

# **CYCLING IN THE PEAK DISTRICT**



### About the Author

Chiz Dakin's cycle touring adventures almost happened by accident, when after a local photography trip by bike she realised that she'd done 50 miles in a single day with a reasonably heavy load. This led to the disconnected logic that if she could do that once, she was now ready to tackle multi-day cycle touring, and two weeks later set out on the Land's End to John o' Groats route.

Since then she's done several other multi-day trips including a pioneering Welsh coast cycle route (600 miles and 16km of ascent) but still maintains that you don't need to be seriously fit or fast to enjoy long multi-day routes. (She certainly makes no claim to being either!) She has previously won an Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild award for her photography.

### Other Cicerone guides by the author

*Cycling in the Cotswolds*

*Outdoor Photography (with Jon Sparks)*

# **CYCLING IN THE PEAK DISTRICT**

**by Chiz Dakin**

**CICERONE**

2 POLICE SQUARE, MILNTHORPE, CUMBRIA LA7 7PY  
[www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk)

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And finally to Rob – for 'JFDI!'

*Front cover:* Crossing the Ogden Brook near Tintwistle on the Tour de Peak District (Day 3)



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### Symbols used on route maps

	route		café
	alternative route		public house
	road route		wide range of refreshments available
	start/finish point		cycle hire
	start point		transmitter station
	finish point		wind turbine
	alternative start point		viewpoint
	alternative finish point		
	route direction		
	steep ascent/steep descent		

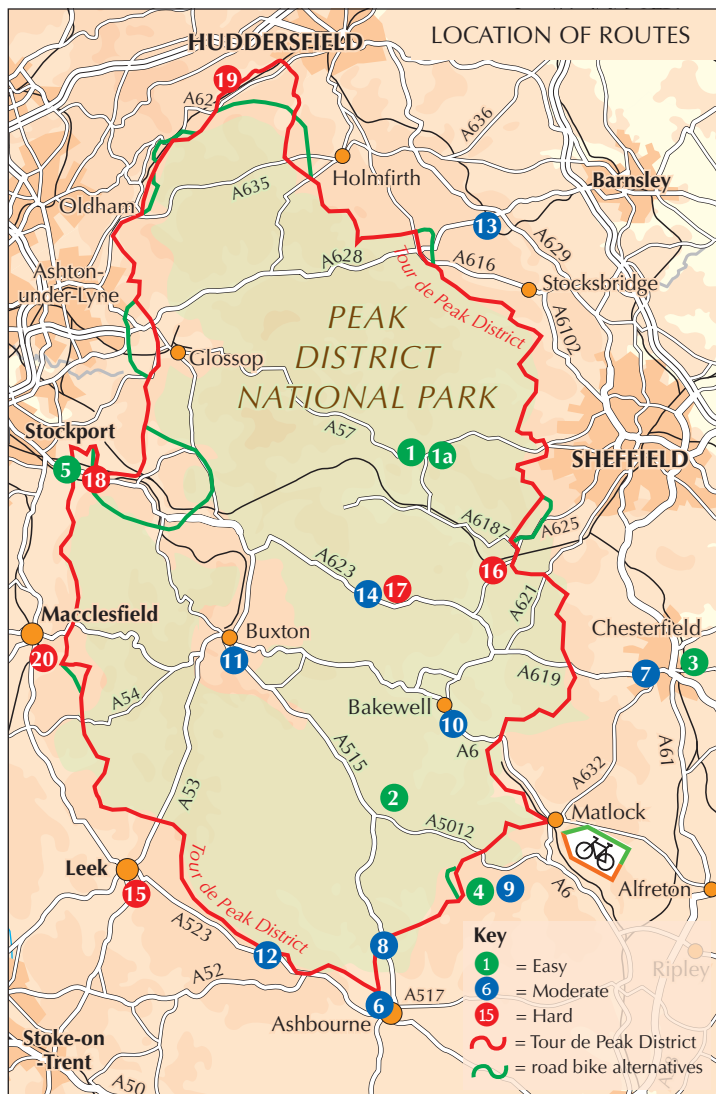
0 kilometres 1 2  
0 miles 1

Contour lines are drawn at 50m intervals and labelled at 100m intervals. Route maps are drawn at 1:100,000 (1 cm = 1 km)

### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/878/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/878/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, 2 Police Square, Milnthorpe LA7 7PY, United Kingdom.

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## PREFACE TO THE 2ND EDITION

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A surprising number of changes have taken place since the first edition of this guidebook. In the light of this, several of the routes have undergone a number of changes. Often these are just tweaks – little bits of road or trail that just work better than the original – but some are more significant, due to changes in what is rideable or changes to rules and regulations.

For example, towpaths under the Canal and River Trust have become legally available for cyclists to use – without any need for that awkward permit you were supposed to get under British Waterways. This has opened up quite a few possibilities, altering the Tour de Peak District route for the better in the northwest and west. New linking sections have been built, but some future links that were expected in the first edition haven't been... Sadly, the tightening-up of rules on non-rail users parking at railway car parks – particularly those in rural areas with no other nearby parking – has also forced a few unintended changes.

