

# In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: **Heritage Walks**

Hartington • Alstonefield • Wetton  
Wetton Mill • Warslow • Hulme End



# BESST Heritage Walks in the Peak District

The book and the related footpath improvements came about thanks to BESST\* – an international demonstration project creating new opportunities for innovative rural businesses that care about the environment.

This book is more than just a collection of walks:

- **It is a heritage guide** - as you walk it explains the features of the landscape and the stories of the villages. It brings the history of the past 10,000 years to life. The book explains how our ancestors lived and worked and how the countryside has changed over the centuries.
- **It is a visit planner** - with detailed route descriptions of 10 splendid walks of varying lengths in a quiet corner of England's first National Park. Use it to plan a weekend visit or a week's walking.
- **It is a souvenir** - packed with illustrations and photographs. It is a colourful reminder of your visit and an incentive for you to come back to discover more.
- **It is a guide to businesses** - make the most of your visit by staying longer, shopping and eating locally. The enclosed leaflet gives details of businesses meeting BESST's environmental and quality criteria, offering a special experience.

Profits from sales of the book will go back into path maintenance and book reprinting costs. We want to incorporate customer feedback - so please complete the post-paid questionnaire in the enclosed leaflet.

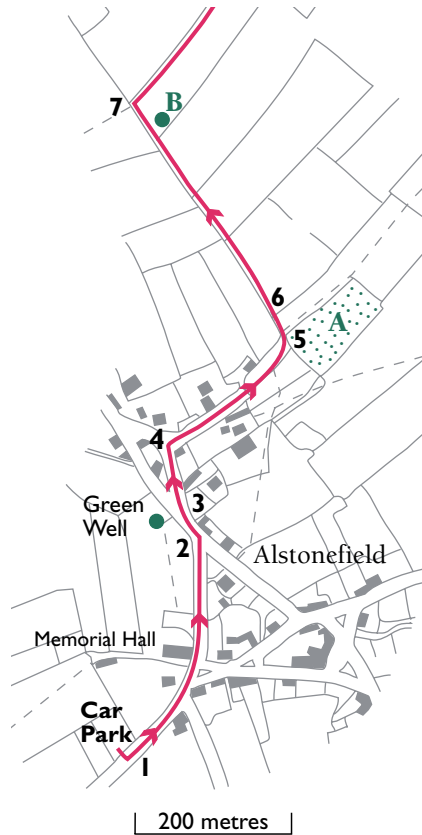
We developed the book working with local people. We tested ideas on them, with potential customers and with our international colleagues from the partner areas.

There are similar walking opportunities in our BESST partner areas – Hylte in Sweden and Fyresdal in Norway. Check out the website [www.besst.org](http://www.besst.org) to see how you could visit their versions of the Peak District's Heritage Walks.

*\*BESST stands for Business and the Environment linked through Small Scale Tourism. The BESST philosophy is that the environment – the landscape, wildlife, history and traditions of the place people live and work – is a great business asset. Businesses make the most of what is special locally. They create new holiday offers and products that link back to the environment. They use BESST's investments in improved walking, cycling and riding routes. Visitors will get a special experience by becoming customers of these businesses – who should all benefit as a result. This is why the BESST logo is a never-ending spiral of growing green leaves – a 'virtuous spiral' (the opposite of a vicious circle) - illustrating business and the environment growing together.*



BESST is an international demonstration project in the EU's Interreg I I B Programme for the North Sea Region



## Start

From the playing fields car park entrance (1) turn left and after 100 metres bear left towards the Memorial Hall. Continue past the Hall to the road junction and bear left (2).

Follow the road signposted 'Hulme End' and 'Hartington' until you get to the interpretation sign on the left of the roadside that explains the Green Well.

Across the road from here, the tree on the green has a plaque that commemorates one of Alstonefield's many victories in the Staffordshire Best Kept Village competition.

Follow the lane (3) to the right of the tree.

After a short distance there is another small green (4). Turn right and follow a narrow lane past farm buildings to either side.

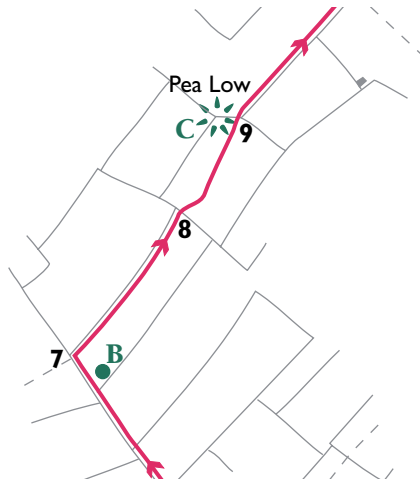
Ignore the farm tracks coming in from the left and right and continue straight on through the gate. Where the track starts to bend to the left (5), pause and look over the wall to the right of a metal field barn.

