

Moors for the Future Audio Trail: Edale

1. Edale: at the car park or railway station:

Song:

*The ramble will be taken wet or fine
Bring a sandwich, a song
Make sure you're on time
We live to walk and we've travelled far
Our feet in the heather
Our hearts with the stars....*

I'm Sally Goldsmith and I'm a writer, songmaker, singer and weekend walker. I made that song out of words I found in a tiny handbook beautifully produced around 80 years ago by the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers. These books had details of the groups' walks for the year together with a dotty cornucopia of information about place names, ancient trackways, boundary stones, landscape features, dos and don'ts - and all mixed in with songs and poetry. I want this downloadable audio trail to be a sort of 21st century version of those books – something a bit different you can take with you to help you to enjoy this stunning little walk.

So, here we are at Edale, which is probably best known as the starting point for the long distance Pennine Way footpath which snakes its way up to Kirk Yetholm in the Scottish borders. But this circular walk I'm about to take you on is only about 2 miles at most. It takes us up onto moorland either on or just below an outcrop known as The Nab, then down Ollerbrook and back to Edale. You can take the walk very much at your own pace. After only a short steep uphill stretch it has marvellous views. And if you haven't walked on the moors before, this is a great, safe introduction. If you're an experienced walker and good with a map and compass, you could find your own way up to Ringing Roger - the gritstone tor on the Kinder ridge behind the Nab.

So from either the railway station or car park we're going to walk down the road towards the village until we reach the Moorland Centre on our right. There you can listen to this guide again and I can introduce some people to whom all walkers might have cause to be grateful. So let's go!

2. The Moorland Centre

Here we are outside the new Moorland Centre, designed to be ecological, but also evocative of the moors with its living sedum moss roof, its waterfall and its use of recycled stone. But I want to take you inside – especially to have a look at the commemorative plaques in the centre.

Song:

*Trespassers will be celebrated now their will is done,
Trespassers will be celebrated, glorious kingdom come,
By those who walk the southern downs, the high and windy moor,
Trespassers will be celebrated, freedom is won.*

Now, many of us don't think twice about our right to go out and have a good walk, do we? But since the early 19th century, much of the high moorland round here was walled off to ordinary people and guarded by gamekeepers armed with sticks. The Peak Park was formed in the 1950's and the right to walk freely on moor and mountain was only fully gained in the year 2000. Since the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century it was ordinary men and women who had to make a fuss and even trespass on private land to get the world to sit up and take notice. Although the moors around Edale have been open to walkers since the 1950's it has not always been as easy elsewhere.

The plaque on the left particularly remembers Sheffield walkers who campaigned to be able to walk freely and it shows Bert Ward, the so called "King of the Ramblers" – addressing a rally in Winnats Pass, near Castleton.

At this point I'd like to introduce you to a man I interviewed, John Bunting, ex Sheffield steel worker, who with his wife Irene attended many of those rallies in the 30's

"On one hillside there's be the speakers and on other hillside there'd be – oh many hundreds of cyclists, walkers – anybody who were interested in walking in countryside and on occasion there weren't hundreds, there were thousands – because we didn't want to shoot grouse or kill foxes or pinch birds eggs – only what we just wanted – a lovely walk , a nice quiet walk in lovely scenery – that's all what we wanted and thank goodness we've now got it."

The plaque on the right commemorates young ramblers from Manchester and Sheffield, who took part in the famous 1932 Kinder Mass Trespass. People were desperate to get out of the cities:

"Bear in mind that when you worked in steelworks, before smoke abatement, you never saw the sun for a week. You were working and living in a terrible atmosphere."

Some of the mass trespassers, led by a young man from Manchester called Benny Rothman – were arrested – and there was a public outcry about this.

Song:

*Remember those who stuck at nothing
But kept slogging up the hill
For the right to spread their wings and take their space
Negotiators, demonstrators, all who spun the dream
That you and me might claim our rightful place
Trespassed for us and against those
Who kept beauty for themselves
Who fenced us out for profit and for greed
But now the way is open for us all to share this land
And the beauty and the glory's ours indeed.*

*Trespassers will be celebrated now their will is done,
Trespassers will be celebrated, glorious kingdom come,
By those who walk the southern downs, the high and windy moor,
Trespassers will be celebrated, freedom is won.*

John Bunting, still an active trespasser in the 1980s and 90's as part of Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland – says this of the Kinder Mass Trespass:

"It brought people's consciousness to the need for ordinary people to enjoy this wonderful land of ours. I've great admiration for Benny for what he did, but there were lots of foot soldiers that never got a mention that were on these walks you know on these trespasses, month after month, year after year and some of them I know their names but very many of them I don't."

