

High Peak Trail and Long Dale

An easy-to-follow walk suitable for everyone, taking in a stretch of an old railway followed by a visit to delightful Long Dale. Varied scenery, a wealth of wildflowers and the possibility of observing creatures such as hares and kestrels at close quarters make this a 'must' for every countryside-lover.

Walk Facts:

Start	Car park and picnic area near Gotham (SK 195 582), off the A5012 Cromford to Newhaven road at Pikehall
Terrain	Converted railway trackbed and an easy path through Long Dale; some road walking mainly on unfrequented lanes though a short section is along the busy A5012.
Length	Seven miles
Time	3 hours or so, depending on how much time you spend exploring Long Dale.
Food/Drink	None en route.
Toilets	None.

Route

To reach the car park turn off the A5012 Cromford to Newhaven road at Pikehall and follow the narrow lane to the picnic area (signposted) - the entrance is on the left immediately after you pass under an old railway bridge.

Leave the car park heading north-west (left from the entrance), heading towards Hartington. You're on the High Peak Trail, which was formerly a railway leading from Cromford to Buxton, joining with another railway (now the Tissington Trail) along the way.

Follow the trackbed all the way to the next car park, at Friden. These trails can be very boring to walk along but this section is an exception. The route is varied as the track twists and turns and goes through cuttings, alongside fields and woodland, and along embankments. It's a genuine nature trail - the views from the elevated sections are excellent and the embankments are a mass of wildflowers in summer.

About half way to Friden, you have to cross the A5012 road - *take care*, as it can be very busy!

When you arrive at the car park and picnic area at Friden, leave the trail by the car park access track. When the road is reached, opposite a factory, turn right and pass under the bridge carrying the trail.

Walk down the road until it turns left then sharp right to cross the valley. Just before the road swings right, look for a path leaving to the right (which may be rather overgrown). This leads through a gate into a walled green lane.

Walk along the green lane until it ends, then continue straight ahead through the field. Climb over a stile to the left of a gate to enter the dale proper. After a short distance a fence seems to block the way but if you follow it left to the top of the hill there's a gate giving access to the dale. Please don't be tempted to climb

over the fence - it's there for a reason. The number of grazing animals in the dale is controlled to prevent over-grazing and the fence prevents other animals from the surrounding fields gaining access.

Follow the path all the way along the dale. At first it goes high above the valley (pictured right) then descends alongside a wall into the valley floor. The dale is quiet, unfrequented and a perfect delight.

It's an excellent example of a limestone grassland environment which supports a huge range of flowers such as cowslips in spring and harebells and scabious in summer - don't forget to take your wildflower identification book with you! In recognition of its importance, part of the right-hand flank is protected as a National Nature Reserve. The dale is grazed by cattle and sheep, whose cropping of the grass is essential in order to preserve the diversity of the plant life.



Rabbits are numerous but this is also perfect territory for hares and you stand a good chance of seeing these beautiful creatures. There is a varied bird population, including partridge and kestrels. If you're lucky you might hear a skylark, an ever-present sound of my childhood summers now sadly driven away from around my home by modern farming methods.

Take your time and linger in Long Dale - it's a little gem, a throwback to a time which has all but disappeared.

At the abrupt end of Long Dale, turn right and follow the obvious path which climbs through the little side-dale and then goes to the left of Mouldridge Grange. A grange was a farm run by a monastery, often a place to which monks were sent to serve penance. After passing through a gateway, walk straight ahead until a wall is reached. Turn left and follow the wall, which swings right and eventually leads you to the main A5012 road.

Turn right onto the road and follow it (taking great care) for about four hundred metres until a lane, signposted 'Parwich', leaves to the left. Take this lane and follow it (it's very quiet and has hardly any traffic) until the car park is reached.

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