Look across at the field to the right, which has a striped appearance with long low ridges (A). This field has not been ploughed for many years which is why this **ridge and furrow** has survived, marking individual cultivation strips first laid out in the medieval period. These lay within one of the large **open fields** of Alstonefield.

Continue along the track for just a few metres to the field corner on the left. Turn off the track and follow the wall on the left to the stile (6). Go through it and into the fields.

Follow the wall on the left and go straight ahead through three more stiles in the field walls until you get to a round concrete pond on the right.

This is a traditional **dew pond** (B), with a modern concrete lining, providing drinking water for livestock. Since leaving the village you have been walking through distinctive long, narrow fields, edged by limestone **drystone walls** which reflect the shape of medieval **cultivation strips**. From about 1350 onwards, with a change of farming from the widespread cultivation of arable crops to mainly livestock farming, groups of strips began to be walled to form small fields used by individual farmers. Although the individual arable strips within them are usually no longer visible, the walls built when the strips were



abandoned in effect ‘fossilise’ the layout of the medieval **open field**, echoing a pattern of land use that goes back one thousand years. Looking up the hill from the dew pond the walls curve noticeably – the original cultivation strips did the same, allowing the oxen teams used for ploughing to turn more easily at the ends of the strips.

From the dew pond, keep going in the same direction as before until you reach the wall opposite. Don’t go through this stile! Turn right (**7**) and walk up the hill. Go through the gap in the wall at the top (**8**).

At this point turn around for a fine view across Alstonefield and beyond. From here you can appreciate the size of the ‘fossilised’ medieval **open field** from the long narrow walled fields you have just walked through and see how the **village** sits at the heart of a broad basin of fertile land.

Keep going uphill to the ridgetop. In the top left corner of the field you will see walls crossing the top of a mound - this is Pea Low. The footpath goes immediately to the right of the mound to a stile (**9**).



Pea Low (C)

## Pea Low

This massive round barrow (C) is one of the largest and most impressive in the Peak District. It is a **Scheduled Monument** and it is illegal to damage it. It may be a Bronze Age mound built around 3500-4500 years ago. Or it could be one thousand years older still! There's an intriguing possibility that it has a hidden chamber (or chambers!) at its heart, built from large slabs of stone and fully covered by the great mound of stones and soil. If so, Pea Low may be one of the best surviving chambered tombs in Britain, built in the Neolithic period sometime between 4500 and 5500 years ago, which is so well preserved that any chambers and human skeletons remain undiscovered!

Excavations in the 1840s, by the antiquarians Thomas Bateman and Samuel Carrington, failed to find a stone burial chamber. But just because they didn't find it doesn't mean it's not there. Their only trench to reach the base of the mound was no more than three feet wide at its bottom and excavations were stopped when the mound caved in. So a chamber could easily have been missed. However, Bateman and Carrington did find large quantities of charcoal and a few burnt bones below the barrow, while in the mound itself there was an ox skull and scattered human bones. These are common in Neolithic mounds.

Many centuries after the barrow was built it was used to bury a hoard of at least 50 Roman coins. Pea Low would be easily remembered as a hiding place but the owner never came back!

The coins were discovered in 1848, over 1500 years after they were hidden.

In the Anglo-Saxon period, about 1300-1400 years ago, Pea Low was used for a burial again. But this time a person, probably a member of the local ruling families, was interred in the top of the mound together with a spear and an arrow. An exotic amber button was found that may have been attached to the clothing he was buried in. At this time princely warriors and their families ruled the people of the Peak. The name of many Peak District hills today is 'Low' - although they are actually high. This is because the Anglo-Saxon word for a burial place or hill is 'Hlaw' - this has become 'Low'.

The last part of the story of Pea Low is the building of the field walls across the top of the mound. These walls are about 200 or 300 years old, built when the open commons of Alstonefield were enclosed.

Pea Low is in a spectacular location carefully chosen by the prehistoric people who built it. There are fine views, particularly across the fertile land around Alstonefield. From the barrow, the spirits of their ancestors could overlook 'the land of the living'. The exact position for the mound increases its impact as a focus for rituals, for when approached up the slope from below (as you have just done several thousand years later), the mound is at first hidden, then suddenly appears in all its glory.

