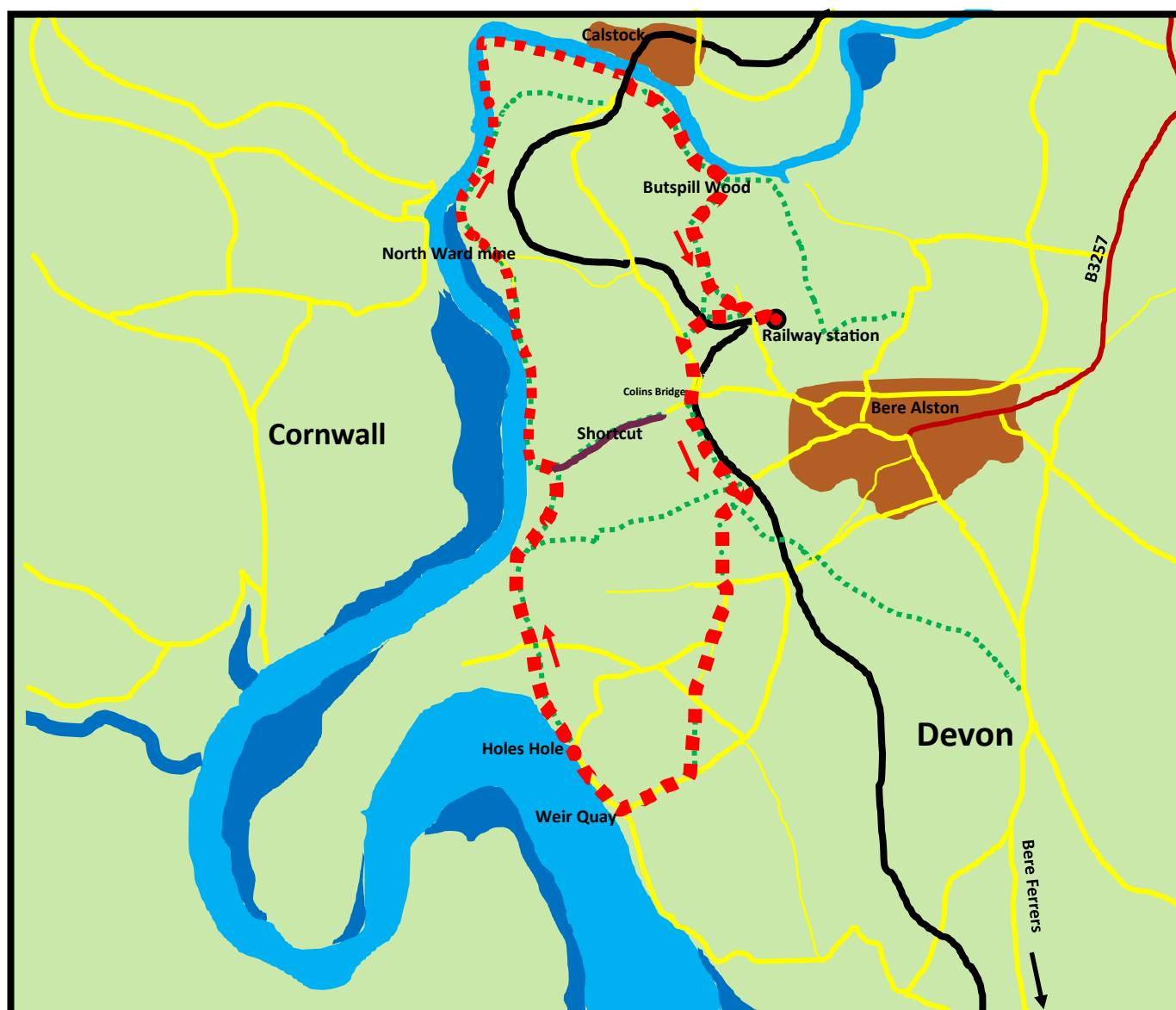


Walk 3 The Silver Mines

In his book "Industrial Archaeology of the Tamar Valley" Frank Booker opens the chapter on Silver Mines by saying "The silver and lead mines of the Tamar Valley have probably been more profitably worked over a longer period than any other mines in England." The silver/lead lode is made up of two parallel seams about threequarters of a mile apart. This walk is going to take you down the eastern seam and back up the western seam. It's a walk of about 6 miles but there is a shortcut back to make a 4 mile walk. On the walk you will pass through Lockeridge Whitsam Birch Butspill and North Ward mines and pass close to Furzhill. You will also walk under the Calstock viaduct.



Bere Alston railway station is the start of this walk but it is some way out of the village at PL20 7ES, SX 440673. Park in the approach road rather than in front of the station building as this is a well used line and the commuters won't be too pleased if all their spaces are taken up. This is a particularly picturesque walk and there are also some free to use picnic tables near North Ward Mine. You should allow about 2 hours from the start to reach them. There is a shortcut which reduces the walk length by a couple of miles.



Come out of the station road and turn right to set off down hill and under a pair of railway bridges one of which carries the railway line that goes to Gunnislake over the Calstock viaduct. A little bit further on just past the house on the right there is a kissing gate on your left. Go through the gate and walk straight ahead across the field.



On the other side of the field there is another gate and also another bridge to walk under. Stay on the path and when you reach the road turn left.

Walk on up the road to another railway

bridge (Colins bridge) but this time we ignore it and instead fork right and then almost immediately fork left. Go over two stiles and down the edge of a field staying parallel with the railway line.

When you reach the other side of the field go over another stile and along a narrow path. In 100m you will reach a road.





