

Walking weekend based on Youlgreave YH. 18-20th July 2003

Yes, we are a section of the Cyclists' Touring Club but we decided to have a walking weekend in the Peak District, based at Youlgreave Youth Hostel - the old Co-op where the dormitories enjoy names like "Bedding" or "Men's Underwear". We mostly arrived on Friday night and started with the ritual meal in the George Inn.



On Saturday morning seven members of the group descended from the hostel into Bradford Dale where we were treated to the sight of a dipper bobbing around in the shallow water. After a sharp pull up through the woods to Lomberdale Hall the countryside opened out and we took the Limestone Way to Calling Low. As we dropped into Cales

Dale we had a brief glimpse of the limestone crags of Lathkill Dale, but for now we climbed out of Cales Dale and continued to Monyash. In good CTC tradition we tested out the tea shop near the cross roads, but resisted the temptations of the all day breakfasts streaming (or steaming) out of the kitchen.



Bagshaw Dale provided an ideal lunch spot, before reaching the busier Lathkill dale. A variety of cheeses, cooked meats, bread rolls, quiche, fruit and Audrey's sticky date cake were produced from rucksacks and provided an excellent picnic.



We made our way steadily down Lathkill Dale, a dry, stony limestone valley in its upper reaches. Suddenly we were aware that the river had water in it, having emerged from

an underground stream. The path became more distinct and we soon realised that we were walking along a well made path, sharing the gorge with the river, ducks, moorhens and grey wagtails. It is difficult to believe today that this was the scene of 18th century industry: the numerous small caves in the river bank are the only real signs of the old lead mining activity.



It seemed like it was time for another cup of tea, but this was only granted after a stiff climb up into Over Haddon to the hotel at the east end of the village, with splendid views



across the hills. Leaving the hotel we enjoyed good views of the river as we gradually dropped to Conksbury Bridge where we watched some sizeable trout swimming in the river before taking the path along the edge of the flood plain to



Alport. From here it was a short step along Bradford Dale, where we met the three invalids in our party and watched some more dippers before climbing the path into the village just next to the hostel.

As usual, we spent the evening bonding over a meal and some grape juice, joined by Sheila's brother and family. There were also 18 members of the Chelmsford YHA Group cooking a gastronomic extravaganza so facilities in the kitchen were a bit stretched. However, thanks must go to Debbie, the warden, who helped us re-arrange the furniture in the dining room and lent us extra cooking pots from her kitchen. Thirty plus people sat down comfortably to their evening meals.

On Sunday morning we drove to Monsal Head and had a good grumble about a £3.50 car park charge before setting off down the hill into Monsal Dale with spectacular views of the old railway viaduct.



After a pleasant river walk to Lees Bottom through meadows full of wild flowers, we climbed a wooded valley to Taddington Field.



Halfway up the climb we saw a greater spotted woodpecker and spent several minutes watching it progressing up the trunk of a tree, before flying off.

Another frugal lunch was eaten in a field near Taddington overlooking the Wye valley. We then walked through the very pleasant village of Taddington and cut off through the churchyard to Priestcliffe. After a steady climb past New Barn we found ourselves overlooking the River Wye again by Priestcliffe Lees. On the descent to the river we were delighted to find several Lesser Spotted and Early Purple Orchids.

A short walk along the Monsal Trail brought us opposite Litton Mill, where we intended to cross the river for a cup of tea. Sadly the bridge was closed because of building works,



but an elderly gentleman said we should ignore the "Path Closed" sign on the Monsal Trail and take the high level path bypassing the old railway tunnel, which is firmly bricked up. It turned out to be



the best part of the route, being a narrow, but well trodden path along the top of the cliffs forming the Wye gorge, known here as Miller's Dale. The path dropped down to Water-cum Jolly Dale where we crossed the river to Cressbrook for a cup of tea and a lemon sorbet.

We retraced our steps to the right bank of the river and followed the Monsal Trail to cross the river again on the Monsal Head viaduct. At one point we saw some of the black and yellow striped caterpillars of the Cinnabar moth, which is about the only animal that is not poisoned by ragwort, its favourite food. Finally we ascended the steep path to the Monsal Head Hotel to reclaim our cars and drive back home reflecting on an excellent weekend walking in very pleasant countryside with some interesting flora and fauna.