Go through the stile (9) to the right of Pea Low and follow the wall down the hill, keeping the wall on your right.

As you walk down you will see a mere (D) (a large pond) in front of you and a large stone-built field barn behind it. These are on private property but they make a great photograph from the public footpath. The irregular mere provided essential water for livestock in this upland limestone landscape where water was scarce. The large barn was probably placed in this isolated spot to provide shelter and food for farm animals that were over-wintered in the adjacent fields.

Do not go as far as the mere! Turn left before the wall (10) at the bottom of the field, follow along this and look for a stile at the side of a gate (11).

Go through this stile and walk straight ahead keeping the wall on your right.

Go through the next stile and head slightly to the left and look for a stile in the opposite wall (12). Go through it.

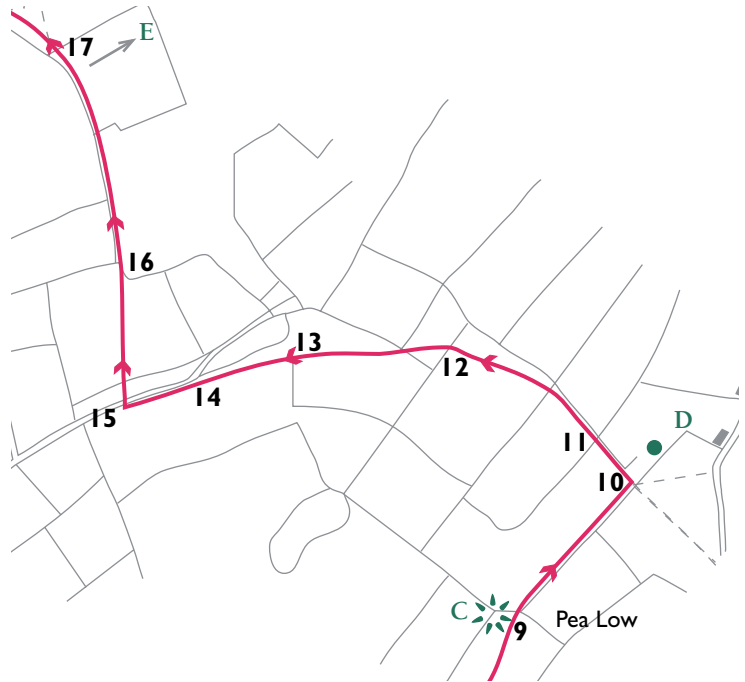
Keep bearing slightly left. The path meets a track in the gap between the far walls (13). Follow this track.

Keep to the track until reaching a gateway into a narrow lane (14). Don't go through it!

Go to the left of the gateway and follow the wall to a stile with a three-way signpost (15).

Take the route to the right, indicating 'Hartington', through the stile and across the lane through the stile opposite. Go across the narrow field and through the next stile.

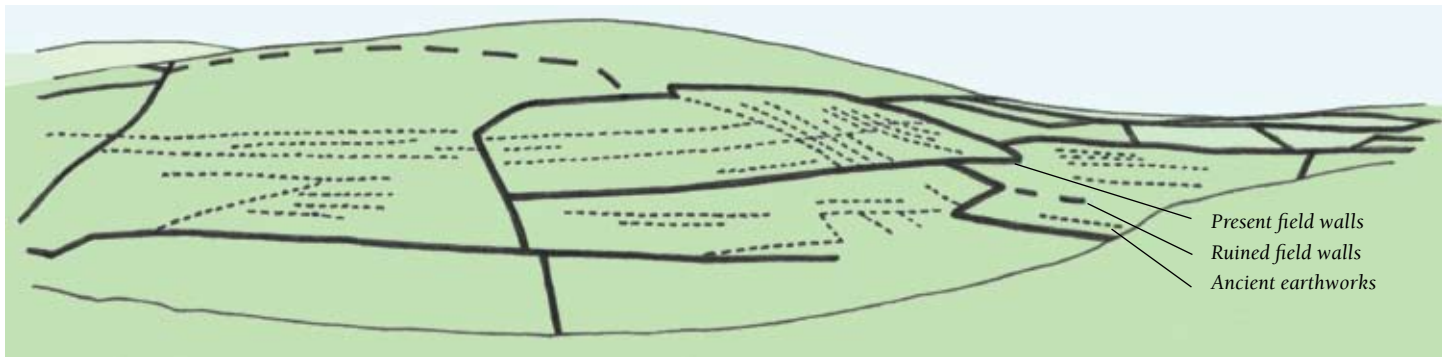
Bear slightly right across the field to the stile in the opposite wall (16).



