From Mineshaft to Fireside

Five circular walks to discover the lost communities of The Stiperstones

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SHROPSHIRE HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

ADVANTAGE WEST MIDLANDS

Designed by www.MACreative.co.uk
Introduction

This guide book has been produced as part of the Once Upon a Hill project. The project aims to discover the lost communities of The Stiperstones and is led by Natural England in partnership with English Heritage, The Heritage Lottery Fund, LEADER and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

These walks follow in the footsteps of the families that worked and lived in and around The Stiperstones and the journeys they made on foot every day to work, school, or to get supplies.

While on the walks you can see the remains of the mines, houses and field systems of these once bustling communities as well as some of the wildlife that lives there today.

Safety on the walks

The walks in this guide are suitable for any person of average fitness and experience. However no walk in the countryside can be considered risk free.

As a guide please:
- Exercise common sense, care and judgement when walking in the countryside
- Wear sensible, sturdy footwear and suitable clothing
- Take enough drink and food to sustain you in an emergency
- Be aware of the changeable weather conditions at any time of year and carry extra clothing, a map, compass and mobile phone
- If walking alone tell someone your route and expected time of return
- The area has many mine workings and shafts, please stay on the footpaths
- Enjoy your Walk!

Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

Using this guidebook

Each of the walks has an accompanying map where you will find symbols for parking, toilets and information points. The numbered points on the maps correspond to the numbers in the text where there is information about each point. Armed with this book your route should be clear, but we do recommend that you carry the relevant OS map with you.

At the beginning of each walk you will find information relating to distance, time, grading and where to start. Please note that times given are approximate and do not allow for prolonged breaks.

All the walks are accessible from the Shuttle Service which runs at weekends and Bank Holidays in the spring, summer and autumn. Please look at the website for further information: www.shropshirehillsshuttles.co.uk

There are toilets in Snailbeach and at the Bog Visitor Centre when it is open. For Opening times please see: www.bogcentre.co.uk or telephone 01743 792484.

Refreshments are available at The Stiperstones Inn and when open The Bog Visitor Centre serves drinks and cakes.

For those looking for a more gentle walk there is an all-ability trail from The Knolls car park which is suitable for wheelchairs and anyone with restricted mobility.
Shropshire’s geology

Shropshire’s geology is very diverse and most rock types found in the British Isles can be found in Shropshire. There is also a large mineral wealth including lead, coal and iron. The Stiperstones ores were formed by molten liquids rising from deep within the earth’s crust, finding their way into fissures in the rock and then cooling over many millions of years. The minerals were deposited at different cooling temperatures and therefore at different levels within the faults. Minerals deposited in The Stiperstones area include barite, witherite, calcite, galena (lead ore), sphalerite (zinc), and quartz.

The history of lead mining in The Stiperstones area dates back to at least Roman times and ceased in 1911. The demand for lead was always unpredictable and as a result the prices varied greatly. At the turn of the 20th century cheap imports of lead from abroad caused the prices to drop to a level at which the small mines became unviable and were forced to close. At this point The Stiperstones mines began mining barite which allowed them a brief respite until 1955. Barite is used in the production of glass, paper and rubber and is mixed with mud to act as a coolant during oil drilling. It is also used to make a barium meal which when ingested shows up on an x-ray of the digestive tract.

In the 1950s and 60s the larger spoil heaps were reworked before being either capped with top soil and seeded, or abandoned to nature.

The abandoned settlements of The Stiperstones are within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The more remote settlements were abandoned in the early 20th century and have fairly quickly gone back to nature. The stone banks have crumbled but still offer nesting places for birds such as wheatears, summer visitors to the Shropshire hills.

The hedges have grown into trees, where on a spring day redstarts and willow warblers can be heard singing. The tumbled down ruins of the cottages and outbuildings, once full of children and farm animals are now home to rabbits and a family of stoats. Grasslands that were laboriously carved out of the hill in summer are carpeted with yellow mountain pansies are now slowly being covered with a blanket of heather and whinberry (the local name for bilberry). Yet clues to the people who lived here and their work remain to be discovered. The stone middens from clearing the fields, the laburnum trees planted in the hedges and the ditches and ponds dug to channel the water to the houses or for the animals. There are ruins of the pig sties and cattle byres along with barns for storing the hay.

Outside a cottage a few daffodils remain; and here and there a gooseberry bush or rhubarb plant; all that is left of a well-tended vegetable garden. Dependant on employment in the mines the settlements were always temporary and merely borrowed from nature; as the people have left so the wildlife has returned.
There has been settlement in the Stiperstones area since prehistoric times and lead mining in the hills, since the Romans.

