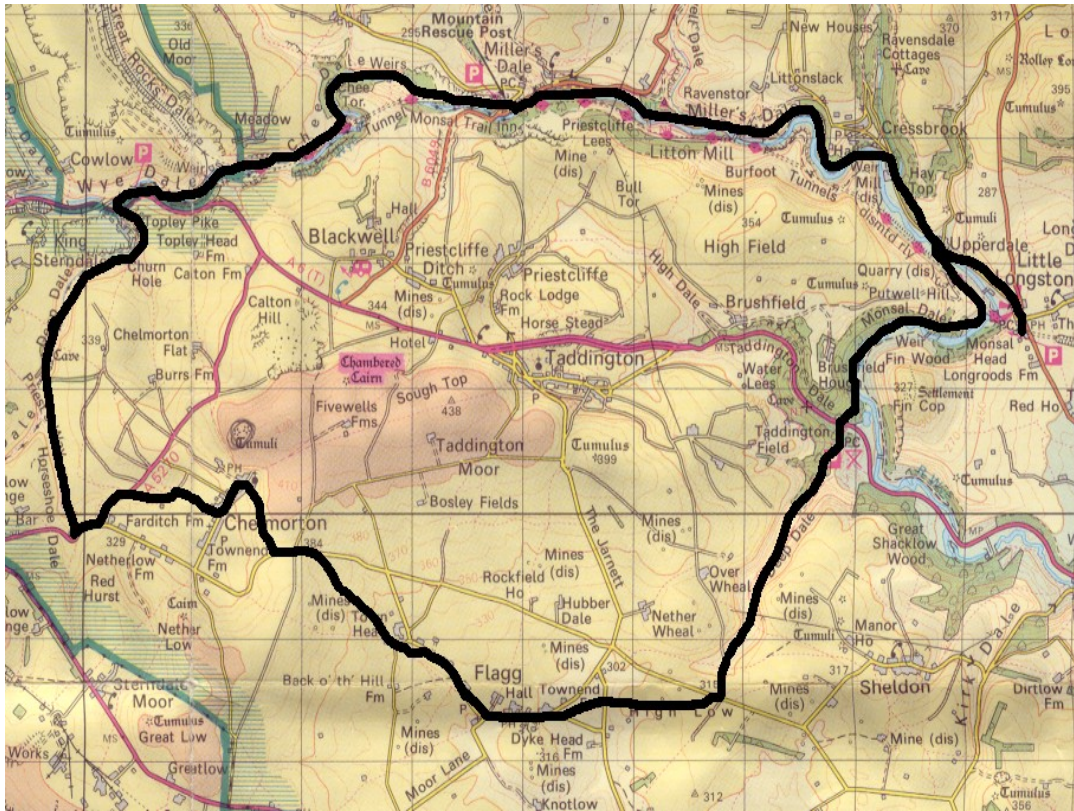


WALK 14
MONSAL HEAD 14.
17.7 miles 5 hours.
Map White Peak.



Reproduced by kind permission of Ordnance Survey.
Crown Copyright NC/02/30874.

Start at Monsal Head (185715). Take the path that leads down precipitately to the valley below, by walking downhill on a path at the left hand side of the road, to a farm building on your left. Turn left and walk to a footbridge across the River Wye at (181718). The river is crystal clear with many fish, and frequented by dippers and grey wagtails to name but a few. Turn left and take a path down the famous dale going under the railway viaduct. Ruskin visited the dale and marvelled at the perspective. Proceed down the dale past the waterfall (on your left) until a ladder stile is reached. Fin Cop, is the high hill on the left; it is a promontory fort, an iron age defensive position which makes use of the steep slopes to take care of the defence of the north and west, while rampart and ditch guard the other sides. There are traces of a second defensive bank; within the fort is a Bronze Age barrow. Cross the next field and go up a stile on to the road at (170706) this is the A.6.

Cross the road; enter the picnic area and leave it by a wooden step stile, then walk S to a rocky area where there is a stile in a low wall. Do not take this, but bear right and proceed SW up through Deepdale. The early stages of this dale are quite spectacular as you thread your way between outcrops of narrow limestone rocks; you can imagine fairies behind every rock; but all too soon you come out on to a wider, grassy area where the walking is quite pleasant if not exciting. Walk with wall on the right until you come to a gate where you go through to the right, then walk upwards with the wall on your left until you come to a corner where you climb over in to a lane at (158688). Walk S for 350 yards until you come out on to a road at (158685).

