

Long Dale and Gratton Dale

A stroll through two adjacent, but very different, dales. One thing they share, thankfully, is quietness and seclusion.

Walk Facts:

Start	Friden picnic area (SK 171 606), just off the A515 Ashbourne to Buxton road at Newhaven
Terrain	Generally good paths through limestone dales and across fields plus a little road walking.
Length	Eight miles
Time	3 hours or so.
Food/Drink	None en route.
Toilets	None.

Route

To reach the car park turn off the A515 Ashbourne to Buxton road at Newhaven, onto the A5012 Cromford road, then turn left again after 400 metres onto a minor road. The entrance to the picnic area is on the right about 100 metres before the bridge which crosses the road.

Walk back onto the road, turning right and passing under the bridge. Walk down the road until it turns sharp right, then look for a path leaving to the right. This leads through a gate into a walled green lane. Walk along the lane until it ends, then continue 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 to the top of the hill there's a gate.



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

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.

The dale is grazed by cattle and sheep, whose cropping of the grass is essential in order to preserve the

diversity of plant life.

At the end of Long Dale turn left, passing through two gates in the process. This is Gratton Dale and is a good example of what happens when these limestone dales are left un-grazed for a number of years: the flanks are invaded by hawthorn scrub, which shades out the grass and flowering plants. Gratton Dale has undergone something of a transformation in the past few years, as a lot of the scrub has been removed and grazing animals introduced, with the result that the grassland is now recovering. Nevertheless, there's still a lot of scrub in the dale and this gives it a different feel to Long Dale. It also means that there are a lot of birds to see, so the scrub does have its uses!

When the road at the end of Gratton Dale is reached, turn left and then fork right by the Old Cheese Factory. Walk up the hill, passing Gratton Grange farm, before leaving the road by a footpath on the left a little way above the farm buildings.

The next section needs a little care, as the route of the footpath is not very obvious. Follow the overhead electricity cables, taking detours to the right where necessary to avoid the reedy wet bits. Continue to follow the wires until two fences have been crossed then veer left, away from the wires, to cross the next fence by climbing a ladder stile in the corner of the field. *If you end up crossing this fence by a gateway, you've gone the wrong way and need to turn left and follow the fence to the ladder stile.* Follow the ditch downhill for a short distance to a stile by a gate. Cross this and fight your way through a short overgrown area to reach a lane alongside a cattle grid.

Turn right and follow the lane for about 30 metres until you come to stiles in the walls on both sides. Cross the stile to the left. The path goes alongside a stream for a short distance and then through a short wooded area in a delightfully cool, damp limestone gorge, finally reaching a road at grid reference SK 197 623.

Cross the road and walk up the access road to Mount Pleasant farm. At the top of the hill, where the road turns left, you go right and pass through a gate to a green lane just inside Kenslow Wood. Walk along the lane, pausing to watch the abundant bird life, before emerging by another gate into a field. Walk through this, keeping the wall on your left and passing a 'dew pond' in a circular walled enclosure on the right. Just after this go through a gateway into a field, now with the wall on your right. Walk through the field and through yet another gate, at which there's a finger-post marked to Friden and pointing diagonally left.

Cross the field in the direction pointed, crossing the rather ruinous wall by way of a gap. Look for a stile in the fence/wall on the opposite side of the next field - this is indicated by two fenceposts close together. Cross this stile and look in the same direction for the stile in the next wall, a little to the left of a large tree and indicated by a tall post. Cross this wall and walk to the top right corner of the next field, by the big tree you used to find the previous stile.

Cross the track and enter yet another field by yet another stile, crossing this one diagonally left to a stile leading onto the road. Incidentally, the track to the left leads to the road, too, but the farmer prefers you to trample his grass crop down in the field rather than use it.

Once on the road turn left and follow it back to the car park. This is about a mile of road walking but the road is pretty quiet and there's no alternative, I'm afraid. While you tramp along the tarmac, remember the delights of the dales and you'll think the road a small price to pay!

This walk has been printed from <http://www.peakwalking.co.uk>

© Neil Tonks 2006. All rights reserved. This document may be printed for personal use only. Reproduction in any form for any other purpose without the prior consent of the copyright owner is strictly prohibited.