

Bakewell, Little Longstone and Ashford

This walk starts in the market town of Bakewell then makes use of a quiet section of the Monsal Trail to reach Little Longstone. The return is along green lanes and fields, passing through Ashford-in-the-Water en route.

Walk Facts:

Start	Car park at the old Bakewell railway station (SK 222 690) on a minor road above Bakewell
Terrain	Good path along the Monsal Trail for the first half, returning along tracks and field paths
Length	Nine miles
Time	Three to four hours
Food/Drink	Good selection of shops, cafes and pubs at Monsal Head, Ashford and in Bakewell
Toilets	Monsal Head, Ashford and Bakewell

Route

To reach the car park from Bakewell, cross the river bridge heading towards Chatsworth on the A619. Immediately after the bridge turn right onto a minor road and follow the signs for the Industrial Estate uphill. The car park is at the entrance to the industrial estate, where the road levels out.

Walk to the left of the old station building and turn left onto the Monsal Trail. This is the route of the former railway which ran from Derby to Manchester. The section north of Matlock was closed in 1968 but times change and plans are being mooted to re-open it as a passenger and freight line. Should it ever happen, this will be a good thing in some ways as it will make the Peak District more accessible by public transport. On the down side, it may also lead to the loss of this popular walkers' route.

However all that is well into the future so on with the walk. The first three miles involve simply following the trail, so I don't need to give instructions. The route passes through countryside with good views and there are masses of wild flowers growing on the embankments, including cranesbills by the thousand in July and August. Shortly after going under the second road bridge, the left-hand side of the trail has a lot of wild raspberry canes. The fruit (in July) is delicious! The raspberries remain in evidence for the best part of a mile - strangely enough they seem to prefer the left-hand side of the path!

Eventually, not long after passing between the well-maintained platforms and buildings at the former Great Longstone station, you are directed to leave the trail to the right and follow a field path to Little Longstone. The reason for the diversion is that the railway went through a tunnel a little further on and this has been sealed off. Once you reach the village of Little Longstone, turn left onto the road and follow this to Monsal Head.

After admiring the view from Monsal Head and visiting the pub or cafe, go through the stile above the dale, turn left and take the footpath signposted to Ashford (ignoring those to the car park and Monsal Dale). The

path runs above the dale for a while, then turns sharp left into a track between walls. The early stages of this path used to be a muddy quagmire but it has recently been excellently restored.

After crossing several stiles, the path turns left again into a large field. Walk down this, keeping the wall on your right, before passing through yet another stile to enter a second walled lane. Follow this all the way into Ashford village.

Ashford is an ancient village; a settlement here was noted in the Domesday Book. It's well worth looking around the village and if you're in need of refreshment, the pub, shop and cafes should provide relief. The church is pretty and has nice stained glass windows, some of which are by William Morris.



Also worth a visit is the old 'sheepwash bridge' (pictured). Until fairly recently, sheep were ducked in the river here to clean them before shearing. The bridge itself is on an old packhorse route; up to 300 horses crossed it every week in the seventeenth century.

Walk through the village until you come to the Chesterfield road, opposite the pretty cricket ground. Cross the road and take the gated lane which is to the right of the cricket ground. This was the main route until the new bridge was built in the 1970s.

Reaching the A6 road, turn left and walk along the pavement for a few metres, then follow a finger-post onto a footpath through the fields on the left. There is a notice which instructs you to stay on the path and not walk along the riverbank.

Follow the path through several fields until you eventually reach a residential road. Walk up this to reach the A6 and then follow the pavement alongside the road down the hill into Bakewell.



Bakewell itself is a pretty place and well worth some exploration. There are two ancient bridges - one you pass just before the buildings of Bakewell begin (after the factories are passed). The other you cross to get back to the start point. The town centre has recently been redeveloped, to a mixed reaction although I quite like the new buildings. There are some nice shops, too, particularly if you like books!

Once the river is reached, cross it using the second ancient bridge (now carrying the Chatsworth road) and follow the minor road back to the car park. As you climb above the town, look behind you and imagine how nice the view used to be prior to the construction of the new cattle market building. In my view this is one of the ugliest, most out-of-place buildings ever to soil a National Park!

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