





A SILENT RIGHT TO ROAM

Celebrating the history
of public access to
Darwen Moor

Guided Trail Map

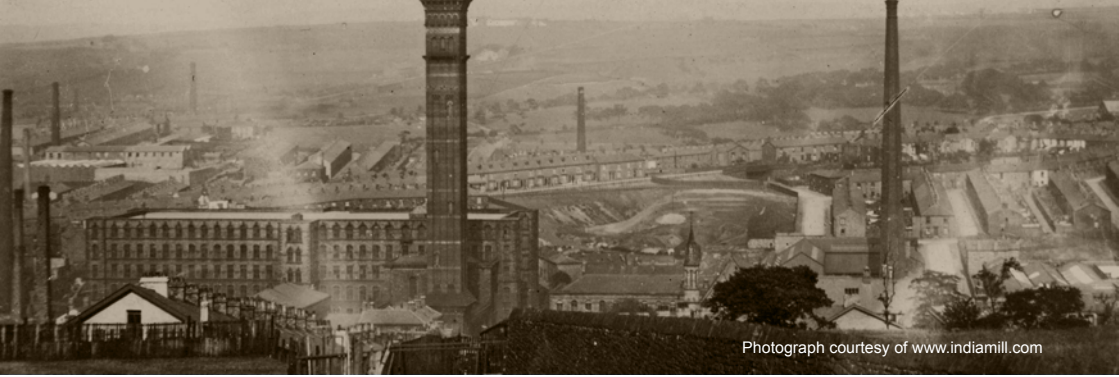
 A walk of 1.6 miles (2.6 kms) uphill from the town centre to Darwen Tower. Returning the same way is a walk of 3.2 miles (5.2 kms).

 The walk to Darwen Tower takes around 60-75 minutes at a moderate pace. Please allow 2 hours for the full walk to the Tower and back to the town centre.

The walk is uphill most of the way from the town centre to Darwen Tower but downhill on the way back. The walk includes steep gradients and rough moorland tracks.



The Wildlife Trust for
**Lancashire
Manchester &
North Merseyside**



Photograph courtesy of www.indiamill.com

Darwen and the 'freedom to roam'

Over 50 years before the famous Kinder Trespass of Derbyshire in 1932, Darwen witnessed its own, often forgotten, struggle for public access to open moorland.

This walking trail, from the town centre to Darwen Tower, celebrates this story.

For many local people working long hours in the mills, access to the countryside was vital - offering fresh air, space and escape from the harsh conditions of industrial life.

By the 1870's, many of the old footpaths over Darwen Moor had become neglected with the closure of moorland coal mines. Some of these paths had even been blocked off by new fences as the absentee landlord, Revd. William Arthur Duckworth, began to manage the moor for lucrative game shooting.

In 1877 and 1878, a small group of men attempted to exercise their public right to walk the footpaths across the moor, led by John Oldman. After walking on the moor on a Sunday at the end of July 1878, High Court writs were issued to five Darwen men: John Oldman, Richard Ainsworth, James Fish, Ellis Gibson and Joseph Kay.

The writs were served on the men at their places of work and were answerable the next day at the High Court of Justice in London. Evidence was collected and sworn statements were signed, with important information coming from William Thomas Ashton, a retired coal mine employee who had an extensive knowledge of the public rights of way across the moors. It was a race against time - John Oldman, carrying the sworn statements, pawned his watch to raise the train fare to London, and he had to walk from Darwen to Bolton to catch the early mail train to the capital.

The High Court judge decided that the men had not infringed on the 'sporting rights' of the landowner and subsequently an amicable agreement was sought between Darwen Corporation and the Revd. Duckworth over public access to the moor.

Initially 55 acres of the moor were provided for free public access and lengthy negotiations continued until 1896, when a further 225 acres of the moor were vested in the Corporation for free access to the public.

In September 1896 a big procession was held on the moor to celebrate the victory of the 'Freedom of the Moors'. This was largely due to the efforts of W. T. Ashton's three sons and their solicitor, Fred Hindle.

Trail Map Route

Start the walk in the Market Square **1** by the Weaver Bird sculpture. With the sculpture behind you walk straight ahead to pass between buildings and reach Market Street bus lane.