The most recent active lead mining spanned the 19th century while barite continued to be mined until 1955. It was during this time that small settlements began to spread up the hills and across the common land of the Stiperstones.

Small ‘squatter’ cottages were built by the miners, who were allowed to stay if, it is said, they could build a house in one night and have smoke coming out of the chimney by morning. The families paid a small rent to the estate and would walk for two hours or more, across the steep exposed hills to reach the mines, the church and the school.

Small whitewashed stone cottages and clearly marked cart tracks to the rows of dwellings were quickly in place as small communities developed. Each cottage was built to a similar design – a garden, root store and a byre for a cow or sty for a pig.

These remote and inhospitable settlements were inhabited as late as the 1950s and today there are still local residents whose families came from ‘up on the hill’.

Once Upon a Hill
Discovering the lost villages of The Stiperstones

The ropeway (1920) carried coal up to the bog and barites down

Illustration of Cook’s Cottage, Blakemoorgate by a 1940s wartime evacuee

Five walks around The Stiperstones
Mining at the Bog began during the late 17th Century. The village grew up around the mine and was described as a ‘thriving village’ with rows of cottages, mine buildings and offices, a pub and a school. According to census records it was at its busiest in 1861 when the population was 248. Of these, 54 were employed in mining, four in agriculture and others included two shoemakers and a wheelwright. The school, which closed in 1968, is now a visitor centre. At one time the school had 106 children aged between five and 14.

There were still seven addresses registered for voting in 1973, but shortly afterwards the village was demolished leaving only the school building. In ‘The Lead, Copper and Barytes Mines of Shropshire’, Michael Shaw speculates that, although no actual evidence has survived, the Romans would have been mining here. He also notes that “The mine supplied the locals with power, making The Bog the first village in the county with electricity”. This seems to have been in the 1920s.

Devil’s Chair

The Devil’s chair can be seen at some point while on most of the walks in this booklet.

There are many legends as to how the Devil’s Chair came to be on The Stiperstones. One is that he was carrying rocks in his apron to fill a valley called Hell’s Gutter. It was a very hot day, too hot even for the Devil, so he sat down for a rest. When he got up his apron strings broke and the rocks fell to the ground. He was very angry and cursed the rocks leaving them where they fell. He later returned and realised that the fallen rocks had formed a very comfortable seat which he could sit upon and enjoy the cold winds which offer a welcome respite from the heat of hell.

Beware when the mist is down on The Stiperstones, the Devil is sitting on his chair contemplating his next evil deed. He also returns on the longest night to meet with the witches and evil spirits to choose their new King. Be that as it may, it is said that the rocks of the Devil’s Chair all smell of Brimstone!
Nipstone Quick

Distance: 1.5 miles 2.4km - Time: 1 hour

A short walk that affords a great view of the whole ridge. It is worth making a detour to the signposted viewpoint before beginning the walk.

One short uphill section

From the Bog car park take the grassy track up hill passing the pond on your left.

Opposite the pond are the remains of the concrete foundations of the aerial ropeway used to carry coal and rock.

Follow the waymarker to see the entrance to the Somme tunnel and further on to see the old powder house, one of the few remaining buildings of the once thriving mine.

The pond is man-made and held water for processing the lead ore and condensing steam for the mine’s steam engines.

Retrace your steps and turn right before the pond following the waymarker up the steps and through the kissing gate in to an open field.

Follow the grassy track towards the telegraph pole. Turn right here and follow the waymarker towards the left hand side of the wood. Go over a stile and into the conifer plantation.

Leave the wood and continue along the path onto Shropshire Wildlife Trust’s reserve. Nipstone is in the process of returning to heathland after the conifer plantation was felled in 2006. The speed of recovery has been amazing, already drifts of purple heather and bilberry are back with skylarks nesting in their cover. The heathland will soon be a haven for stonechats, meadow pipits, insects and lichens.

Turn right at the main track and head down hill.

At the end of the track, go through the Nipstone car park and turn right, following the road back to The Bog car park.

You will pass the The Miners Arms on your right. This used to be a popular pub and was also where the mining families paid their rent twice a year: on Lady Day in March and Michaelmas Day in September. It is now a private house.

Laburnum

The abandoned settlements are places to look for a tree that is a particular feature of The Stiperstones; the laburnum. It is not a native plant and its presence here is largely due to deliberate planting. There are many single laburnums, and few of the abandoned holdings on and around the hill are without one; at Pennerley there are entire hedgerows.

