

# **DARK PEAK WALKS**



#### About the Author

Paul Besley first went walking in the Dark Peak when he was 14 years old and a love of the high moors and gritstone edges was born. Over the following years he has explored the area, walking its moorlands, investigating hidden cloughs, expanding his knowledge and experience: he has learned when and where the Dark Peak is best and which are the best walks.

He is a volunteer ranger for the Peak District National Park and a member of Woodhead Mountain Rescue, an informative walking guide and writer. His ranger base is in the Upper Derwent Valley, just a few minutes from where he lives in Sheffield with his wife, metalsmith Alison Counsell, and their three dogs Olly, Monty and Scout.

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## DARK PEAK WALKS

### 40 WALKS EXPLORING THE PEAK DISTRICT GRITSTONE AND MOORLAND LANDSCAPES

by Paul Besley

## CICERONE

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© Paul Besley 2017  
 First edition 2017  
 ISBN-13: 978 1 85284 519 3  
 Reprinted 2019 (with updates)  
 Printed in China on behalf of Latitude Press Ltd.  
 A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.



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*This book is dedicated to metalsmith Alison Counsell.  
 My wonderful wife, best friend, and fellow adventurer.  
 Thank you for everything. I love you dearly.*

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Front cover: The Vale of Edale from Kinder Scout (Walk 39)

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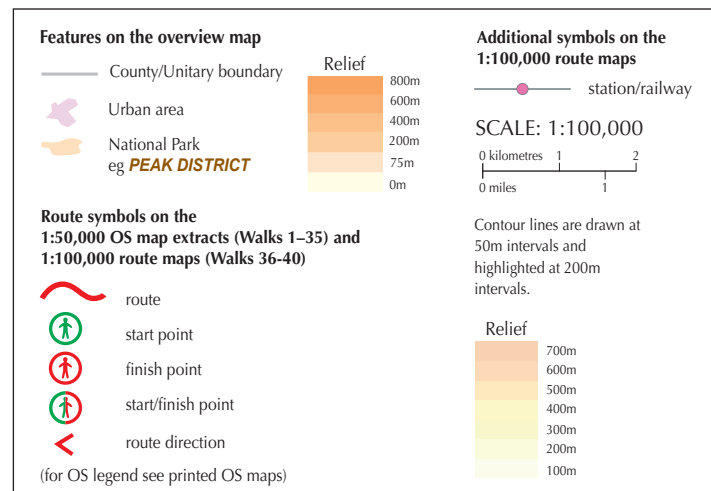
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### Warning

Hill walking can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and experience to evaluate them. While every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and can change quickly, materially affecting the seriousness of a high-level walk. Therefore, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author accept liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

The Dark Peak is prone to sudden changes of weather and the nature of the upland areas demands a high level of navigational skill. Walkers should be properly equipped for the conditions and leave details of their route with an appropriate person. To call out Mountain Rescue, ring 999 or the international emergency number 112: this will connect you via any available network. Once connected to the emergency operator, ask for the police. Walkers can also avail of an emergency SMS system by registering their phone with the provider.



### Acknowledgments

I got to do the good bit: walking all the routes, finding out all the information. I was not alone; many people helped in producing this book.