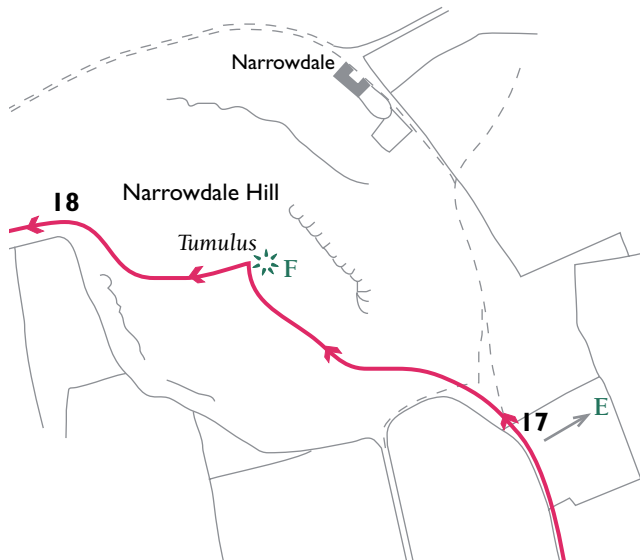
This path has been trodden by many generations. It is an old route with medieval or earlier origins leading to Narrowdale and beyond.

Go through the stile and keep the wall on the left. Eventually you will meet a stile (17) with a very large irregular slab of limestone forming the left side - imagine the effort to put this in position!

There is a spectacular view straight ahead which is even more impressive from the top of Narrowdale Hill. This is where you



*The earthworks on the other side of Narrowdale (E)*



are going next but, before you do so, look to the right at the fields (E) across the steep-sided valley – which is called, appropriately enough, Narrowdale. Here there are extensive long low grassy banks - these **earthworks** can be seen in a good light. These almost certainly define **cultivation strips** used to grow arable crops in the medieval period. However, because of a decline in population from about 1350, the cultivation strips at this remote spot were abandoned to become part of the open grazing on the **common**. The present field walls were added much later, in the 1700s or 1800s, when most of the commons were enclosed to create more economic farm holdings.

**Cross the stile (17) and follow the wall on the left to the corner. Continue straight ahead to the top of the hill. You are now crossing 'Open Access Land'.**

This is Narrowdale Hill (F)- turn to pages 32-34 under Walk 2 where the views and a barrow at the summit are described.

From the summit of the hill, bear left from the direction you came up the hill and walk ahead keeping the steepest side of the hill to your right. As you descend, look for the two large rectangular walled fields which will appear in front of you as the land flattens out – the walls won't be in view until you've walked down from the summit. If in doubt check the map and match up the field patterns with what you can see in the landscape. Aim for the bottom right corner of the first of these large fields (18).

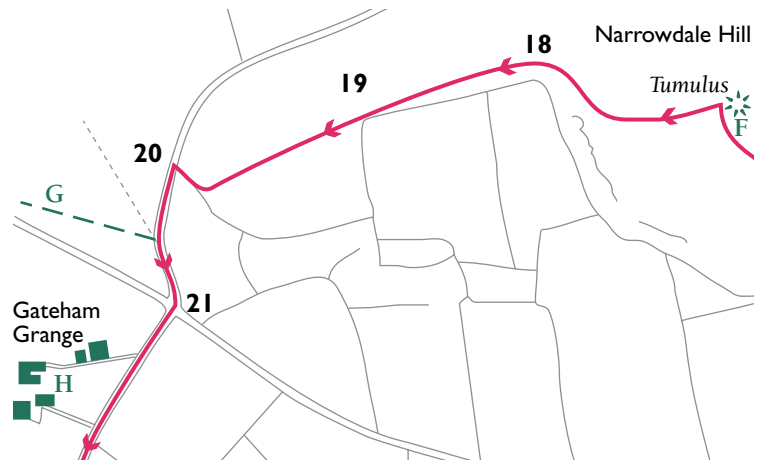
At the corner of the field walk straight ahead keeping the field wall to your left, and the steep drop of the hill to your right.

Pass a group of trees on the right. The field wall turns sharp left at a corner (19). Keep going ahead, bearing slightly left across the open hillside.

Eventually you will reach another wall in front of you. Turn right here and start to head downhill.