Despite much discussion no one has come up with a convincing explanation as to why Laburnums should have been planted here. Was it perhaps ornamental? After hours of blackness in the mines it must have been a joy, in the June flowering time, to see the tree known locally as “golden showers”.

Nipstone Rock

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From the Bog Centre follow the road uphill past the Bog Car Park.

At the first bend in the road go through the gate on your left onto the permissive path following the fence line uphill. At the top of the field go through the gate, across the track and through the next gate onto a grassy fenced track. Continue uphill and along the track as it bends to the left. Go through the gate and on to the Nature Reserve.

Notice the distinct difference between the farmland you are leaving and the heathland you are entering. Cranberry Rock is clearly visible ahead.

Continue along the wide, stony path and through a further two gates.

The remains of The Crown pub can be seen on the left of the track, licensed as “a beer house” the pub closed in 1902 but its reputation has been handed down. Nearly a hundred years later Les Hotchkiss (born nearby in 1927), reminiscing for ‘Never on a Sunday’, recalled being told that “… men used to come [to ‘The Crown’] from the Bridges for bare knuckle fights”. Henry Jones (born 1930), another Pennerley resident, remembered that “It was said they could hear for a mile the miners singing in The Crown on a Saturday night… Mrs Chidley [the landlady] used to sweep the beer that had been spilt on the floor out through the door with a broom after they’d gone.”

At the crossroads go through the gate on your left and leave the Nature Reserve.

The covered Pennerley Reservoir can be seen here on the right, it was constructed in 1966 and holds up to 102m³ of drinking water. Water from the River Severn is treated and pumped up to the reservoir which then, using gravity, supplies the houses immediately below and in Hope Village.

Follow the track down hill initially then round to the left and slightly up hill. The covered Pennerley Reservoir can be seen here on the right, it was constructed in 1966 and holds up to 102m³ of drinking water. Water from the River Severn is treated and pumped up to the reservoir which then, using gravity, supplies the houses immediately below and in Hope Village.

Pennerley Hay Meadow

This is a fine example of one of the flower rich hay meadows which would have surrounded The Stiperstones. Hay was cut during the summer and stored to provide winter food for the settlements’ animals. Once a common sight these meadows are full of a variety of wild flowers. Intensive farming methods from the 1930s onwards have lead to many of the meadows being lost.

At the T junction go right. You will pass Pennerley Hill Farm on your left.

Go left at the next road junction along track signposted Brook House and Ritton Place.

After the stables and pond go through the gate and straight on at the crossroads. Continue along this bridleway enjoying the views towards the Bog Village.

At the end of the track go back through the gate on your right, onto the permissive path and retrace your steps back down to the Bog Centre.

Pennerley Haymeadows in their glory
Devil’s Trail

Distance: 4.2 miles / 6.8 km • Time: 2½ hours

A walk around the ridge with great views of the rock formations and the surrounding landscape. One steep climb otherwise good paths following the ridge line.

From the Bog Centre follow the road uphill past the Bog Car Park.

At the first bend in the road go through the gate on your left onto the permissive path and follow the fence line uphill.

At the top of the field go through the gate, across the track and through the next gate onto a grassy fenced track, continue uphill and along the track as it bends to the left. Go through the gate and onto the Nature Reserve.

Notice the distinct difference between the farm land you are leaving and the heathland you are entering. Cranberry Rock is clearly visible ahead.

Continue along the wide, stony path and through a further two gates.

The remains of The Crown pub can be seen on the left of the track, see ‘The Bog Trail’ walk for more information

At the crossroads turn right and walk passed the reservoir, follow this stony track towards Devil’s Chair.

The cottage remains on your left are those of Tin House, so named, it is thought because it had a tin roof. Lived in initially by Mr and Mrs Hughes and subsequently by Jim and Sarah (Sally) Hayman and their daughter, Maggie. Jim was a miner. The third and last occupant was a miner, Tom Evans, and his wife. There are remains of a root store and obvious fields. The cottage is also referred to locally as Mary Webb’s cottage although there is no evidence that she stayed there. She would however have walked passed and it is thought that the cottage provided the inspiration for Deborah Arden and Steven Southernwood’s home in “The Golden Arrow”.

At the crossroads with the main ridge path carry straight on, down the hill.

Just before the gate leaving the Nature Reserve take the smaller grassy track on the right. This path runs parallel with the ridge.