Cross this with care to Market Street Pharmacy and bear left to the pedestrian crossing facing the Post Office. Cross the road with care here and turn right following the pavement of Borough Road past the site of Bank Top Mill. **2**

Continue along the pavement of Borough Road uphill to reach the main entrance gates of Bold Venture Park **3** on the opposite side of the road. Cross to the gates and turn left and right around the edge of the park, keeping the park railings on the right.

Continue uphill along Belgrave Road, crossing Manor Road at the top end of the park Belgrave Road ends but continue straight ahead along the track signed as a bridleway. This continues uphill past old quarry sites **4** on the left to reach the gate at the boundary of Darwen Moor.

Continue straight ahead uphill and keep to the track as it bends sharp right. It now follows the edge of the moor, and the climb becomes more gradual to reach a junction of paths **5** by a seat.

Turn left here to follow the path up to the Tower. There are good views of the heather moor **6** and to Earnsdale Reservoir **7** below, as the Tower is soon reached by the trig point of Darwen Hill (372 metres). Jubilee Tower **8** can be climbed inside.

Please note

Climbing inside Jubilee Tower involves a steep set of steps and darkness! On a clear day the view stretches from Snowdonia to the Lake District.

To return to Darwen simply retrace the route – it is now all downhill. The return route can be varied by passing through Bold Venture Park.

The trail route is uphill for nearly all of the way and includes steep gradients and rough moorland tracks. It may be unsuitable for prams and wheelchairs.

DARWEN MOOR IS PRONE TO FIRE RISK. PLEASE AVOID DISCARDING ANY NAKED FLAME OR LIGHTING ANY BARBECUE ON YOUR WALK.

Enhance your experience

To take your hike to another level please scan the QR code below. This will allow you to view artwork, read poetry, listen to music and watch films that all have a connection to the area.



lancswt.org.uk/silent-right-to-roam



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Points of interest along the route

1. Market Square

Market Square was the centre of Victorian Darwen, surrounded by the Town Hall, churches and shops. Formed as a borough in 1878, the town had over 34,000 residents, many working in cotton mills along the River Darwen which runs beneath the town centre.

2. Mills

Around 1890, Darwen had nearly 50 cotton mills, including Bank Top Mill with 700 looms. The industry evolved from handloom weaving in cottages to mechanised factories, driving rapid town growth. Long hours in noisy mills led to demanding and repetitive working conditions.

3. Bold Venture Park

Victorian parks were created to provide green space for workers. Darwen developed several, including Whitehall Park (1879), Bold Venture Park (1889) and Sunnyhurst Woods (1903). Bold Venture Park, built on former quarries, includes the town's war memorial (1921).

4. Quarries and Coal

Darwen Moor shows clear evidence of quarrying and mining, with stone and coal extracted across the area. Workers travelled from the town to the moors, and materials from local quarries were used to build landmarks like Jubilee Tower.

5. Footpaths

Many footpaths on Darwen Moor date back centuries, with some routes originating in prehistoric, Roman and medieval times. They were used by workers and traders but declined as industry became concentrated in the town.

6. Grouse

Darwen Moor's heather supported game birds, leading to private shooting estates in the 19th century. This restricted public access, closing traditional paths and leading to disputes, including legal action against trespassers in 1878.

7. Water

As Darwen grew, demand for water increased. Moorland streams were dammed to create reservoirs such as Earnsdale (1863) and Sunnyhurst Hey (1875), supporting both homes and industry.

8. Jubilee Tower

Also known as Victoria Tower, it was built in 1897–98 to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and symbolise the freedom of the moors. Two plaques added in 1996 and 1997 commemorate 100 years of open access and the start of its construction.

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**Project devised and managed by
The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire,
Manchester & North Merseyside**

The Barn, Berkeley Drive, Bamber Bridge
Preston, PR5 6BY

E: info@lancswt.org.uk **T:** 01772 324129

More information on the town's history can be found in the Reference section of Darwen Library and in the Darwen Heritage Centre – both are well worth a visit.

Design & Print: Devote Associates

Map Illustration: Print, Paint and Pixel

Travelling to Darwen

Why not start your trail and arrive using public transport?

Darwen station is served with direct trains operating on the Blackburn to Manchester Victoria line. Key routes include a quick 7-minute trip from Blackburn or 40 minutes from Manchester with trains running regularly.

If you are travelling by car, head into Darwen town centre and choose from one of the many free car parks.

Railway Road Car Park: 40 spaces

Atlas Road Car Park: 30 spaces

Market Shoppers Car Park: 160 spaces

Duckworth Street: 25 spaces



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