

A STROLL WITH STU

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Moorsbus sets us on way to start of 10-mile country trek

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The Moorsbus service – organised using charitable handouts by a small band of energetic volunteers – is up and running again on Sundays and Bank Holidays until the end of September.

So, I took the opportunity to visit an otherwise inaccessible area of the National Park by public transport, as I embarked on a strenuous 10-mile in Farndale.

Starting at the Lion Inn on Blakey Ridge, head up a little earth mound with its standing stone, then quickly downhill alongside a wall to

Reach the old ironstone railway. Turn right and enjoy the stunning views for two miles or so on the old track bed.

After 40 minutes (ish) a signpost on an embankment indicates Westerdale to your right and Farndale on your left. However, I do like to take slightly less trodden routes, so carry on along a lengthy straight stretch, past a sign saying Esklets indicating the where the River Esk gathers itself together in a gloopy manner, before babbling down to Whitby for a quick swirl round the swing bridge.

As the track begins to bear left (100 yards before some wooden fencing), look out for a path on your left.

No, I couldn't see it either, so just plod down in the general direction of a wooded valley half a mile below. Ray Mears, and Tonto would do well to find evidence that anyone has set foot on this path since the last train departed for Battersby, but never fear, you won't disappear into a peat bog – the going is surprisingly good.

Head for the right of those trees, where the path miraculously reappears running alongside the wooded valley. You soon bear slightly right though a gate, straight on to a wall which stays on your left as you drop down a gully with



SUBMITTED PHOTO

a gravity defying holly bush, then slightly left to a stile onto a road.

Turn right and head through Elm House, admiring the extensive collection of kid's bikes, scooters and other aids to juvenile mobility.

Just after a gate, a footpath sign points you left and downhill into woods. There is high bracken now, but it only lasts 100 yards or so, before you drop through sumptuous woodland and over the infant River Dove on a geriatric iron footbridge.

There is seriously lovely wildlife in these parts – the only place I've seen a Red Kite for instance – so keep your eyes peeled as you head up the grass slope, through a marked gap in the wall and slightly right up to a ladder stile. Turn left and essentially stick to this track for a mile or two. Pass Spring House and Spout House, then onto Tarmac to eventually drop down to Frost Hall. Just after the next building (Duffin Stone), a sign leads you left into a field. Quickly head to a gate in the left hand wall and follow it down to go through another unmarked gate, so the wall is now on your left. Towards the foot of the slope,

Traverse right and through a gate leading to a bridge over the beck. Follow the clear track to turn right on the road through a tiny gate. I'd noticed 30 or 40 vehicles parked in a field up the slope and was soon confronted with a piercing and raucous explanation.

Several youths and youth

wannabes were busily churning up a hilly field on their motor bikes which, apparently, don't come with silencers. Two pigs and three black horses looked deeply unimpressed, and wore a resigned look as if they knew that this could now go on every day until the schools reopen in September.

Stay on the road for a mile or more until you reach Hall Farm, immediately after some National Trust woodland. Go up to the farmhouse and through a gate to curl right to second gate, after which you swing almost 180 degrees left in a field to a wide track over a brook.

Go through another gate, then diagonally left towards a farm accessed through a couple more marked gates, the second directly in front of the farmhouse. Follow the waymarks straight on until one points you sharp right after a gate. It's steeply downhill – follow the electricity lines – then right through a gate at the bottom. Cross a bridge ahead of you, then bear right to a stile. Go left past North Gill House, soon right along a path that heads right behind the farm, dropping to turn left on the road. The route back to the bus/car/pub is now vertically upwards for a cruel mile. It would be utterly ridiculous to suggest that a man who writes a walking column in a provincial newspaper would now resort to sticking his thumb out, desperately begging for a lift. Just a preposterous idea. Absolutely mad...



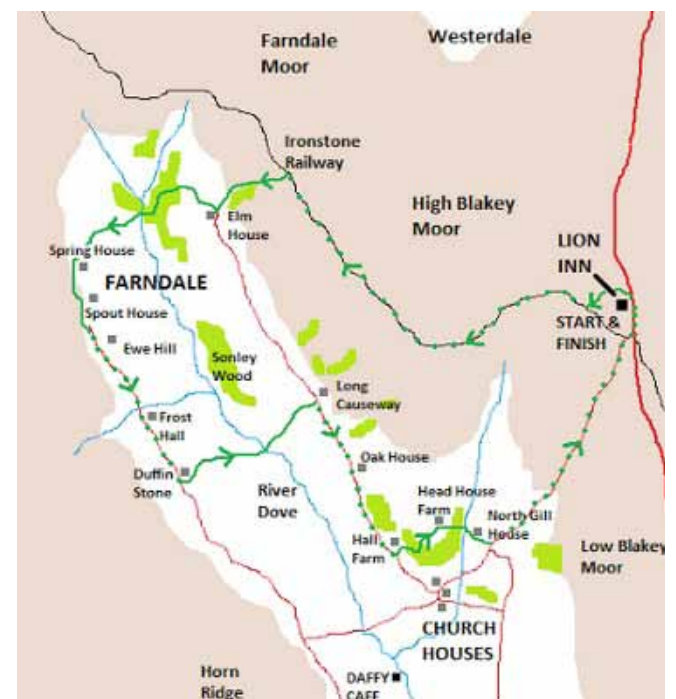
Farndale



Curious horses in a field



Spot the pig



A map of the route