So, do have more of a look round if you like. But when you are ready, go out of the Centre and turn right and walk into the village – past the church on your left and join me again outside the Old Nags Head pub at the top of the village.

3. Old Nag's Head

*Song:
Fifty hardy Yorkshire jaggars
Over ridge, black peaty moss
Hauling wool and salt and corn
Through Derwent, Grindsbrook, Edale Cross.....*

The Nags Head – was once a bit of a watering hole for the jaggars or packhorsemen who came this way via a system of ancient trackways carrying wool, hides, salt, iron ore, preserved meat, oats and corn. These high ridge routes were really the only link with the outside world until the 19th century. Stopping here, the jaggars could leave their horses under the old walnut tree just by the cottage opposite which evidently kept them nicely free of flies. You could make a little detour in front of the pub where you'll see the old packhorse bridge over the Grindsbrook.

Grindsbrook Booth is the proper name for this village – Edale being the name of the whole valley. Booth means animal shelter – a bit like the Scottish word bothy. There are 5 booths in this valley – Grindsbrook, Upper, Barber, Ollerbrook and Nether Booth. It was the coming of the railway in the 1890's that really opened up this remote valley to the world – to coal instead of peat, better trade and transport - and of course to those early walkers. Here are John and Irene Bunting again with fond memories of the trains and rambling in the 1930's:

“When we used to go on the train, before I ever knew John, that train used to be packed – all stood up in't corridors – all t' ramblers. They used to have a real old time in that corridor – same coming back. We've scrambled for that train at Edale to get on.”

“I can particularly remember Bamford and big waiting room wi' big roaring fire and we used to have a sing song and train'd be packed and all t' lads'd take light bulbs out so it'd be dark you know things like that – have a snog – if they could get away wi' it.”

Song:

*Under gritstone, Cowburn Tunnel,
Comes the Dore and Chinley Line,
Bringing walkers from the cities,
Pale from work in mill and mine.*

And here's the start of the tough Pennine Way taking people up onto the vast Kinder Plateau. It was the brainchild of another walking campaigner Tom Stephenson. So this, and Kinder, is a big reason why people come to Edale now.

If you, like the packhorse men, are feeling thirsty on your way back there are two cafés – one at the Station, one on your left here next to the shop, and 2 pubs – The Nags Head or the Rambler near the station and you're pretty much bound to find one open. But for now we're going to walk straight on, taking the footpath signed Grindsbrook, on past the little estate lodge, forking right at another sign, over a wooden bridge above the clough and then on and over flagstones as far as the little stone building known as “Billy's Cote” where you might want to sit and enjoy the view.

Song:

*Young and old still walk the tracks
That long ago the jagers rode.
Now Pennine Way and high ridge footpath,
Rucksack now not packhorse load*

4 Billy's Cote

Here's Billy's Cote – it's a traditional little shelter for animals complete with a manger inside. If it's unlocked you're welcome to go in. If you sit on the poetry bench outside, like me, the hill immediately in front of you is the Nab. You can see your way ahead here – diverging off the flagstone path, diagonally up towards the little triangular plantation and the gate known as Nab Stile - which is the boundary of open country.

*Song:
Lay the stone
And heal the land....*

One day, I walked up this way with Sheila McHale, the Area Ranger for these parts and she told me a bit about these new flagstone paths around Edale – and she's laid a fair few herself in her time:

“So as we're walking along this causey path which is based on the old roman and medieval pack horse routes and techniques. We tried all the geo textiles and wooden palings and everything - and in the end this is how we do upland moorland restoration work. The very stones we're walking on are at least 100 years old usually, and they're reclaimed from the old industrial mills of the north - they've been quarried from this part of the Pennines to build the mills and now in their new life they're down here on the Pennine Way. And if people look carefully they'll find little bits where the metal was - where the machinery was fitted into the machinery in the mills.”