*The old road from Alstonefield to Hulme End (G)*

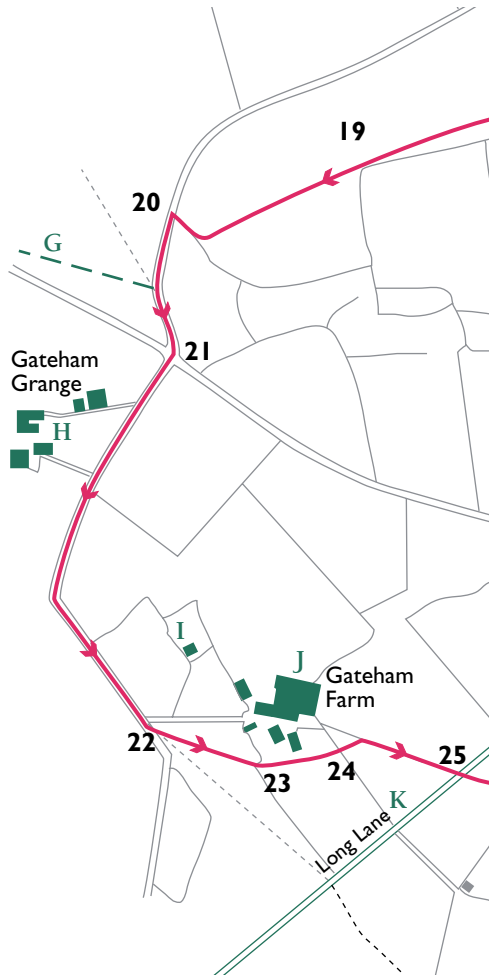


You will reach a road at the bottom of the slope. Turn left through the gateway (20) and head uphill.

In the field on your right you can see the grassy earthworks of the old road (G) from Alstonefield to Hulme End. It was abandoned about 200 years ago when the present road was built further up the slope, thus cutting out two sharp bends.

Follow the road uphill until you reach the crossroads (21). Go straight ahead on the road signposted 'Wetton'.

The buildings you pass on the right are Gateham Grange (H) – this is private property, so stay on the road. This grange was established about 800 years ago as a monastic farm (the original meaning of the term 'grange'). It belonged to Combermere Abbey in Cheshire, 27 miles (43km) to the west, and the income from the farm helped support the monastic community. However, when King Henry VIII seized all monastery lands in the 1530s the last of the granges



became private farms – some had been sold many years before as monasteries fell on hard times. There is now nothing left of the monastic buildings of Gateham Grange except the name. The farm buildings here have been rebuilt in more recent centuries.

The steep hill ahead of you is Wetton Near Hill which you can visit on Walk 10.

Keep following the road around the bend until reaching, on the left, the entrance gateway (22) to Gateham Farm.



*Field barn (I)*

There is a good example of a small **field barn (I)** to the left of the farm access road. It has an external staircase to the upper storey where hay was stored for cattle which were kept below. Such steps, that add to the barn's character, were once common elsewhere - at many they have now been removed.

The present farm buildings at Gateham Farm (J) date to the 1800s. The surrounding fields were enclosed from **common** after the Alstonefield **Parliamentary Enclosure Award** of 1839. However, there may have been buildings hereabouts before this date, as indicated by a map of Staffordshire drawn in 1775.

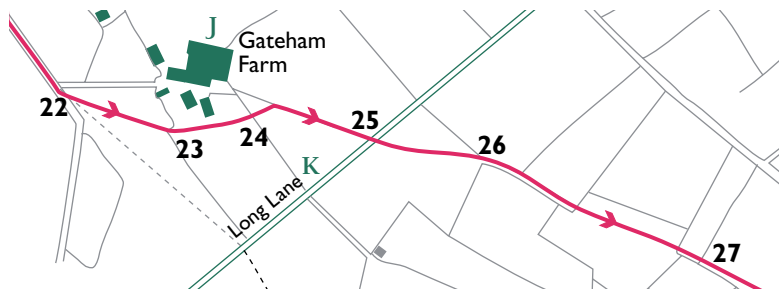
As with many farms, over the past few years Gateham Farm has been modernised. The large modern buildings allow all the cows to be kept inside over winter close to the farmhouse. The hay, or more often nowadays silage (which is grass cut in the summer and kept packed tight in plastic bags) is also stored nearby.

The public footpath has been diverted to the right of the farm buildings because a farmyard can be a dangerous place with tractors and other machinery in use.

