

Hall Dale from Milldale

Probably not one in a thousand of those hordes who walk through Dovedale venture off the riverside path into any of the side-dales. This is sad for them, as they miss some stunning scenery, but good for the more adventurous as the side dales are consequently very quiet even in the height of the tourist season. This walk visits Hall Dale, in my opinion the prettiest of Dovedale's companions, along with the pleasant village of Alstonefield. Varied scenery and relative ease make it suitable for all times of the year.

Walk Facts:

Start	Car Park in Milldale (SK 138 547), off the A515 Ashbourne/Buxton road
Terrain	Field and riverside paths, climbs through Hall Dale and steeply up to Alstonefield
Length	Six miles
Time	Three hours or so
Food/Drink	Milldale (shop), Alstonefield (pub)
Toilets	Milldale (by the bridge), Alstonefield (at the car park, off the route of the walk)

Route

From the car park, walk down the road to the village and locate the old packhorse bridge crossing the river Dove. This is Viator's Bridge from Izaak Walton's eighteenth-century book 'The Compleat Angler', although in Walton's time it didn't have parapets and resembled a stone path across the river. There's a National Trust information point in the barn alongside the bridge.

Cross the bridge and follow the well-made riverside path downstream. The small weirs in the river are intended to create small pools, which favour trout and other fish. 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 also be a torrent in winter and has been known to freeze over in cold weather - the last time I can remember this happening was the winter of 1996/97.

Shortly after passing a series of large caves (called Dove Holes), you come to a wooden bridge over the river, with a rock needle opposite. This is Ilam Rock and is popular with climbers. Walk past the rock and follow the obvious path along the riverbank, heading back upstream, with Hurts Wood on your left.

When a wall with a stile in it is reached, pass through this and enter Hall Dale. Now simply walk straight up the dale, keeping the wall always on your left and passing through several stiles along the way.

Hall Dale is narrow at first but gradually opens out and becomes greener. It's a wonderful, quiet place with interesting and varied scenery ranging from woodland and steep, craggy limestone meadows and the bottom, to flatter open pasture higher up. It's a brilliant place for relaxing on warm summer days, or crisp cold winter mornings, and has a fantastic ethereal quality in mist.

You might see a hare or two in Hall Dale if you're lucky, or even a fox. Once, I was walking up here on a cold, snowy morning and was startled when the top foot or so of one of the fenceposts suddenly took to the

air and glided silently away, so there are tawny owls around these parts, too!

Walk right to the top of the dale, ignoring footpaths to left and right, until the path enters a walled track via a stile, with the buildings of Stanshope to the left and ahead. Turn left here, ignoring the fact that the track to the right is signposted 'Milldale' - we aren't going back there just yet!

Walk the short distance to where the track meets the road in Stanshope, then turn immediately right to join another track, passing Church and Grove farms on the right. Continue along the track, which eventually descends steeply to join the road at Dale Bottom.

If you want to curtail the walk, turn right here and walk down the road back to the car park in Milldale, about a mile away.

Otherwise, cross the road and pass through a stile into the wooded area opposite. Walk steeply up the dale-side, keeping the wall on your left once again. The steepness continues for a couple of hundred metres, then the ground levels out and you enter a small triangular field. Continue with the wall on your left to the opposite side of the field, then enter a larger field. Walk straight ahead through three fields until you find yourself in Alstonefield.



Turn right to walk through the village past the sadly-closed Post Office (Alstonefield seems to have joined the ranks of small villages which have lost their Post Offices). Alongside the village green, the George pub survives and is a source of welcome refreshment if required, otherwise turn right again to locate the ancient parish church of St Peter.

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!

Follow the lane all the way back to Milldale, enjoying the glorious views in all directions along the way, then turn right to return to the car park.

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