*Song:
Walk the stone
And track the land....*

2000 years ago the wide Edale valley below was wooded, with wild animals – boars, bears, mountain cats, wolves. In 1086 the area was recorded in William the Conqueror's Domesday Book as a Royal Hunting Forest. However, “Forest” doesn't mean there were lots of trees then – these would already have been partly cleared for pasture. Sheep have been the most successful farm stock to be kept here for many centuries. However successful is a relative term. It's hard to farm here. The soil is thin, heavy, acid and not very fertile. In the nineteenth century, farming here was in decline, the valley was isolated and life was tough. The coming of the railway in the 1890's improved things - but it's still tough. Farmers have had to find income in new ways – providing holiday cottages, camping barns, trekking centres for the tourists. So a bit of a plea here to respect their work by leaving gates as you find them – either open or closed - and if you have a dog, please keep it on a lead.

We're going to head off uphill here – up to the gate known as Nab Stile and the little plantation planted in memory of Fred Heardman – alias Bill the Bogtrotter – yet *another* walking campaigner who used to run the Nags Head.

Take your time and you might even be lucky enough to spot the hovering kestrels who have taken up residence on the Nab. We'll stop for a proper breather at Nab Stile.

Song

Leave the stone

And view the land.....

5. Nab Stile

We're now at the boundary of Open Country. Looking back the way we've come we can see the difference between the in-bye land - rough pasture reclaimed from the moor - and the uncultivated moorland ahead. And isn't that a wonderful patterning of fields on Grindsbrook Knoll behind Billy's Cote?

So this is the Dark Peak – named after the millstone grit under our feet. As we climb we'll see more of the wide six mile long valley of the River Noe with its various settlements - and the high ridge beyond it of Mam Tor, Back Tor and Lose Hill. The other side of this ridge are Castleton and Hope where the limestone country or the White Peak begins.

The rocks of this area were first layers of sand and mud in an ancient sea, hundreds of millions of years ago. Their sediments were compressed and earth forces buckled and raised them high above sea level. Hills and valleys were carved out by weathering.

Song:

Walking up and out we're at the edge, at the edge,

Walking up and out we're at the edge

The gritstone and the limestone

The Dark Peak and the White

From Yorkshire into Derbyshire

We walk the border line

The city and the country

They high land and the low

Walking up and out we're at the edge, at the edge,

Walking up and out we're at the edge.

As we look back at the skyline to your right is the edge of Kinder and some of the raw gritstone outcrops which circle it. These outcrops are above the Grindsbrook valley and the original Pennine Way path winding up onto Kinder. We'll be able to see it more clearly as we climb. Behind the Nab, not visible here, is Ringing Roger meaning "echoing rocks" its name coming from Rocher or Roche - from

the Norman French who came here to hunt and farm and build a church and a castle just over the ridge at Castleton.

There are some interesting indentations on the hillsides too. On Grindsbrook Knoll, you might be able to make out tracks gouged out by wooden peat sleds used by the Edale people to bring down their fuel from the high moorland. There are similar quarry tracks on the steep sides of Grindsbrook where building stone was brought down from the rocky edges.

We're going to continue to climb steeply for a little while, keeping our eyes and ears sharp for birds in the little plantation. I've heard of wrens, long tailed tits and chaffinches here. Where the steps veer off sharply to the left you have a choice. We can fork off right gently up the little beaten path through the heather, keeping the wall always on my right.

The other way, if you're up for it, is to carry on steeply up the stone path to a rocky outcrop just below the brow of the Nab. You will need to supervise children at the rocky edge. You can join me again - either on the Nab or at the high point on the lower path, just where the view opens out ahead.

If you're an experienced walker, you might want make a detour up to Ringing Roger, finding your own way - but do take a compass and map and know how to use them.

Song:
Walking up and out we're at the edge, at the edge,
Walking up and out we're at the edge...

6. The highest point of the lower path OR the Nab outcrop:

This lovely moorland where we're walking contains not only heather – a fantastic purple in August – but also bilberry, crowberry and moorland grasses. I've heard the call of the grouse every time I've been up here or startled them in the heather. We might be lucky enough to see a mountain hare....

Song:
Backbone of rock stretching under the sky
And under your grasses the old chieftains lie
You mothered their bodies and lifted them high
Backbone of rock stretching under the sky

We're stopping here at the highest point of the walk and looking out over the Edale valley at the high ridge beyond it. On the far right of the ridge is Rushup Edge – don't you love the poetry of some of these names! Moving across to the left and in front of us is Mam Tor, literally meaning "Mother Mountain," and

sometimes called Shivering Mountain due to its many landslips. Between 2000 and 3000 years ago this was a vast iron age hill fort from where you could easily see raiders coming up from the wooded valley below. It was an even older prehistoric burial ground. Moving further to the left, just opposite, is a tiny dip in the ridge. This is Hollins Cross, where the packhorse routes met. This route was also a coffin path where the dead from Edale were taken up and across for burial at Castleton. To the far left of the ridge is Lose Hill where an iron age chieftain is supposed to be buried. But as Mike Harding says, that warrior was followed 2000 years later by another sort of warrior – Bert Ward. The top of Lose Hill is now known as “Ward’s Piece” and was bought by fellow walkers for the rambling campaigner. Believing that everyone should own such land, he in characteristic fashion gave it to the National Trust.

