

# Water-cum-Jolly and High Dales

**This walk follows a spectacular section of the Wye through a deep valley before crossing to short, secluded High Dale and returning high above Monsal Dale with superb views along the way. Lots of bird and plant life make it a real delight for nature lovers.**

## Walk Facts:

Start	Car park at Monsal Head (SK 184 714) north of Bakewell near Ashford-in-the-Water
Terrain	Good paths and tracks throughout. One short but very steep climb half-way round and another on the return to Monsal Head.
Length	Eight miles
Time	Three to four hours (depending on how much nature study you do!)
Food/Drink	Shops, cafes and pubs at Monsal Head. Cafes at Cressbrook and Litton.
Toilets	Monsal Head

## 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. The structure 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 first section of the walk crosses the viaduct and follows the Monsal Trail to Cressbrook.



From the gap in the wall to the right of the gift shop/cafe, take the path signposted to the viaduct, which heads right and drops quite steeply down some wide stone steps. Turn left at the bottom of the steps (half way down the hill), indicated by a finger post, to descend to the viaduct through trees.

Cross the viaduct and continue along the trackbed of the old railway. This has an interesting variety of trees and flowering plants which have arrived since the railway closed. The re-opening of the tunnels has generated more possibilities for walks, but on the downside the trail has lost much of its former tranquility, with lycra-clad cyclists sometimes almost using it as a race track, so you do need to take care.

Presently, the imposing but gracefully-designed buildings of Cressbrook Mill come into view ahead and to the right. The mill is listed but was derelict for a number of years. Happily, it's now been restored after a long legal battle by the authorities, and has become apartments and housing. Such schemes are often opposed but personally I prefer to see old buildings being put to a new use rather than being left to decay into an eyesore.

Shortly before the trail enters the gloom of a tunnel, leave the trackbed to the right to take a footpath signposted "Cressbrook". This path is cut into the hillside and, after passing above the mill buildings, descends down rough steps to a bridge over the weir at the end of the old millpond. At this point you can head right to "D's Brew Stop" for refreshments if you wish. Otherwise, head left to cross another bridge and gain the riverside footpath through the intriguingly-named water-cum-jolly dale. The path initially runs at the base of a high, sheer limestone cliff and **may be**

**under water in very wet conditions** at this point.

After passing the cliff, the path continues alongside the river for a mile or so until you reach Litton. This mile is a bird-watcher's paradise, as the millpond and the river beyond it have become silted up and are a haven for water birds. A number of species of duck, goose and water fowl breed here and the wooded riverbanks and mud banks are also home to many other bird species. Take time to enjoy this perfect riverside walk.



You'll know when Litton has been reached because of the huge buildings of Litton Mill which seem to block the path. However, there is a clearly marked way through. The buildings were empty and derelict for many years but, like the mill at Cressbrook, have recently been transformed into accommodation, thankfully in a sensitive way which respects the old buildings.

In the nineteenth century, Litton mill was infamous for ill-treating its child workers but 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.

Exiting from the mill yard onto a road, look for a finger-post pointing left at the end of a terrace of buildings - it may be overgrown so take care not to miss it. Follow the indicated path to cross the river again by a bridge and then climb a steep zig-zag path up the side of an embankment to regain the Monsal Trail. As you've probably worked out, you could simply continue on the Monsal Trail at Cressbrook and use it to get here, avoiding the detour through Cressbrook and Litton. This is certainly the case, but in doing so you'll swap the lovely riverside walk for two tunnels and a short stretch of railway trackbed, and have to spend longer dodging the cyclists!

Almost immediately after joining the trail, leave it again by some steps at the left-hand side of a bridge which crosses the trackbed. At the top of the steps, cross a stile to enter a nature reserve. The next part of the walk, through the reserve, involves a steep climb up a grassy field. Initially you need to walk almost straight up the hill, slanting slightly right. You need to eventually get to the top right-hand corner of the field, which is initially out of sight. Ignore any paths which cross the fence or wall into the adjacent field. The nature reserve has lots of wildflowers including a spectacular display of yellow cowslips and the white star blooms of wood anemones in spring.

In the top right-hand corner of the field, cross a stile next to a gate and continue to walk straight ahead with a wall and fence to your right. After 100 metres or so, cross the wall and fence by a stile near a wooden nature reserve sign. Walk in the same direction as before for a short distance, with the wall/fence on your left, until you pass through a stone stile to find yourself in a long rectangular field.

Walk the length of this field to the bottom-left corner. There are a lot of old holes, trenches and humps which are evidence of mining activity in the past. These days, the field is grassy and full of daisies and other wild flowers. A real taste of an old meadow of the type you see very rarely these days.

At the end of the field go through a stile to the left of the gate and turn **left** onto a rough track. Walk down the track until you see a finger-post pointing to the left. Ignore this but fifty metres past it, look for a gate with a bridleway post on the right. Go through the gate and walk straight ahead, gradually descending to join grassy, secluded High Dale. Once the dale bottom is reached, ignore the path which climbs the opposite side of the dale. Instead, turn left and walk along the valley floor with a wall on your left.

The dale is short, steep-sided and quiet. The perfect place to rest weary legs!

At the end of the dale you join a road (which is shown as a track on some of the OS maps). Turn left and follow the winding road until it swings sharp left at a point where a gateway leads to a number of restored farm buildings. Go through the gate (a finger post points the way) and walk past the buildings - another example of old buildings finding a new use.

At the end of the buildings, pass through another gate and take the right-hand track at a fork. Follow this track for a while, high above the noisy A6 road in Taddington Dale, passing through a couple more gates. The woodland to the right has a carpet of yellow celandine flowers in spring.

Eventually the track forks again around a large tree. Take the left fork and follow the track through a couple of fields and another gate until you get to a point where there are two gates in the corner of a field. Take the rightmost gate, which has a stile on its right hand side, to get onto a walled lane (with rather ruinous walls!) high above Monsal Dale.

Follow the lane, or walk along the grass to the right of it, keeping high above the dale. The views are stunning, down into the steep-sided dale. However, bear in mind that the ground drops away steeply into the dale so it may be best to

keep to the (perfectly safe) track if you have small children with you.

Eventually, the track opens out and you begin a descent into the dale. The path is rough, and the footing loose at times, so take care. At a point where the track forks, take the rightmost route to descend through trees. Eventually you find yourself alongside a gate at the end of the viaduct. Cross the viaduct to return to Monsal Head up the steep path which you descended at the beginning of the walk.

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