The footpath leaves the road to the right of the cattle grid (22). It is signposted 'Alstonefield'. Cross the field keeping the farm buildings to your left. The next stile



*Long Lane (K)*



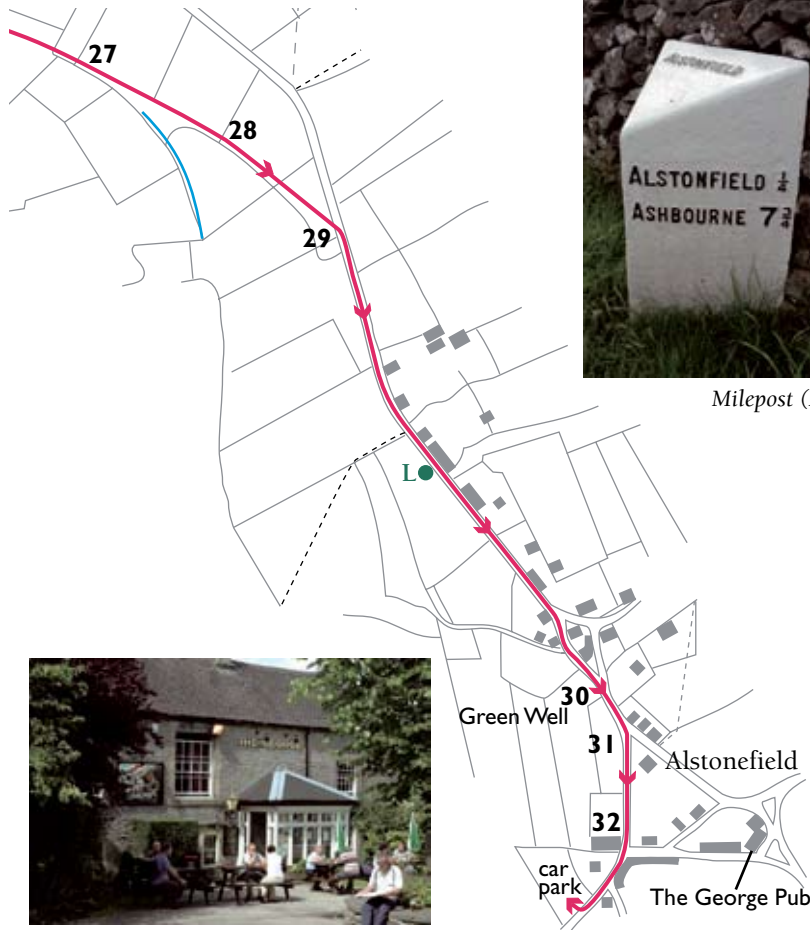
is in the wall ahead and has a two-way signpost (**23**). Go through the stile following the route again marked 'Alstonefield'.

Go straight across the field to the stile in the opposite wall (**24**). You will cross a farm track just before this stile.

Cross the stile and go diagonally to the right across the field, aiming for the stile halfway down the wall to the right (**25**). Go through this stile onto the road.

This straight road (**K**), known as Long Lane, was made at the same time that the fields on either side were created, following the **Parliamentary Enclosure Award** of 1839. Before the improvement work started, both the road and the walls were planned on a map of the **common** with the aid of a ruler. This way of working, where the builders followed the exact line on an office-based plan only became common in the 1700s. Before then decisions on where to put the boundaries were made on site, so the lines could follow the lie of the land more closely. This new method resulted in distinctive straight-line features that stand out in the landscape, making such boundaries recognisable as having been created from the 1700s onwards.

Go straight across Long Lane and through the stile in the opposite wall. Bear diagonally left across the field and through the next stile (**26**). Turn



*The George*

*Milepost (L)*

immediately right and follow the wall on your right. Go through two more stiles. Keep going straight ahead across two fields aiming for the trees ahead (27).

Go through two more stiles keeping the stream and trees on your right. Go through a gap to the right of the next field wall (28). Continue straight ahead and through the next stile.

Continue slightly uphill through the stile until you reach the stile at the roadside gateway (29).

Turn right along the road, back towards Alstonefield. You soon reach the first houses. Keep following the road towards the village.

This road was improved in the early 1800s. On the roadside verge to the right there is a cast iron milepost (L) which shows the distances to nearby places.

Go past Green Well (30) on your right. At the road junction turn right on the road signposted 'Wetton, Ilam and Dovedale' by an old water pump (31). Follow this road past the Memorial Hall on the right (32).

Now, why not make a diversion (by turning left) to see if the pub is open and take some well-earned refreshments!

Bear right from the Memorial Hall, on the road to Wetton, and you will return straight to the Playing Field car park to complete the circular walk.