

Lathkill Dale and Bradford Dale

An easy long walk on riverside and field paths through two of Derbyshire's most beautiful limestone dales. The Lathkill is a 'disappearing' river, vanishing below ground for much of its course in dry summers. Despite being in the heart of the National Park, much of this walk is relatively unfrequented.

Walk Facts:

Start	Lay-by or roadside in Alport (SK 218 645), off the A6 between Rowsley and Bakewell. NOTE: The concessionary path through Lathkill Dale is closed on Wednesdays between October and February, so the walk therefore cannot be done on those days
Terrain	Field and riverside paths, one short steep climb. Can be muddy.
Length	Nine miles
Time	Four hours or so
Food/Drink	None en-route. Shops and pubs in Youlgreave and Bakewell
Toilets	None en-route - nearest are in Youlgreave

Route

Walk to the river bridge in Alport and pass through a stile next to a cottage. Walk through a succession of fields with the river Lathkill always on your right. Soon the river swings away from you but you continue to follow the obvious path. After crossing a track below Raper Lodge, then walking alongside a small wood, a proper road is reached. Turn right and follow this to the substantial stone Conksbury Bridge.

Cross the bridge then take the riverside path again (pictured below), following this to a footbridge by a house. At one point you climb above the river and then descend again - take care on the descent across rocks as they can be slippery in wet weather. In the vicinity of the house, the river may be dry. This happens because the river bed is on porous limestone so the water gradually drains away underground and when the river level is low after dry weather it's possible for all the water to be lost in this way.

Don't cross the footbridge (which looks peculiar when it's high and dry!) but pass between the house and a barn to rejoin the path on the same side of the river. Just past the barn there may be leaflets which you can take for a small fee - these explain the environment of the dale and are well worth the money.



Follow the path for two miles through the dale, which is wooded at this point and is a National Nature Reserve.

Although now the haunt of birds and walkers, this part of Lathkill Dale has an industrial past. There were once several lead mines and evidence of the workings can still be seen - there are derelict buildings and at one point several stone columns, which are the remains of an aqueduct but now provide nest sites for birds such as blue tits.

There are still mineshafts around and although the path is perfectly safe you **should not** go exploring in the woods.

Eventually, you emerge from the woodland and the dale opens out. When a footbridge is reached, cross the river and enter the short Cales Dale. After a short distance the path forks. Take the left fork to and climb out of the dale by way of a steep stone staircase up the left-hand flank.

Once out of the dale and into fields, follow the field path uphill to pass behind and to the left of Calling Low Farm through a small wood. After emerging from the wood beside the farm you find yourself in a large field. Head diagonally across this to enter another small wood by means of a stile in the corner of the field. After leaving this wood, continue to follow the path downhill, through several more (often muddy) fields until the road is reached.

The road forks at the point you join it. Take the right fork and after a short distance take the footpath to the right immediately past Moor Lane car park and picnic area (at grid reference SK 193 644). After travelling alongside the car park, the path descends steeply to join another road.

Cross this road then take another footpath on the right which descends to yet another road. Turn right and follow this one for a few hundred metres until there's a sharp bend, then take the footpath which leaves to the left. This runs high above a lovely steep-sided wooded valley for a distance before zig-zagging steeply down into Bradford Dale.

Cross the stone bridge and walk downstream with the river on your left, past a succession of trout pools maintained by dams and gurgling weirs. There are many water birds around here and the woodland on both sides of the dale are alive with their own birdsong on spring and summer mornings.

It's a delightful place, quiet and peaceful. Somewhere to linger. Incidentally, the buildings above the dale to the left are in Youlgreave.

Eventually you cross the river again by a footbridge. Continue to follow the river until a minor road is reached. Cross the road, then shortly afterwards the river (yet again!) and follow the track back to the starting point at Alport. The joining of the rivers Lathkill and Bradford is just before you reach the main road at Alport.

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