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## Gaunless Valley and Woodland

<b>Starting point and OS Grid reference</b>	Car park just outside the village of Copley (NZ 087250)
<b>Ordnance Survey map</b>	OL31 North Pennines – Teesdale & Weardale
<b>Distance</b>	5.3 miles
<b>Date of Walk</b>	7 October 2014
<b>Traffic light rating</b>	

**Introduction:** This walk starting at the upper end of the Gaunless valley is a pleasant easy country ramble. The walk starts at Copley with an opportunity to see a massive lead smelt mill chimney and passes through the former mining village of Woodland, with its unusual St Mary's Church, made of corrugated iron.

The area was dotted with lead and coal mines, now closed and there is evidence here and there, not least the massive chimney at Copley, now a listed building. It was built in 1832 and carried away the noxious fumes from lead smelting from the Gaunless lead mill.

At one time there would have been a long flue connected to the chimney but little of this now remains.

Across the road from the car park where you start the walk, is a cluster of former mine buildings. They are now residences but you can pick out the former store sheds and furnace house and the imposing mine manager's house. An information board in the car park explains more.

Woodland is a long, narrow village, strung out along the B6282. It is over 1000 ft above sea level and has fine views, particularly to the south and on a clear day to the Cumbrian Mountains, the North York Moors and (it is claimed) the east coast and North Sea.

En route, you will see signs for the Gaunless valley Trail and Steele Road. In fact, I discovered I had more or less done the Gaunless Valley Trail but in reverse.

The walk starts from a car park just to the south of Copley, on the road from Barnard Castle. It is off to the right on a sharp right hand bend, just before crossing a bridge with a stone cottage next to it.

**Start:** From the car park (NZ 087250), walk up the hill on the path behind the information board. The huge chimney appears amongst the trees and though large as it is, it can take some spotting amongst the trees. Retrace your steps to the car park and turn right along the road into Copley. At the road junction, turn right on the B6282.

After no more than 100 yards, at the end of a row of terraced houses, turn left on a concrete footpath path (NZ 088253). This is unmarked and easy to miss. If you get as far as the children's playground, you have missed it!

Cross a stile into a field and the next stile is visible.

Walk up the middle of the next two fields and follow the left hand boundary of the third.

On arriving at the stony track leading to a farm, turn right, then almost immediately left on another stony track (NZ 088258).

When the track splits, the left hand arm going to another farm, keep straight ahead.

Follow the track as it curves right, passing in front of a barn. Pass through a gate and into the next field. The path is not clear but you need to bear left and head for the diagonally opposite corner, across the rough pasture. The route involves something of an obstacle course of patches of shrubbery. You may notice the churchyard to the right.

In the corner is a ramshackle stile into the woods (NZ 089263). Again, the path is unclear and there may be an element of forcing through weeds etc. Head towards the left of West Softley Cottage and turn left up the broad track (NZ 089264).

After just over a quarter of a mile, continue to follow the track, as it turns left through a gate (NZ 085266) and stay on it to Lunton Hill Farm. Just before the farmyard, turn right, through a gate, on a broad track. Stay on this and at the road (NZ 081269), turn left. There are good views along here, mainly to the south and east. There are occasional glances of open moor land to the north.

Pass through the village of Woodland with its unusual corrugated iron church. Sadly, the pub was closed and up for sale as I passed but a bench on the village green, with good views, provided a lunch stop.

Pass the children's play area on the left and just as the road starts to dip, look out for an old fashioned vertical green footpath marker on the left (NZ 069264). Cross the stile here and follow the right hand boundary of the field towards the farm (Brass Sides).

Just before the farm, turn right over a stone stile (NZ 070260) and follow the footpath alongside two derelict farm buildings. After about three stiles, at the next farm, the path is directed clockwise around it, going through three walkers' gates. After the third gate, turn left, following the left hand side of the field (NZ 066260).

About two thirds of the way down, head right, for the bottom right hand corner of the field where there are two stiles. Over these, head very slightly right. You cannot see the next stile (gated stile) until you are almost up to it.

Cross this and the next stile is visible. After this, follow the left hand field boundary.

Pass along a short, fenced, section of path and at the end of it turn left (NZ 064253). When you come to a double row of fencing with trees planted between the two, keep to the left hand side of the double row.

Pass through the gate about half way along the far side of the field and into rougher pasture, passing some old mine spoil heaps and a small lake.

You join a broader, clearer track.

After crossing a little wooden bridge, keep straight ahead up the short hill. Once you get to the top, the way ahead is obvious.

After a couple of steep ladder stiles, turn right indicated by a blue brideway arrow (NZ 076255).

Over the brow of the hill in the next field, you will see the way ahead. Follow the well worn path into the trees and as it curves left to a walkers' gate. Through this, turn right.

After the next gate, follow the track along the higher part of the field. Do not drop down to the lower level near trees. The track leads you into the woods and you follow it along the edge of the trees. When it splits, take the right fork. Follow to the road and turn right back to the car park.