On the other side of the road is Lockeridge silver mine. Where you can find fenced in mine shafts, buildings and adits. It's a private woodland but plenty of dog walkers use the paths so I don't suppose anyone would mind if you explored.

Walk on up to but not under the bridge and fork right to go up and around the

edge of the woodland mining set. At about the highest point just before you reach the chimney stack take the short path on your left up to a gate that opens out into a field. Go through the gate and turn right to walk along the top edge of the wood heading towards a mound with some fir trees growing on top. This is believed to be a medieval mine shaft and spoil heap



The next mine you pass through is Whitsam mine and you reach it by continuing on past the mound to go down hill next to a hedge on your right. Whitsam mine is on the other side of the metal gate. You will walk through it for 350m following a well used path down to and over a stream then up to the road passing the mine shafts and spoil heaps on your way.

On reaching the road go straight ahead sign-posted to Holes Hole. This road will take you past Furzhill mine which is in private woodland on your right as you walk down hill.





As the road bends right keep straight on along a track sign posted as a restrictive by-way. You are now walking along the line of Furzhill /Birch silver mine that is split into two parts one on either side of the next road you meet.

On reaching the road turn left Looking ahead you see a white gable end of a cottage. This is Birch cottage and is at the top end of the southern section of Furzhill/Birch mine.



Turn right next to Birch Cottage to follow the bridleway through the mine workings. Look out for a chimney hidden in the woods on the left.

When you reach the road turn right and walk down hill. As you walk down the hill on your right you will pass a large stone building which was once an ore processing and metal smelting plant that operated in the mid to late 19th century. After it closed down the premises were turned into a jam factory presumably capitalising on all the soft fruit which was produced in the area.



Unfortunately that also failed and the building are now homes. The photograph shows the road that you have just walked down.



When you reach the T junction at the bottom of the hill turn right and with the river on your left set off to walk to Holes Hole, about a third of a mile away, passing almost immediately the remains of a lime kiln on the right.

Just past the wreck of the Merganser on the foreshore the road bends sharply right.



Here fork left and passing between two tall hedges start the short but quite steep climb into Hanging Cliff Wood.

On your left as you walk up through the wood look down to the water and you can see the trees are growing on an almost vertical drop.



When the path reaches the top of the wood it levels out next to a fence. Here fork right. Go over a stile turn right again and walk along the edge of the field with the hedge on your right.

When you reach the road turn left.



Within 20m turn right to go through another gate and again keeping the hedge on your right walk on down the field that does become progressively steeper. Zig zagging may be safer!

Unseen below at river level on your left is North Hooe Silver and lead mine that was worked from the 13th Century on and off until the late 19th Century.



Follow the path over a stream and up through a metal pedestrian gate. Then go across the end of a field and through a wooden gate where you will then walk down hill on an ancient sunken path that would surely have been used by the mine workers in medieval



times. When you reach the bottom of the hill turn left to go over the board walk which crosses the reed beds. Having crossed the reed beds go up into the next field and turn right.

With the field boundary on your right at all times walk around the field and in the very far corner you will arrive at this gate. For the 6 mile walk go through the gate and down to a bridge .

Shortcut

If you now want to take the short cut back to your car turn right and walk up the farm track which is a public footpath passing Braunder farm and at the top of the hill you will arrive back at Colins Bridge where you can retrace your steps to the station and your car.





Having gone over the little bridge that crosses a stream in the wood go up the slope through the gate and turn left to walk on down this steep field. When you reach the bottom edge of the field turn right and walk along quite a well worn path as far as you can go keeping to the lower side of the field.



In the field corner go through the gate and into a wood.



On exiting the wood keep on along the base of the next field. After going through a gate you will reach a farm drive. Here turn right and walk out of the farm and over a stream and a bit further on over a cattle grid. *(The landowner is encouraging you to go up the hill and along the top of the field which you can if you want to as it will re-join the farm road a public path later on but its quite a steep walk up.)*

When the farm road makes a very sharp right turn go left through a wooden gate. Walk quickly past the now private house which was part of North Hooe mine once a very productive silver/lead mine.





Walkers are free to use these picnic tables.

Go past the picnic tables and through the gate into another wood. Follow the track through the wood. As you reach river level Cotehele quay can be seen on the other side of the river which you will go past on

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On the other side of the wood go through the gate or over the stile into a field and stay on the lower side of the field to walk next to the river.



When you reach the other side of this field keep left to use the permissive path which takes you



over a stile and along the top of the embankment.



Stay on the embankment passing under the Calstock viaduct built of in-situ cast concrete blocks and completed in 1908.

When you reach the end of the embankment go up the zig zag steps and into the wood. Walk on up to the way marker post and turn left. Stay on the path with the river on your left.



Eventually you will drop down to meet a wider path with a stream in front of you.

Don't cross the stream instead turn right and take the moderate incline away from the river passing through Butspill mine another of the medieval silver mines. Mine workings are still visible in the wood.



Staying on the main path and ignoring others that branch off you will eventually go through a kissing gate and out into a field.

Fork slightly left to go to the left of the trees in the middle of the field and step over a small stream.

Walk on up the field and soon the very first kissing gate you went through will come into view. Go through it turn right and walk back up to the station.



The next walk is across the river starting in Calstock. Now instead of driving around via Gunnislake New Bridge you could take the train from here it only takes 7 minutes to get to Calstock station and you will pass over the viaduct. There is easily enough time to do either the short or long walk and still be in time to catch a train back across the viaduct but check the timetable first.



Calstock Church which you go past on the next walk