Looking to your right Manstone rock is clearly visible so named, it is thought because of the many shapes in the rock that can resemble a man.

Pass the old Gatten Plantation on your left.

The conifer trees were felled in 1998 as part of the heathland recreation project ‘Back to Purple’.

At the main track turn left and follow the wide path down towards the car park.

Just before the gate into the car park take the smaller grassy track on your right. Follow this track as it meanders along the fence line, through the gorse and heather.

At the small T-junction take the left path downhill then at the next NNR sign take a right and continue along the narrow grassy path.

Leave the NNR by the gate and retrace your steps back down the wide grassy paths to the Bog Car Park.
Perkins Beach and the Paddock

**Distance:** 3.5 miles / 5.6km  **Time:** 3 hours

The longest walk visiting four of the settlements, passing through a variety of habitats with far reaching views.

One steep, sustained climb and a sharp descent down steps.

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Start at The Stiperstones Inn. Walking away from the Car Park passed the shop and turn right up Perkins Beach Dingle.

**STIPERSTONES INN**

According to the 1901 'Returns of Licensed Houses', the original licence for 'The Stiperstones Inn' dates back 'out of memory'. It continues to serve residents and visitors to this day. In 1901 it is recorded as being owned by the Earl of Tankerville, and as having six bedrooms and stabling for 14 horses. Today it is owned by the Sproson family, has two bedrooms and stables two race horses owned by former publican John Sproson.

1. Follow the road passed the old Chapel. Continue along the road passed houses as the track becomes more stony, and lined with banks and trees.

Go through gate and on to the Nature Reserve. Follow the track which would have been used by the miners living in Perkins Beach.

2. The Perkins family who lived here from at least 1851 are thought to have given their name to the settlement. In 1881, at the height of the mining boom, there were 154 people living in 34 houses, 45 men were employed in the lead mining industry, mostly as miners but there was also a smelter, blacksmith, mine agent, cattle dealer, sawyer, carpenter and a bricklayer. The majority of the residents were born locally, but there were some from Mid Wales.

3. The spoil heaps on your right are distinctive because there is no vegetation growing on them; most plants are unable to germinate on the waste.

At the fork in the track there is a small pond; this would have been the water source for the village. Take the right track and continue uphill.

4. Look over your right shoulder to The Devil's Chair and forwards to Shepherds' Rock, which it is thought was so named because the Shepherds used the vantage point to watch their flocks.

At the stone cairn continue straight on down the rocky track, enjoying the views of The Long Mynd and on a clear day The Wrekin.

Soon after the cairn as the stony track bends right, take the left grassy track walking around Shepherds' rock.

Leave the Nature Reserve at the gate and follow the grassy track to the left.

Follow waymarkers along the tree-lined bridleway, through a gate and passed the old field boundaries and the remains of The Paddock settlement.

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According to the census records there were 12 households at The Paddock settlement in 1871 and 1881. There was also a Methodist Meeting House which people remember still being used in the 1920s. The last record of anyone living at the Paddock was in 1953 when Percy Goodwin and Celia Read lived at number 8, Paddock Farm.

Go through the gates and into the Shropshire Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve, Brook Vessons.  
Continue through the next gate and follow the track along the fence line.  
Continue straight on at the Nature Reserve sign and follow the grassy track uphill.  
At the fork take the left track then go through the gate.  
On your right is Blakemoorgate and the remains of Rita Evans’s cottage. This settlement consisted of four households. Two of the cottages have been restored to serve as an education resource for you to explore.  
Go through the next gate and take the wide track to the left. Walk towards the next fenced enclosure containing the remains of Blakemoorflat.  
At the corner of the fenced area take the right hand grassy track off the main route following the fence line, keeping the enclosure on your right.  
The occupants of Blakemoorflat worked in the mining industry or as farmers. In the voting registers of 1921, 1926, 1931 and 1936 Mary Isabella Evans and her husband Richard Ernest Evans lived at 4, Blakemoorflat. Mary, or Izzy as she was known was the last occupant and left in 1937. The height of Blakemoorflat’s occupancy was in 1910 when there were 4 families living there.  
At the end of the fence line look to your right to see the site of a Bronze Age Hillfort. People have been living and working on The Stiperstones for thousands of years.  
Continue along the track then take the smaller grassy track on the left, straight towards the edge of the hill and go down the steps into Mytton Dingle.  
Some of the old ventilation shafts for the mines are visible here, on the lower slope of the hill on the right (they are fenced off to prevent accidents).  
There are two theories as to how the Dingle got its name, one being that it was named after John (Jack) Mytton (1796–1834) an infamous Shropshire Squire. Known as ‘Mad Jack’ he is said to have drunk between four and six bottles of port a day and apparently drove his second wife down the Dingle at speed in a two-wheeled carriage drawn by two horses.  
The other idea is that it began as ‘Mutton Dingle’, referring to the similarity of the shape of the dingle to that of a sheep’s back leg, which over the years became Mytton Dingle.  
Pass the Whitley Bomber memorial plaque, and continue down the track.  
Leave the Nature Reserve by the gate and follow the track back down into Stiperstones Village.