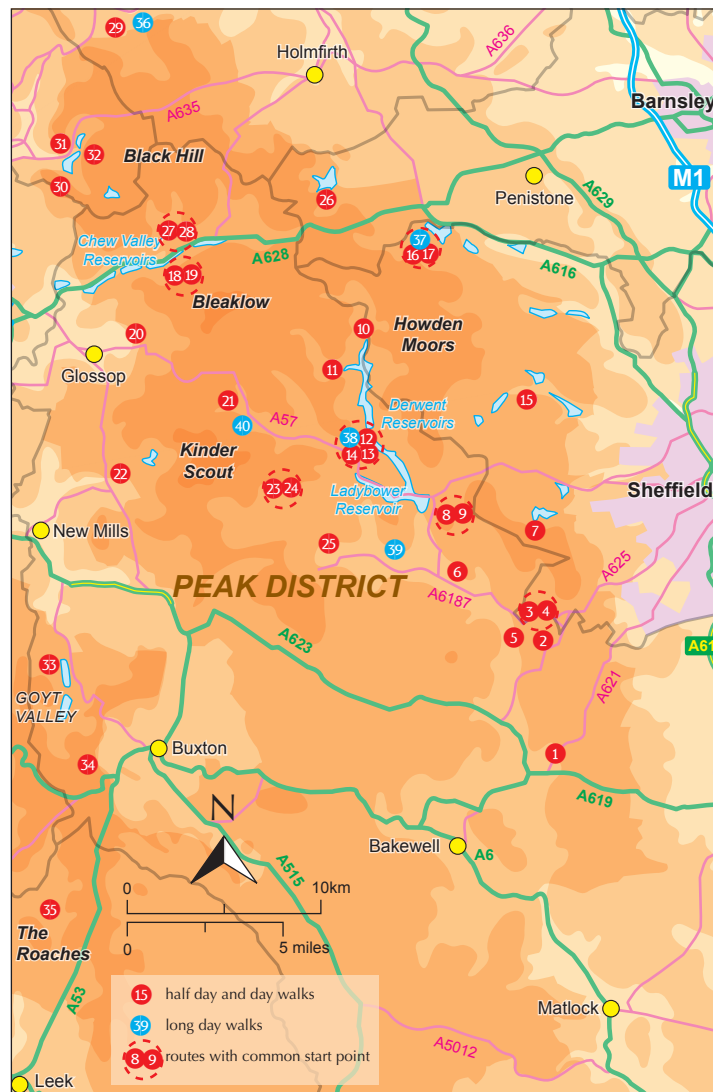
First I would like to thank Mark Richards, without whose suggestion and help this book would never have happened. Of course, someone needs to sort out my words and print the book. Thank you to Jonathan Williams, Sian Jenkins, Natalie Simpson, Stephanie Rebello and the team at Cicerone.

Many people gave their time to check my routes and make the odd suggestion, and even walk some of the routes with me. To David and Stephanie Haffenden, Phil Newing, Duncan Sissons, Tony Amies, Alison Counsell, Gail Ferriman and Jeff Cole, thank you, for your assistance, your patience and encouragement, and above all your friendship.

I would like to thank the Area Rangers of the Peak District National Park, who gave me their time, advice and encouraging words: Paul Wetton, Tom Lewis, Fiona Draisey, Neil Hanshaw, Andy Valentine, Martin Winder, Steven Bell, Gordon Danks and Richard Pett of Aldern House. Also thanks to Debra Wilson, who talked so enthusiastically about Moors For The Future and helped to explain what it all meant; to Michelle Sullivan from the National Trust High Peak Estate, who provided me with so much helpful information; and to Paul Bridge and Mike Potts, who provided information about the aircraft crash sites.

But most important of all, thanks to my wife Alison Counsell for supporting me throughout the project, and giving endless encouragement. I owe everything to you.

*Long Causeway and Stanage Edge*





*Walking along the Great Ridge (Walk 25)*

## INTRODUCTION



*Full winter kit on Kinder Scout (Walk 24)*

On a beautiful winter's day with a sky that was powder blue and dotted with brilliant white clouds, I dropped down from Barrow Stones to Ridgewalk Moor. As the path levelled out the wind suddenly became stronger, not enough to blow me over, but enough for me to think it was time to be getting off the high moor and down into the valley. The afternoon was drawing to a close and my walk that day had been one of the most enjoyable that winter. I hadn't seen a soul, it being a weekday, and my walk had taken me off the footpath and across a succession of moors, rising up to Bleaklow Stones via a series of spot heights that formed a natural ascent. As I turned to head towards Round Hill I had the most amazing sense of the ocean. I stopped and breathed in the air, taking

huge draughts into my lungs. I could smell and taste sea salt on the wind, fresh, tangy and exhilarating. It is a moment I relive, and it is just one of many memories that I have of the Dark Peak.