Turn right and walk WNW along a road for 100 yards to a lay-by on the left where there is a poor stile in a wall. Enter a field and walk 150 yards SW to the far wall where you pass through a gap, then turn to the right, cutting the corner, to a stile in 70 yards. The next field has many mounds and depressions, the evidence of former lead workings, as well as low walls, which might be the foundations of buildings. Walk W through this area to a wooden stile attached to a stone stile and go in to the next field, walking W to the far corner a little to the right of which you will find a step stile: it could easily be missed. Continue to walk W through the next field to a good stile where a wall makes a corner. Go downhill to the road via a good stile at (147684) go straight across the road.

Go a little WSW keeping close to a wall on the left until you come to a poor step stile. In the next field, keep close to the wall on your left, level going, to another step stile in the corner under a tree; then go forward out on to the road at (144683). Turn right to walk WNW along the road to a junction in 150 yards, then turn left to walk W to Flagg, an old village mentioned in the Domesday Book. An old mediaeval way ran through here. When you enter the village at (136683), continue straight through, and walk NW along the road for about 250 yards to a good slot stile in the wall on the left; then enter a field walking NW to the far wall which has four sound stone steps in it. Take the same direction through the next field to a slot stile. In the next field, the path approaches a copse surrounded by a wall, go to the left corner of the wall of the copse and get over it, then in ten yards there is a good step stile.

There are mounds and depressions in the next field to indicate former lead workings; also a disused shaft surrounded by a wall away to the right on a high mound. Pass a copse on your left and make for an excellent step stile in the wall: if only all stiles were like this one; but stiles are like people - all shapes and sizes, good and bad, some give you a firm step up on your way, others make things difficult. Proceed on, then, to the next stile, which is more modest, a step stile again, and then another step stile takes you out on to the road at (128689) at High Stool Farm.

Cross the road at the signpost and come to a stile which brings you near the farm area. Walk NW; Town Head Farm is away to the right, and a copse ahead. Go to the left of the copse to a stile at the side of a gateway, and walk NW copse on your right, on level ground to the next stile, a slot with one of its uprights leaning over. This route from Flagg was an old track used in mediaeval times. In 1820 a traveller, John Taylor, was told that this was a pack-and-prime way, i.e. the prime way being for splay-footed oxen drawing carts; the pack ways were for horses and mules with panniers and were paved about one yard wide. Continue NW to the far left corner of the next field, going slightly uphill to a poor stile which needs some attention. Make next for a single big tree ahead: under it is a stile over a stonewall. From this point, go NW, wall on right, along sloping ground, to a good little slot stile at (121696).

Turn left and walk W along the road for 200 yards or so to a crossroads: go straight over this. In 150 yards or so, you come to a junction: bear right and walk NW to Chelmorton. There is a good view ahead of Chelmorton Low on whose summit lie two burial mounds. Strangely Chelmorton is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, but it must be even older, a Saxon village no doubt. Its site must have been on a spring: this is where the oldest part of the village lies, and why the church and pub appear to be at the end of a cul de sac. With the coming of the first enclosures, land appears to have been allotted so that each cottage had a few strips behind it, and this order has been preserved so that, even today, there are narrow fields stretching away from the main street.

We have passed, on this walk, a point (119697) called Chelmorton Thorn, an indication of its age, for thorns were chosen in former times as long-lived and hardy markers for crossways, or a change of direction. Later, in 1659, there was a reference to a Salter Way in Chelmorton, which suggests that some of the salters from Northwich may have left Macclesfield on the route through Chelmorton.

Travellers from Buxton to Bakewell prior to 1810 had to follow the Ashbourne turnpike as far as Brierlow, then turn on to a parish road to Chelmorton. It is interesting to learn that the salary of the schoolmaster in the village depended on the profitability of these roads: it

came from the interest of £101 in the Buxton turnpike and £200 in the Cheadale turnpike, the former yielding 5% but paid infrequently; the latter yielding 3.5% but paid as when due.

The parish church is quite fascinating. Its history is complex: various features having been added at different times. The S arcade must have been built before 1200. The lancet windows suggest 1300. Ancient coffin stones line the walls, and the floor is lined with them, some of them carved with crosses, swords and shields, two fine ones known to be C.12; another is carved with a pair of scissors and a cross 700 years old. A rare feature is the rood screen made of stone in the C.15. It is low, embattled with a blank ogee arcade and openwork quatrefoils. The base of the tower is C.13; the top is C.15.

Follow the road SW down to a point (112700) and turn right. Go straight ahead through a rough stile at a house: through the garden, it seems; then over the garden wall by stone steps. Go forward through the allotments. Once in the lane, turn left, and go to the corner in 100 yards. Go into field and walk toward an old building ahead. Then down a lane and out onto a road at (103701). Turn left: walk SSW to a junction in 300 yards passing a sewage works on your right, then turn right at the road junction. Get on to the grass verge here and walk down to a gate in a wall on your right at (099697), (where the road curves fairly sharply to the right), then proceed N through farm buildings into Horseshoe Dale. In 200 yards or so notice Bullnay Dale to the right where there is a deep cleft in the rock.