**Brook Vessons**

An extraordinarily atmospheric place, Brook Vessons has a wonderful feeling of antiquity, with towering hedgerows, many gnarled old trees, a tangled woodland, tiny meadows and boggy, tussocky grazing pastures.

It lies on the northern slopes of The Stiperstones, on the edge of The Paddock – a village that grew up with the local mining industry as people took on smallholdings to supplement their income. It was finally abandoned early in the 20th century, when the industry declined, but the remnants of fields and cottage walls remain.

Perhaps the strangest thing about Brook Vessons is its cluster of giant trees. Here you will find a group of broad-girthed rowans, the fattest of them matched in the UK only by a portly old monster in Hampshire. The wood also holds Shropshire’s biggest holly and crab apple trees.

**Aerial view of The Stiperstones showing the bronze age hillfort © Shropshire Council**
**Trail of two Chimneys**

*Distance: 2.9miles / 4.6km *  *Time: 3 hours*

From the mine (still open to visitors today) walk up the hill to visit the most intact of the squatters’ settlements at Blakemoorgate. Pass the ancient holly trees on the way back down and on to Lordshill, the setting for the filming of Gone to Earth and the burial place of Arthur Wardman a Snailbeach miner killed in a tragic accident.

A more strenuous walk with one steep section on a rough footpath.

Park in Snailbeach car park.

Take some time to look at the mine buildings. For more information and opening times see: www.shropshiremines.org.uk

Cross the road and go through the kissing gate on the road signposted ‘Lordshill’. Walk up the grassy track. Leave by the next kissing gate and cross the road. Walk along the old railway track. Turn left after the shed go up the steps passing the lift. Turn left along the track passing the gated entrance to the mine then right up the next set of steps.

Follow round to the right, then left up more steps. Follow the left bend and up the final steps to the Engine Shaft buildings.

1. **Oak coppice**

There are signs of coppicing in the oak woodland above Snailbeach. Coppicing is a traditional method of woodland management; trees are cut close to ground level which encourages multiple stems to grow back. These stems are cut and used for building. Coppicing improves the woodland habitat for wildlife and is continued today.

Go right at the buildings walking round the shaft and uphill. You will pass the first chimney on your left. Enter the Nature Reserve.

Continue up the hill and through the gate, follow the directional arrow across the field.

2. Look back at the chimney. There is a nest box towards the top which is used by a kestrel family.

Go through the kissing gate and passed the Nature Reserve sign. Follow the wide grassy track along the fence line.

Follow the track as it bends right, away from the fence line. Ignoring the top left field gate go through the kissing gate below and onto the heath.

3. Look down into Crowsnest Dingle – The house that can be seen at the bottom was the mine owner’s house.

At the junction with the main track turn left.

4. Turn left down the next track by Blakemoorgate. Continue along the main track, through the gate and passed Blakemoorgate. Leave the Nature Reserve by the next gate. Walk across the field aiming for the gap in the trees. Go through the gate and on to The Hollies Nature Reserve.

5. ‘The Hollies’ is a nature reserve owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Two hundred or so ancient holly trees can be found scattered here. Some thought to be three or four centuries old: an impressive age for...
Once upon a hill is a partnership project aimed at rediscovering local community heritage. It has been funded by Natural England, English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and LEADER. Its primary focus is around the renovation of two miner’s cottages at Blakemoorgate, part of the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve but also includes:

- Building conservation, through the repair and consolidation of outbuildings associated with the settlement.
- Restoration of hedges and stone banks, with the help of trained volunteers.
- Grassland conservation, monitoring the mountain pansies and researching the use of lime.
- Community history, through the recording of oral history by local residents and the research of census records.
- Education, through the involvement of local schools, community and visitors and developing the site as an educational resource.
- Access and interpretation, with information panels and this walks guide.

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