

Monsal Dale, Deep Dale and Millers Dale

A long walk taking in pretty Monsal Dale and the hidden gem of Deep Dale, then visiting the village of Taddington before returning along an old railway line and a pretty riverside path. This is a good walk to start early in the day, when the chances of seeing wildlife are greatest.

Walk Facts:

Start	Car park at Monsal Head (SK 184 714) north of Bakewell
Terrain	Good paths and tracks throughout. Climbs through Deep Dale and on return to Monsal Head.
Length	Thirteen miles
Time	About five hours
Food/Drink	Shops, cafes and pubs at Monsal Head. Queens Arms pub in Taddington (on Main Street) serves food. Cafe in Litton.
Toilets	Monsal Head and Millers Dale.

Route

From the car, make your way to the viewpoint of Monsal Head. Enjoy the view of the dale far below, the river Wye glinting in the sunlight. Prominent in the valley is the Monsal Viaduct, which was controversial when it was built to carry the Midland Railway's Derby to Manchester line as many critics, including Ruskin, thought it spoiled the dale. The viaduct has been disused since 1968 and is now part of a walking and cycle track called the Monsal Trail which starts in Bakewell. The section of the trail from Millers Dale will be your return route at the end of the walk.



Take the path signposted to Monsal Dale, which heads left and slopes gently down through trees. Take care not to get onto the path which descends steeply to the viaduct.

The path is a delight, the trees providing a cool green canopy on hot days. Eventually you emerge into the open dale bottom near a weir behind which is a large still pool. There will be various ducks, coots and moorhens here and, if you're very lucky, perhaps even a heron.

Cross the river by a footbridge and follow it downstream using the obvious path through the dale. This is a wonderful place - the busy river Wye has a good population of water birds and the dale a good population of rabbits, some of which are black rather than the usual grey. The trees support a varied bird population and you

may even glimpse a fox or hare, so all in all this is a place to linger and make use of binoculars.

Eventually the dale ends and the path emerges onto the busy A6 road. Cross the road with care and take a path opposite into a small car park. Walk past the ticket machine, to a stile in a fence opposite and cross this. Follow the path, crossing another stile. Where a waymark post indicates a fork in the path, veer left to descend to a gorge.

Once there, cross over the stile and proceed straight ahead through a rocky gully. Follow the path round to the right (ignoring the path to Sheldon which branches off uphill to the left). After a few hundred yards the path descends towards a low dry-stone wall. From here the path runs on the left of the wall, on the other side of which will be a stream in wet weather: this is Deep Dale.

This high limestone dale is one of the Peak District's undiscovered treasures, lonely and unfrequented. The dale, which is open and airy, climbs gently and twists and turns to reveal itself gradually to the visitor. A very satisfying place to be, the Northwest-facing side of the dale is owned by the Plantlife charity and managed as a nature reserve for its wild flowers. Enjoy looking at the flora but please keep to the path so that the work which is being done to preserve this rare and fragile environment is not put at risk.

Eventually, the path levels out and crosses the wall by way of a gate. Follow the wall for a few hundred metres more until you meet a green lane which crosses the dale at a point where a couple of huge concrete sewer pipes have been dumped, looking oddly out of place! Turn right onto the lane, which climbs and gives you stunning views back down the dale.

The lane levels out at Over Wheal farm and becomes metalled. Continue along it (it's now the farm access road) for about a mile and a half, all the way down into Taddington village, ignoring the various tracks and footpaths which leave to either side.

Walk through Taddington village, passing or visiting the interesting church, to eventually emerge onto the main A6 road. On the way, refreshments can be obtained from the village pub which is on Main Street.



Follow the A6 left for a short distance then cross and join a minor road signposted to Priestcliffe. Walk along the Priestcliffe road, going straight on at a cross-roads. Shortly afterwards, where the road turns sharp left, go straight ahead onto another 'green lane' (a rough-surfaced track).

This lane descends, at first gradually and then steeply, to Millers Dale. It's suffered from the attentions of fly-tippers and the 'off road' brigade of late but is still a nice place to be. When a road is joined, turn right and follow it down into Millers Dale village. Cross the river bridge and then pass through a stile alongside a gate on the left, taking a path which climbs diagonally up the old railway embankment.

Once the abandoned railway trackbed is reached, turn right to walk through the old Millers Dale station. The reason such a small place had such a big railway station was that the branch to Buxton left the main Derby-Manchester railway here and so passengers frequently had to change trains. After going through the station you walk over one of two huge iron-built viaducts which took the trains over the deep valley.

Follow the route of the railway, the Monsal Trail, until a sign directs you to descend to the village of Litton. After crossing the river once more, walk onto the road and turn right. After walking for a short way along the road, you enter the grounds of the former Litton Mill. The buildings were empty and derelict for many years but have recently been transformed into accommodation, thankfully in a sensitive way which respects the old buildings.

Litton mill has a shameful history, as in the nineteenth century its child workers were mistreated terribly. At one point, so many were dying that the owner sent the bodies to other parishes for burial so the local authorities wouldn't get alarmed by the number of fatalities.



Follow the marked route through the mill site and after leaving the buildings behind, you find yourself on a nice path alongside the river Wye. Follow the river downstream through a steep-sided valley all the way to Cressbrook Mill. The mill-pond at Cressbrook and a silted-up section of the river before it (which bears the intriguing name of water-cum-jolly dale) have become a reedy haven for water birds.

As you approach the mill, the path runs at the base of a high, sheer limestone cliff and **may be under water in very wet conditions** at this point.

Cross the river yet again at Cressbrook Mill (which has also been rescued from dereliction by being converted to

apartments) and follow the Monsal Trail signs to cross the river by a footbridge adjacent to the weir. Note that if you find yourself on the road, you've gone the wrong way!

The path climbs in a series of zig-zags before levelling out and becoming a terrace cut into the hillside. There's a good view of the mill, below and to the left. Interestingly, while Litton mill was infamous for ill-treating children the one at

Cressbrook was just the opposite, its child workers being treated in a way which by the standards of the time was good.

Follow the path until it joins the old railway trackbed again alongside a tunnel, which was closed off for many years but has now been opened and incorporated into the Monsal Trail. Turn **left** to continue along the trackbed until you reach and cross the viaduct below Monsal Head. At the far end of the viaduct a path leaves to the left beside another tunnel and climbs steeply up to Monsal Head at the end of a long but varied and interesting walk.

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