Proceed into Deepdale, (there are two of them on this walk, this is the second); the walking is pleasant at first, but eventually getting more difficult as rocky outcrops appear on either side, and stones multiply underfoot, with screes at intervals. Worst of all are the large stones underfoot that make it almost impossible to be sure-footed, and are very slippery in wet weather. The dale turns right (NE) through impressive scenery. A large cave appears high up on the right, this is called Thirst House Cave, the entrance is very impressive. The remains found here were generally Roman, but some earlier pottery was discovered. The local archaeologist W. Salt excavated here for several years. Then onward down the dale, the walking gets no easier until one approaches the (almost) ultimate horror – a huge dam holding a slurry lagoon: this in a beautiful Derbyshire Dale! Go through the Topley Pike Quarry, passing on the right Churn Hole a short but impressive dale, descend first to a path that skirts the works then comes on to an industrial road that leads out on to the A.6 at (103724).

Cross the A.6 and go right down past a car park in to Wye dale, walking E with the River Wye on your left through scenery that is superb at some times of the year, but always splendid even on a rainy day in winter. In fact the scenery gets better all the way. In half a mile cross a strong footbridge near cottages at the foot of Great Rocks Dale (one of the few dales with no footpath). Then follow the river on your right down Chee Dale: some people myself included think this is the most impressive Dale in Derbyshire. The track follows the river as it winds around Plum Tor, a massive rock outcrop on the right: you go under several viaducts. (A railway passed through here tunnelling through the rock then suddenly bursting out into open dale several times). You cross several footbridges, and use stepping stones twice. These latter are very interesting, after heavy rain they disappear under water; you have to make a judgement whether to carry on and judge where the stones are, or to go back and cross a bridge and go down the other side of the river, then cross back at a shallow part of the river. It has been done!

Carry on down the dale; there is one spot where care needs to be taken, where the path goes steeply upwards, but there are plenty of good footholds. Where the track curves around first left then right, Flag Dale joins from the left. The dale then opens out on the right showing grassy fields, the river still on the right. Go under a railway bridge and follow a good wide track down to Millers Dale at (137732).

Come out on to a road: turn right and walk several yards down to the B.6049; turn left and walk E along the road through Millers Dale, a tiny village of a few houses and a mill from which the dale took its former name of Millhouse Dale. Past the impressive railway bridges, where someone took pride in his work, each massive stone perfectly shaped and fitted (they should last a thousand years). Opposite one of the weirs is a small church built by Samuel Andrew in 1880.

Angle right down a road past a public House on the left and follow the river on your right: dippers, kingfishers and grey wagtails can be seen here. Past Tideswell Dale on your left until you come to Litton Mill, which was originally driven by a water wheel. The mill earned a reputation more than a century ago, for cruelty to children when many a pauper apprentice died an early death. Walter Unsworth's novel "The Devil's Mill" refers to this.

Go through the mill; turn right and walk down the dale through scenery that is unequalled in Derbyshire. Mighty cliffs tower up from Water cum Jolly so that whether you look from below, or look down from the precipitous path above the old railway track, the views are superb. The path leads through the untidy grounds of Cressbrook Mill, which was built in 1815 by William Newton to replace Arkwright's Mill of 1779, the remains of which may still be seen at the W end. Cressbrook is twelve bays wide with a four-bay pediment and a lantern on its hipped roof. Inside, it has the typical early slender cross-shaped cast-iron columns, but the beams are timber. The apprentice house by the millrace looks like a Gothic castle with narrow windows and turrets, similar in style, in fact, to Castle Mill, Papplewick.

William Newton was known as the Minstrel of the Peak, a title given him by Anna Seward, the Lichfield poet who was born at Eyam. Newton was the son of a carpenter; he had little education but came to the notice of Anna Seward who contributed to a fund to help him acquire a partnership in a cotton-spinning firm, and the eventual ownership of Cressbrook Mill. Under him, the horrors of the factory system, which existed in Litton Mill, were mitigated in Cressbrook; the apprentice children were well looked after. One of his sons gave Tideswell a water supply at his own cost. William lies buried in Tideswell Churchyard.

Continue to walk SE down the road, up on the left is Hay Top, which holds a barrow of Beaker age; this held a burial in a rock-cut grave, near which was placed a beaker, flint knife and jet bead. Also in the barrow were food vessels, perforated bone, bone pendant and several further inhumations. The barrow is 20 yards in diameter and four feet high. Look to the right for the first sight of the famous viaduct which was criticised by John Ruskin when it was built in 1860 to take the Midland Railway through to the north. Take the path at the foot of the hill on your right and climb the steep slope back to the start.

Checked 24 October 2002