you very easily!) and then turn left and walk on the pavement down the hill and back to the river bridge by the mills. From here the car is only a short distance, at the end of a delightful walk in some countryside you probably never knew existed!

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