

Creative Corner

Many of us respond to the landscape with passion. It takes an artist's vision and skills to communicate that feeling coherently. Sculptor, John Behm's response to his local landscape are his Waymerks on the Southern Upland Way.

The footpath passes John's studio. Its walkers know nothing of the struggles of the artist within, so John was inspired to champion the tradition of making. Calling on his knowledge of history and archaeology, he thought out a way to draw attention to the rich products of past makers: the artefacts that bear witness to their craftsmanship, ingenuity and sense of design. He sought to demonstrate that artists still make beautiful things, and to remind people of the rich wildlife, past and present.

Hand-minted in lead and copper, the Waymerks are 'art tokens'. There are thirteen reverse designs, for thirteen stages of the footpath, and a common obverse. The latter is a palimpsest of earthworks which suggest mankind's impact on the landscape.

A Bronze Age beaker, an Iron Age sickle with a phallic handle, and an Anglo-Saxon beast from a ring are represented on the Waymerks. A wild boar appears for the Melrose section of the walk. This has double resonance: not only a former resident, it was also the insignia of the XX Legion at nearby Trimontium.

The Waymerks are left in hoards in artist-made kists. These have been concealed, though never completely buried, at remote and lovely places along the Way. Walkers are invited to take to the hills and look for them. Bronze plaques (bearing a bastard Latin word ULTREIA ('on with your quest')) on the waymarker either side of the kist site identify where to look.

Successful hunters take home a Waymerk. The response of walkers has been delight, sometimes rhapsody. "I adored the submerged basin with its lid bearing the Covenantor text, but nothing can match that cunning little stone drawer in the bank!" wrote one. People report that they do go home and look at the website (www.waymerks.org.uk) written on every kist to discover the background to the designs. Many who have found a kist by chance say they have returned to the Way to search for others. The lure of an art-treasure hunt has people out on the hills, appreciating not only the landscape but the creativity of the people who live on it now and who have done so in the past.

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**"Whoever controls the language and the symbols, controls the race."
Allen Ginsberg, poet, (1926 - 1997)**