

Alstonefield and Milldale

A pleasant walk on riverside paths, lanes and ancient pack-horse trails with spectacular limestone views. A walk full of interest at all times of year.

Walk Facts:

Start	Car park at the site of the old Alsop railway station on the Tissington Trail, off the A515 Ashbourne to Buxton road (SK 155 548). Buses from Ashbourne and Buxton
Terrain	Field and riverside paths, quiet lanes. Steep climbs at Gypsy Bank and Nabs Dale
Length	Seven miles
Time	Three hours
Food/Drink	Milldale (shop), Alstonefield (pub and cafe)
Toilets	Milldale (by the bridge), Alstonefield (at the car park, off the route of the walk)

Route

From the car park, head left along the trackbed of the old railway, signposted to Hartington. This is the Tissington Trail, on the route of a railway which ran from Ashbourne to Buxton. It was closed at a time when railways were seen as a burden although, like many others which suffered the same fate, it would have been invaluable now as a means of reducing traffic in the National Park.

Leave the trackbed by a footpath on the left at a point where the trail crosses a bridge, to gain access to Bradbury's Bank, a National trust property. Following the signposts, head diagonally right to a narrow gateway and continue in the same general direction down the hill until the wall in the valley floor is reached. Turn left and walk down the dale, following the wall all the way to the river Dove. There is some spectacular limestone scenery along the way as you rapidly descend.

On reaching the river, turn right and pass through a stile by a gate and then immediately cross Coldeaton Bridge. This is a continuation of the old packhorse route you've just been following and the route can be seen zig-zagging down the steep bank. The modern path goes steeply straight up the bank but I think it's much better to follow the old zig-zags. These start on the left of the new path then cross it about half way up. The grooved path gives a good sense of history and is much easier walking than the direct route, at a cost of being longer.



At the top of the bank pass through a stile into a rather overgrown track, after pausing to enjoy the view back down into the dale. Follow the track (which can be very muddy in wet conditions) for half a mile or so until it joins a road.

There are good all-round views over fields along the way and the track itself has a good compliment of daffodils in spring and flowers such as blue field scabious later in the year. Alstonefield church (pictured left), which you'll pass later in the walk, can be seen ahead.

Turn right onto the road and follow it for a short distance into the pretty village of Alstonefield. Turn left in the village and walk past (or visit!) the George pub on your right. If you decide to give the George a miss, there's a pretty green outside the pub which is a good spot to rest any tired legs.

Once refreshed, continue straight ahead on the same lane until you locate the ancient St Peter's church.

After visiting the church (and inspecting its ancient Yew), take the lane which leads past the churchyard and eventually descends to Milldale. This is marked on the map as a track and used to be one but was metalled a few years ago after a water main was laid along it. It's too narrow to use as a road but this doesn't stop a few people from trying. There's a rather bizarre 60mph speed limit sign just past the church - for people intent on suicide, presumably!

Once in the pretty village of Milldale, cross the packhorse bridge over the Dove. This is Viator's Bridge from Izzak Walton's book 'The Compleat Angler', although in Walton's time it didn't have parapets (which would have got in the way of the packs which were hung on the sides of the horses) and therefore resembled a stone path crossing the river.

Follow the well-made riverside path downstream. The Dove along here is the haunt of trout, dippers and water fowl and I once saw a kingfisher. The river may almost dry up in late summer but can be a torrent in winter: the floods of 1998 washed the surface of the path away in places, although it's subsequently been repaired.

As a large cave looms ahead, turn away from the river and cross a short area of grass to enter wooded Nabs Dale, heading towards Alsop-en-le-Dale. Nabs Dale is steep and rough but also delightfully quiet and peaceful, surrounded by high limestone crags. Pause for a few minutes to listen to the birdsong from the woods.

On leaving Nabs Dale into farmland, turn left past a house and head towards the farm buildings. Pass through a gateway then walk diagonally uphill, heading for an electricity pole. Cross the wall by a stile about 30 metres above the farm, then head for the farm track and turn right.

Follow the farm track, going straight on at a cross-roads of paths. The track descends to eventually join a minor road, passing some small bungalows along the way. Cross the road and use the stile to get access to the field opposite. Follow the path across this, heading for the top right-hand corner. Here, another stile leads onto the main road opposite the car park entrance.

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