

Tideswell – 6 mile walk

Factfile

Start/finish: Tideswell Dale car park

Distance: 10 km/6 miles

Approximate time: Allow 2-3 hours

Highest point: Wormhill, about 335m/ 1,100ft

Maps: OS Explorer Sheet 24, The White Peak

Refreshments: At Tideswell, Miller's Dale or Wormhill

Terrain: Mainly easy dale and trail walking

Tideswell and Chee Dale

This walk explores the beautiful dales to the north of the River Wye from the "cathedral town" of Tideswell, an historic settlement founded on the wealth won from wool and lead. En route it visits Monk's Dale, part of the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve and the hilltop village of Wormhill, returning along the Monsal Trail via glorious Chee Dale.

Tideswell

Tideswell has the air of a town twice its size, and this air of importance stems back to the mid-13th century, when it was granted the right to hold a weekly market. Street names like the Pot Market in the centre of the village recall its former bustle.

But the most convincing proof of Tideswell's past glories is its magnificent parish church of St. John the Baptist. Known as "the Cathedral of the Peak," this mainly 14th century church with its Perpendicular-style, pinnacled tower has a wonderfully light and airy chancel in the Decorated style and some of the finest monuments and brasses in the Peak. Tideswell's famous well-dressings, which take place in June, are among the most technically-accomplished in the area and attract large crowds.

From Tideswell, walk south on the B6049 which descends towards the Tideswell Dale car park and picnic area, which is reached through an avenue of stately beeches on your left.

Tideswell Dale

Tideswell Dale was once the site of an ugly quarry where the black, igneous basalt rock which outcrops here was won for use in road-making. But an ambitious restoration scheme by the National Park Authority early in its history demolished the old quarry buildings and converted the dale into one of its first nature trails, best known for its geology, but also for its wealth of wildflowers, which here include orchids.

Turn left out of the car park and walk down the dale road to the large "S" bend, where you bear right across the layby and enter the fields by a squeezer stile. This runs across to Meadow Lane, where you turn left and drop down to reach the road again at Miller's Dale.

Miller's Dale

The old station buildings at Miller's Dale were once the hub of one of the busiest junctions on the former Midland line, now the Monsal Trail. The double track and sidings were the junction for Buxton on the Midland line, and Miller's Dale was the introduction to the Peak District for many of those early tourists. The station opened in 1863 and 40 years later it was extended and a second viaduct built. The old station buildings are now used as a ranger briefing centre for the Monsal Trail.

Walk down into the hamlet of Miller's Dale and turn right at St. Ann's Church, following the sign up the metalled track to Monk's Dale, part of the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve.

Monk's Dale

The 60ha/148acre Monk's Dale National Nature Reserve is famous for its marvellous limestone-loving flora, such as the rare Nottingham catchfly, bloody cranesbill and spring cinquefoil. The woodlands of Monk's Dale consist mainly of ash and sycamore, but the ground flora is exceptionally rich, with herb Paris, moschatel and dog's mercury abundant. The north-south running dale is normally dry during the summer months in its upper part where an occasional stream runs through in the winter. In the damper areas of the lower dale, where springs fed the stream, marsh marigold, brooklime and blue water speedwell thrive.

Walk up for a glorious mile through the steep-sided dale, crossing the stream at one point by a footbridge. The dale gets more heavily-wooded at its northern end, where you meet the former Tideswell Road and turn left, then left again through a stile onto a walled bridleway which leads to the hilltop hamlet of Wormhill.

Wormhill

Wormhill's most famous son was James Brindley, the virtually-illiterate pioneer of canal building, who was born at the nearby hamlet of Tunstead in 1716. There is a simple memorial on the village green to this genius of construction engineering who changed the face of Britain during the 18th century by his brilliant canal schemes. The first was the Duke of Bridgewater's canal between Worsley and Manchester, which was built between 1759-61, and included Britain's first aquaduct. Brindley died in 1772 at the age of 56.

Walk through the village, going down hill past the late 17th century Wormhill Hall on the left and on reaching Hassop Farm on your right, take the footpath signposted Chee Dale. This descends steeply past a number of springs into the dale, with the limestone buttresses of Chee Tor ahead.

Chee Tor

Chee Tor is a 90m/300ft bastion of limestone boasting some demanding rock climbs. But on the tree-skirted peninsula above the crags, a Romano-British settlement site has been identified. It is visible in aerial photographs as a series of

lynchets and low stony banks which define several yards and house sites, with short lanes in between. Excavations have dated this well-protected and agriculturally-unimproved site to the 3rd and 4th century AD.

On reaching the riverside path, turn left keeping the river on your right and when you meet the B6049, turn right through a stile and walk downhill on the road under two impressive metal railway viaducts, which now carry the Monsal Trail.

Back at St. Ann's Church, Miller's Dale, bear right along the road signposted to Litton Mill, eventually turning sharply left (signposted) at the southern end of Tideswell Dale. The crag of Ravenstor stands out to your left, as you walk through the dale, noting the basaltic outcrops in the old quarry to the right.

After about half a mile, you re-emerge on the B6049 to walk back up the hill into Tideswell.

These walks have been adapted from Roly Smith's Rambler's Guide to the Peak District, published by HarperCollins in 2000.

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