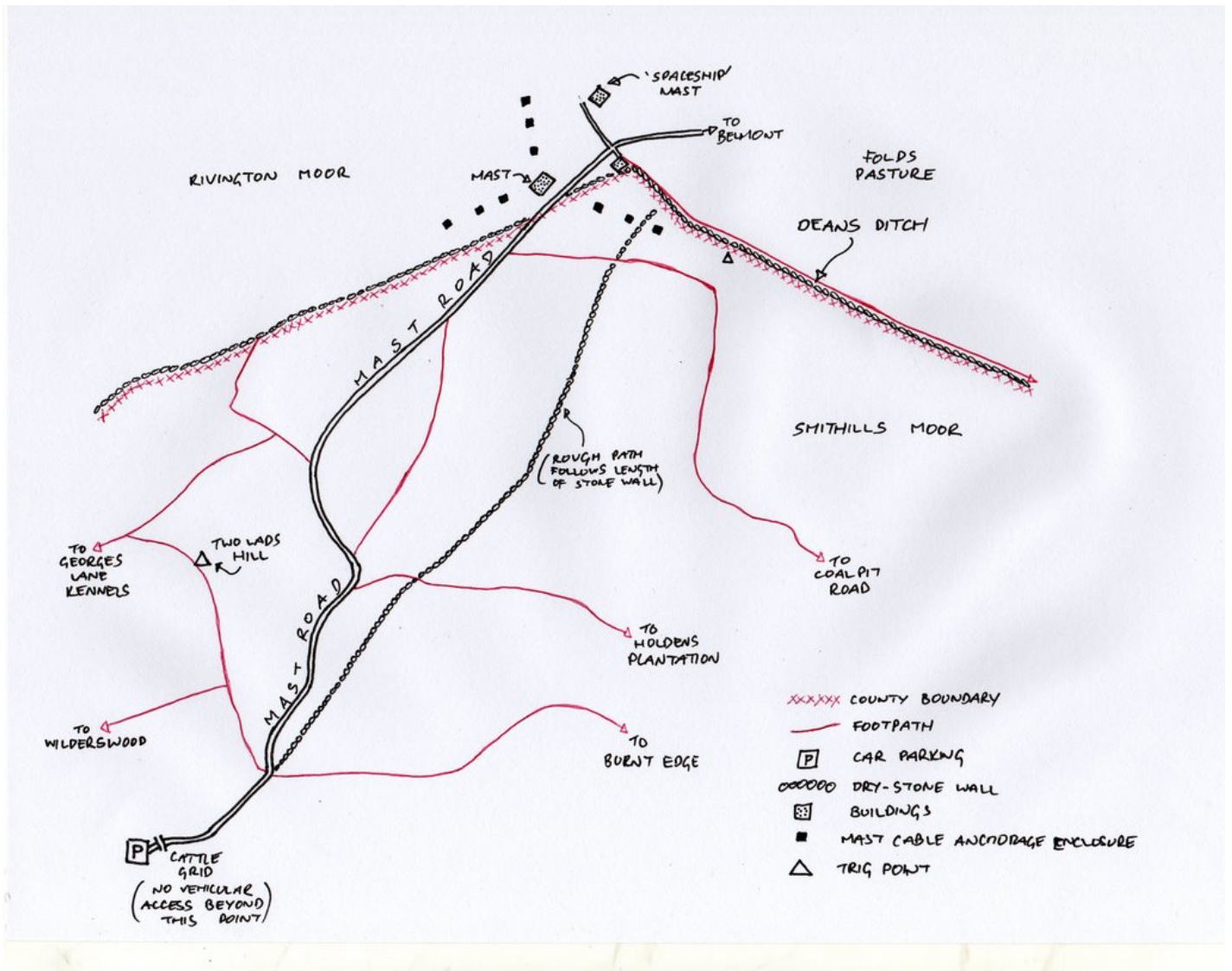


# THE 'HORWICH' MOORS

## Part 2: Winter Hill

by Ian Mckerchar

Leading up north-east from Georges Lane is Mast Road, although don't bother looking for this name in your A to Z as it simply isn't there. Often it is merely labelled 'winter hill'! There are a few grass fields at the bottom of the Road before heading out into the more typical heather moorland and although there is very limited parking by the first cattle grid along Mast Road, walking from Wilderswood car park is much more productive. There are many tracks and footpaths leading off Mast Road along its entire length up to the top of Winter Hill (which lies at an altitude of 1,496 feet) and the mast itself which towers some 1000 feet into the air. Exploring these should be your focus and other than heading for the summit of Two Lads Hill, so long as your route takes you roughly south of the road you will be steering well clear of wandering into Lancashire (not that it's such a bad thing!). Paths leading to the south from Mast Road generally lead to Burnt Edge at some point and form a very productive route. Walking Deans Ditch at the very eastern edge of the county boundary is also advisable and can produce some exiting birding.





One of the most productive areas of the entire site are these few small grass fields. Lying just to the north of and at the bottom of Mast Road, they are an absolute must view, especially as there are two lay-byes to pull your car into if you are not on foot (which frankly is to be advised so you miss nothing!). The fence line along here has Stonechat more often than not plus occasional Whinchat. The fields themselves have attracted Redstart, Black Redstart, Twite, Ring Ouzel and often hold good numbers of pipits. Wilderswood can once again clearly be seen in the background.



The car park along Mast Road by the first cattle grid has very limited parking indeed. Should it be full, seek parking along Georges Lane or in the Wilderswood car park and enjoy the walk back up! Under no circumstances should you drive beyond this first cattle grid as the road is private from there on in though it is permissible and entirely encouraged to walk beyond there however. The fields at the bottom of Mast Road and Wilderswood beyond them can still be seen at the right on the image.



Wildersmoor viewed from Mast Road. A moor seemingly full of juncus, it has been very productive for Hen Harriers over the years plus the occasional Merlin. Once again Wilderswood is to the left (with Lower Rivington Reservoir beyond it) and Rivington Pike to the right.





Two Lads Hill. An excellent viewpoint on a clear day with the Welsh mountains and even the Lake District possible to see. The area just over the other side of the hill has held Dotterel.



Adams Hill, just off to the south of Mast Road. The moor here is excellent for Red Grouse and they often sit out on the stone wall running horizontally across the photo. The moor here is also productive for Wheatear and Whinchat, plus it can be full of Meadow Pipits in autumn especially.



The view from Winter Hill looking south across the county and over towards the Fiddler's Ferry power station in the distance. The very top of Winter Hill here can produce some surprising sightings, including falls of warblers and Spotted Flycatchers amongst the small saplings found in the fenced off areas (which cannot be devoured by sheep!) for the cables holding the mast aloft. Ring Ouzel, Twite, Snow Bunting and Lapland Bunting have been found on the very tops here and Wheatears can be seen in occasional good numbers. Visible migration can be visible (!), from the tops during the right seasons and weather conditions and can include surprising species you might not normally expect to be seen crossing bleak moorland at such altitude. It should be borne in mind however just how close you are to the border between Greater Manchester and Lancashire here. The buildings around the mast are in fact in the latter county though often attract Black

Redstarts which can be prove very elusive.



Andy Makin 'seeding' one of the sheep impenetrable mast cable enclosures on the very top of Winter Hill, one which resides in Greater Manchester I hasten to add. The next enclosure along behind him is in Lancashire!

**Ian McKerchar, December 2009 (revised October 2010)**

[www.manchesterbirding.com](http://www.manchesterbirding.com)