Over further to the left, in the distance, is Win Hill Pyke. The legend is that in the seventh century a Saxon King – Edwin - won a great battle against the King of Wessex here. Edwin is supposed to have camped on Win Hill and his opponent, the loser on Lose or Lose Hill!

Down in the bottom of the valley, there’s the all important railway, still bringing walkers and climbers here to Edale or passengers on and into Manchester or Sheffield. Over in the valley almost opposite we can make out the old cotton mill. Mill workers from Castleton would have walked over the ridge via Hollins Cross just like the pack horse men and the burial parties.

Down and ahead we’re going to join the Ollerbrook. So let’s walk gently on down. We’ll stop near a large beech tree just before the farm gate this side of the brook.

7. The Ollerbrook

Song:

*For this is the joy of life
To be up here where the air is clear
No walls to hold you and fetter
Up on the tops in every weather
Where could you wish for better?
Just being here makes you feel better...*

Looking to our left we can see the rocky edge or Kinder where the Ollerbrook comes tumbling. We’re going to be accompanied by its own music all the way down.

Way up there, the Kinder plateau is some 15 – 20 sq miles of deep boggy peat groughs. It’s hard walking and changeable – to be attempted only with compass, map and navigation skills. But the attractions of Kinder are many and particularly hard won. It was not until the 1950s that parts of it were opened up to the public.

Bert Ward's Clarion Ramblers' Handbook from 1921 carries this letter:

"I have observed gamekeepers in Sunday clothes watching at Edale Station for the arrival of Sheffield and Manchester Sunday morning trains and to see if ramblers attempt to climb any part of Kinder Scout and leave the roundabout footpaths which do not reveal half the glory of that famous plateau and rock edge. There are men fixed at various points on the top to signal and intercept and turn men back – as though they were thieves."

We can walk there now - but it's a fragile landscape. Peat bog is the world's rarest habitat, most of it in Britain. The peat on the plateau is in a very bad way – eroded and bare, due to a combination of higher temperatures, a history of air pollution, overgrazing by sheep, recreational activities and fires but vegetation is gradually being encouraged back. The careful management has resulted in the return of heather and bilberry and a rise in the number of moorland birds - merlin, short eared owl, golden plover, whinchat, ring ouzel, lapwing. Especially with the hotter summers, it is important to do our bit too, and to be careful not to accidentally start fires here as they can burn uncontrollably underground. So no cigarettes, camp fires, stoves or barbeques please. We should also avoid disturbing sheep and ground nesting moorland birds - particularly between March and July when dogs must be on fixed, not extending leads.

But in a moment, we're going on down through several gates towards the little settlement of Ollerbrook Booth. The name comes from Alder Brook - after the alder trees which are still found lower down this little clough. The alder wood was used to make the wooden soles of clogs for the mill and farm workers. Now this beautiful clough contains a singing mixture of not only alder but beech, scots pine, oak, hawthorn and birch. At Ollerbrook Booth, our next stop is as we reach the lane.

8. Ollerbrook

Here we are at the little settlement where we're going to turn right into the farmyard. On the right as we go in there's a lovely old barn, now a bunk barn for walkers - an example of the way in which farmers are diversifying their income in a way that seems to benefit everyone.

In the farmyard, the track straight ahead leads back to the village. But we're turning left onto the path which leads straight back to the Moorlands Centre. We'll be able to look up at Kinder and the Nab and the way we've come.

On our path after some gates and stiles, we're going to again cross the Grindsbrook where you can stop and listen to the water and look out for woodland birds. I hope, when back at the Moorlands Centre, you will agree that this walk with our feet in the heather has lifted your spirits as high as mine and

those of the campaigning Clarion Ramblers, trespassers and other campaigners
twenty, fifty, seventy and a hundred years ago.

Song:

*The ramble will be taken wet or fine
Bring a sandwich, a song
Make sure you're on time
We live to walk and we've travelled far
Our feet in the heather
Our hearts with the stars....*