The area has a habit of producing days that are to be remembered; it is one of the reasons it is loved by so many people. It is a place of great beauty and variety, with a landscape that changes with the seasons. Its primary trait is one of restrained menace. The land broods, waiting for an excuse to show its dark side, often suddenly from nowhere and in a most brutal way. There is a reason why seven Mountain Rescue teams surround the Dark Peak, which alone is enough of a warning to any walker to treat the area with respect.



The Dark Peak is fringed with gritstone edges that look out across wide valleys to high peat moorland. It is famous for two things. The first is gritstone, coarse sandstone laid down between 360 million and 300 million years ago when the area was a vast river delta. The gritstone forms long high edges, a Mecca for climbers, and outcrops that give walkers superb viewpoints across wide valleys to the high moors beyond. The second feature the Dark Peak is famous for is encountered by all who venture onto the high moors: peat. In summer, it takes the form of a dark chocolate brownie that has a gentle bounce

which makes a gait slightly comical. In wet weather it is an entirely different matter. Chocolate fondant is perhaps an appropriate description. Peat, when saturated, still maintains its solid appearance, which makes crossing the moors a challenge, especially if you enter a grough, a steep-sided incision from which egress is less than noble. At best you can end up covered in the black ooze up to your knees; at worst it can be up to your thighs.

The walks are not just about this incredible landscape. They are also about the human element that lies deep within the Dark Peak. From the Neolithic remains of fire platforms to

Bronze Age cairns and burial mounds, we walk in footsteps long ago imprinted into the soft peat. It is an area that has witnessed murder, with the martyrs at Padley Chapel (Walk 5), mystery at Cutthroat Bridge (Walk 8), and human despair in Hannah Mitchell, who lived a life under such cruelty at Alport Hamlet, yet went on to become a Manchester magistrate and writer (Walk 13). The first national park to be granted this status was the Peak National Park, in April 1951, with those who fought for the Right to Roam frequently at the forefront of the national parks campaign.

Industry has made its mark, first with the peat cutting and then more visibly along the gritstone edges and the quarries producing the famous millstones and the stone for the great dams. War also has played its part, with at least three areas taking part in military training, the most famous being the Dambusters of the Upper Derwent Valley. In the last century the area has been the resting place of many aircraft, the remains of which can still be seen.

The Dark Peak presents a different experience with each season. Autumn invites you to savour the blazing colours of the ancient woodlands around Longshaw, and the smell of the landscape readying for the winter slumber. Then take a winter's walk on Higger Tor, the wind driving snow horizontally across the moor, the cold biting the cheeks: perhaps you will be lucky enough to experience the thrill of

sighting a mountain hare in its white winter cloak. In spring the path up to Grindale Barn from Ladybower has a beautiful meadow full of cornflowers and buttercups. And finally summer beckons, promising long days exploring the groughs of the Kinder Scout plateau, lunch at Crowden Head, reclining on soft sweet-smelling grass, and bathing in the Fairie Pools at Slippery Stones after a hard day's walking. There are ample opportunities for challenge and character-building, testing navigational skill and self-reliance, and endless moments of pleasure discovering this rich and varied landscape.

I hope you enjoy the walks in this book and that it leads to further exploration of the Dark Peak and some wonderful memories.

## GEOLOGY

The Peak District is formed mainly of gritstone, which sits above a limestone bed. In the southern part of the Peak District, the White Peak, the gritstone has eroded away leaving the white limestone formed some 360 million years ago now visible on the surface. In the north and on the eastern and western fringes, the gritstone remains in place on the surface giving us the Dark Peak.

The gritstone of the Dark Peak was formed in the Carboniferous Period around 360–300 million years ago at a time of fluctuating sea levels due to ice melt. The gritstone of the



*Peat is one of the Dark Peak's characteristics*

Dark Peak, primarily made from sandstone and grit, was laid down when the area was a huge river delta that poured sediment from the north over the smooth limestone rock, resulting in the formation of gritstone rock, often in layers or strata. Between the layers can be found thin seams of shale and coal, formed from decaying plant material during periods of warmer weather.

