

Three Dales Around Hartington

Centred on Hartington, this enjoyable walk passes through Beresford, Wolfscote and Biggin dales. It finishes with an exploration of some of the area's 'green lanes'.

Walk Facts:

Start	Hartington (SK 128 604), off the A515 Ashbourne-Buxton road.
Terrain	Paths along limestone dales and green lanes between fields. Steady climb through Biggin Dale.
Length	Seven miles
Time	About three hours
Food/Drink	Shops, cafes and pubs in Hartington
Toilets	Hartington

Route

Find the public toilets in Hartington (on the Hulme End road) and join the well-made footpath through a gate to the left of them. After a short distance this crosses a track and enters fields. Follow the waymarked path through the fields until wooded Beresford Dale is reached.



Walk through this short dale (pictured left) which, along with the others on this walk, is owned by the National Trust. The mixed woodland is being regenerated and is home to a good bird population. Trout can be seen in the clear waters of the river Dove, this being a favourite place for fly-fishing: the building to the right at the beginning of the dale is Charles Cotton's Fishing House. Water birds also take advantage of the river, which you cross twice, once by a wooden bridge and then by a narrow concrete-and-wood affair near a large tree. After the second crossing, walk through an often-wet meadow to enter Wolfscote Dale.

This dale is very different - wide and open as opposed to Beresford Dale's rather claustrophobic air. The dale sides are carpeted by sheep-cropped turf, supporting a variety of plant life, punctuated with scree-runs. Sheep are essential to keep the dale in its current condition as without their constant cropping of the vegetation it would quickly be colonised by hawthorn scrub and would eventually become woodland.

The path through here was constructed a few years ago, despite some opposition from those who felt it intruded on the landscape. They did have a point but, as in so many other places, the valley floor had turned into a sea of mud under pressure of visitors and something had to be done.

Follow the dale for a little over a mile, then turn left into Biggin Dale at a point where the main path crosses a little causeway. This dale climbs gradually and you'll leave any crowds behind at this point. The lower reaches

show what happens when these dales are not grazed sufficiently - hawthorn and gorse scrub has colonised much of the left-hand side although some of this is now being removed. Between the scrub, cowslips bloom profusely in spring.

Biggin Dale is dry for most of the year but in wet winters it acquires a stream. The source of this is near the top of the dale and can be spectacular on frosty mornings. The water, which bubbles up from underground, is slightly warmer than the air and steams on contact with it, giving the area the look of a hot volcanic spring!

The path through the dale is easy to follow, passing through a rather ruinous gate at one point. The upper reaches, accessed through a second gate, are a National Nature Reserve. This is an important piece of limestone upland so please keep to the path alongside the wall in order to avoid disturbance to the reserve.

Keep the wall on your left until it ends and the dale swings sharp right. At this point turn left by a finger-post (marked to Hartington) to pass through a gate. Walk through several fields, ignoring the bridleway to Hartington which leaves to the left after a few hundred metres. Eventually, after passing a rather incongruous sewage works, you emerge onto a road. Turn left and after a hundred or so yards/metres, take a left fork by some buildings onto a track.

Follow the walled lane straight ahead between fields, ignoring branches to left and right at one point. A good height is reached and there are fine views both ahead and behind. After a mile or so, the track leads you onto a minor road. Turn left and follow the road downhill back to Hartington.

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