Gritstone has a coarse surface that is harder than the limestone or shales upon which it sits. Layering of the gritstone deposits has produced horizontal banding while weathering has produced vertical fissures. This gives a distinctive look of long edges running in straight lines, with the edge interspersed with buttresses of horizontal layers separated by vertical cracks, as seen at Stanage Edge. Where harder sandstone deposits are present, erosion has resulted in gritstone tors where the surrounding softer stone has been weathered away. This is seen most clearly on Derwent Edge and Kinder Scout.

The shale formed from mud that lies deeper than the sandstone and grit can be found interspersed within a line of gritstone, the most easily visible being at Mam Tor, where gritstone sits above the shale at the base of the mountain. As shale breaks up easily this makes it a very unstable material and, as in Mam Tor, can produce significant landslips. Thin seams of coal are seldom visible but these remains of plant material laid down during

warmer spells of the Carboniferous Period can be seen around Derbyshire Bridge and also in the Longdendale Valley.

Peat, formed from plant material some 10,000 years ago, sits behind the gritstone edges and on the slopes down into the valley at a depth of up to four metres. On the high moorlands the peat has been eroded, producing deep incisions called groughs where it has been eroded down to the underlying bedrock. This came about partially through natural processes but also through deliberate human activity. In the 19th and 20th century drains were cut into the peat in an attempt to make the moors drier for agricultural purposes. The effect of such drainage was to reduce the moors' ability to hold water and also to take sediment from the moor down into the valleys. New peat could not be generated from rotting material, further reducing the moors' water-retention abilities and affecting the delicate natural balance of plant and wildlife where drainage had occurred. Along with the peat, the Dark Peak is one of the world's most important sites for blanket bog. Blanket bog enables the growth of plants such as sphagnum moss, a key plant for the production of new peat. The Moors For The Future Project seeks to reverse the damage caused by moorland peat erosion and promotes the development of new peat by the seeding of grasses, sphagnum moss and other plantlife that will increase the moors' capacity to



*The Wheel Stones or Coach and Horses (Walk 12)*

produce new peat material. The peat is also a major component of flood defences for the surrounding cities, the moor holding water for longer periods to allow floodwater to disperse without damaging settlements downstream.

Groughs should not be confused with cloughs, which are deeply incised valleys running down the hillside from the plateau above. They invariably have a stream running along the length that is cutting deeper into the hillside; many have waterfalls.

#### PLANTS AND WILDLIFE

Plant and wildlife within the Dark Peak is diverse. The high moorlands have a wide range of grasses and

sedges, bilberry and crowberry and cottongrass, as well as managed bracken and heather. There is little tree cover except for the occasional rowan and conifer. The mountain hare is a common sight, as are grouse, which are heavily managed for sport shooting. Deer are also present on the Eastern Moors. Around the gritstone edges merlins, peregrine falcons, goshawks, hen harriers and buzzards may be spotted. Curlew, golden plover and dippers frequent the moors and valleys, while the common lizard and the adder may be found basking on moorland paths.

Grouse moors have a cover of heather, managed to produce differing habitats suitable for the life-cycle of the red grouse. Three main types

## WALK 1

*Chatsworth to Birchen Edge*

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Chatsworth House SK 259 702
<b>Distance</b>	17.5km (11 miles)
<b>Ascent</b>	455m
<b>Time</b>	5hrs
<b>Terrain</b>	Steep, uneven ground, open moor and forest tracks
<b>Map</b>	OS 1:25000 Explorer OL24 White Peak
<b>Refreshments</b>	Chatsworth House
<b>Parking</b>	Chatsworth House SK 259 702

Chatsworth is a wonderful place to start and end a walk. The grounds reflect an interesting period of English social history, full of the romance and adventure of the European tours of the landed gentry. The Three Ships on Birchen Edge provide a wonderful photo opportunity with extensive views across Chatsworth. Hob Hurst's House is an important site, being one of the first to be protected by law. The end of the walk brings you through the grounds surrounding Chatsworth House and provides stunning views over gardens created by Capability Brown and Joseph Paxton.

From Chatsworth House car park walk directly west to **Queen Mary's Bower**, a folly situated by the River Derwent. Take the tarmac drive north past the nursery and on to the Cannon kissing gate to exit the park and enter **Baslow** by a walled lane. At the road junction turn left onto the A619, then cross it at the pelican crossing and walk up the road directly opposite for 400 metres. Where the road forks take the right hand road uphill, continuing on when the road becomes the track Bar Road and pass through a Peak District National Park access gate to a stony track leading up towards Baslow Edge. At the top do not go left to Baslow Edge but proceed straight on to **Wellington's Monument**.





Wellington's  
Monument,  
Baslow Edge



The stone cross is **Wellington's Monument**, erected in honour of the Duke of Wellington. It looks across the valley to Nelson's Monument on Birchen Edge, met later in the walk. The large boulder visible on the moor above Baslow Edge is the Eagle Stone. Bouldering routes on the stone include: The Beagle Has Landed, The Good The Bad and The Beagle, and A Beagle Too Far.

Follow the northeast track from the monument, eventually bounded by a stone wall on the left and passing a guide stoop on the right, to a gate giving access to a minor road. Go right and then straight across the **A621** and through a wooden gate on the opposite corner of the crossroads. Initially the path across the open moor is flagged but it becomes faint, winding its way for 850

metres south to a very large boulder situated on the right in a clearing among trees below the gritstone edge. This marks the turning point to go left and make a short easy scramble up onto **Birchen Edge**. Reaching the triangulation pillar at the top, head southeast to three large gritstone boulders on the left known as the Three Ships. ►

**Nelson's Monument** stands by three of his ships: Victory, Defiance and Royal Sovereign, the last spelled incorrectly. The obelisk was erected 56 years before Wellington's Monument.

If time allows make a diversion to Gardom's Edge to view a menhir (standing stone) and also a replica of a stone with cups and rings. It is well worth the effort.

Follow the footpath along the edge for approximately 700 metres until it turns sharp right by two concrete posts marking the position of a pipeline. Follow the path right, down the steep slope, to reach a wide path with a wall beyond. Turn left and walk south down the path, keeping the wall on your right, to a gate that leads onto a

This is a good place to stop for refreshments.

The Three Ships  
on Birchen Edge



road taking you past a **pub**. From the pub walk down the A619 pavement until you are opposite a signpost on the other side of the road pointing to a concessionary path to Chatsworth. Cross here and go over the stile, down the stone steps and across a wooden bridge, then up a short slope to a marker post.

Turn left and walk along a waymarked footpath, following the signposts at all times southeast to stone steps set into a wall. Go over the wall and continue following the marker posts leading you up a small clough with a stream on your left until you reach a marker post at the foot of a slope. Turn right here and walk up the slope and out onto open moorland. Follow the footpath across the moor to go through a gate giving access onto a wide track. Turn right along the track following it across **Gibbet Moor** to woodland in the distance. Walk on past the woodland until it finishes at the corner of a wall. Go straight on, east, for 70 metres to **Hob Hurst's House**.

**Hob Hurst's House** was one of the first monuments in Britain to be protected under the Ancient Monuments Act, a fact noted by the stone bollards with the inscription VR for Queen Victoria. It is a large burial cairn that contained burnt human remains.

Retrace your steps to the wall corner and turn left to descend the slope keeping the walled forest plantation on your right. Where the plantation ends and the wall turns northwest carry straight on southwest across Rabbit Warren to meet a well-made track. Turn right, northwest, along the track and follow this until it ends at a wall stile leading into woodland. Go over the stile and along the woodland track until it forks after crossing a stream. Take the left hand fork and follow the track until the junction with a tarmac forest road. Walk straight across the road and proceed along a woodland track bearing left at the next track junction. Pass the Cascade Waterfall stopping to take in the views across Chatsworth Gardens and carry on to the Hunting Tower.



*The Hunting Tower  
Chatsworth*

Bess of Hardwick had the **Hunting Tower** built both as a retreat and to view hounds hunting deer in the park. Lancelot Capability Brown turned the deer park into one of his creations embodying coherence and elegance.

From the Hunting Tower go down the steps situated beyond the cannons, cross the track at the foot of the steps and then descend steep stone steps and a footpath to connect with a forest track. Go left along the track and at the next track junction go right and right again at the next junction, then follow the track down to re-enter the car park.