The other change I was hoping to make was to create a road-only version of the Tour de Peak District multi-day route (TdPD). Although I've included a tarmac plus rail trails route for those with skinny tyres, the reality is sadly that any TdPD road version requires significant experience, confidence and competence in riding on main/very urban roads – particularly on the west side (Day 3) – which isn't ideal. So the main route remains best done on a gravel bike, with a few sections that are 'proper' but fairly short-lived MTB terrain.

When researching the first edition, I used a mountain bike with slick tyres. Slick tyres are faster on quiet country lanes, and as I wouldn't ever class myself as awesome on the technical stuff, I didn't feel there was any real need for knobbles as I'd bottle out first! Things change: I soon realised knobbles are useful – especially in mud!

As well as being reluctant to walk any distance with the bike over technical bits, I also have a strong aversion to riding on the A-roads so beloved of club road cyclists. Their tarmac may be smooth and the hills usually gentle, but they're just not fun to ride, especially with heavy or fast traffic.

The ideal ride, in my opinion, has always been a mix of the best of the two. Quiet lanes, lovely downhill, and not overly technical off-road bridleways, trails and tracks. At the same time the guidebook market appeared to have a glaring hole for this type of riding – even though it seems to be what the average 'non-club' rider enjoys.

Recently, a new sort of bike has come onto the market, and is gaining market-share very rapidly. It's called a gravel bike, and seems to combine the advantages of both road and mountain bikes – with a similar ability to lap up the miles on tarmac as a road bike, while still being very capable off-road. In re-riding the routes for this second edition with a gravel bike, I've come to realise that while a gravel bike isn't essential to enjoy these routes, they are a perfect match for such a bike!



*Cycling through the cutting near Parsley Hay on the Tissington Trail (Route 8)*

## INTRODUCTION

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Cycling around a bend on a narrow moorland lane above Hathersage, I stopped briefly at a wider space on the lane to write up some notes from the route I was recceing. I'd only written a few words when the friend I was cycling with whispered, 'Chiz, look over there – there's a curlew on the ground!' I dropped my pen and paper and shuffled over to a drystone wall, hoping that any movement I made would be hidden by the wall. Peeking over, there was not only one curlew but three, and they seemed to be in some sort of dispute – perhaps two males vying for the attention of a female!

They were much larger than I'd imagined – previously having only

ever heard them in the sky above – and by staying low by the drystone wall we were treated to a display of low-flying acrobatics for several minutes. Eventually one flew away over the fields below, one landed on the moorland nearby and one disappeared into long grass at the far end of the field. Such encounters are not common, but when they happen they are all the more special for their rarity – had we been in a car, we'd have whizzed past so fast we'd never have even seen the first curlew; walking, we'd probably have disturbed them with our movement before we got close.

Cycling, however, is the perfect way to experience the countryside: fast enough to cover a good distance



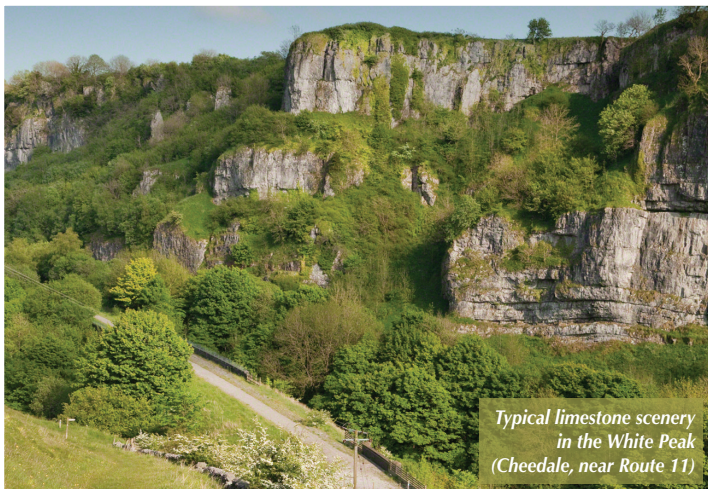
## CYCLING IN THE PEAK DISTRICT

over the ground, yet slow enough to really enjoy the sights, sounds and (mostly!) the smells. From the pungent aroma of wild garlic, the swathes of bluebells that carpet the floor of many woodlands in spring, the haunting cry of the curlew or joyful tweet of the skylark, to the purple blush of vetch in summer or flowering moorland heather in early autumn: on a bicycle the variety of the landscape can be appreciated in both detail and grander scale.

The Peak District needs no introduction to many – it has a string of firsts and mosts in England and the UK to its credit. It was the first National Park to be created in 1959; it's the most central National Park and the nearest wild outdoor space to the largest percentage of the population.

Its 'Wonders' were first eulogised by William Camden in the 16th century in *Britannia* (the first topographical and historical survey of Britain) and it is now one of the most popular National Parks in the UK.

While the honeypots of Castleton, Bakewell and Dovedale can get very busy at the height of summer, they can soon be left behind on the quiet lanes and tracks that criss-cross this wonderfully varied region. This guidebook aims to introduce the reader to some of these wonderful routes, covering between 15km (10 miles) and 65km (40 miles) in a day and leading up to a finale of the multi-day Tour de Peak District – a five-day route running roughly around the edge of this fantastic region and within the grasp of anyone of average fitness.



*Typical limestone scenery  
in the White Peak  
(Cheedale, near Route 11)*



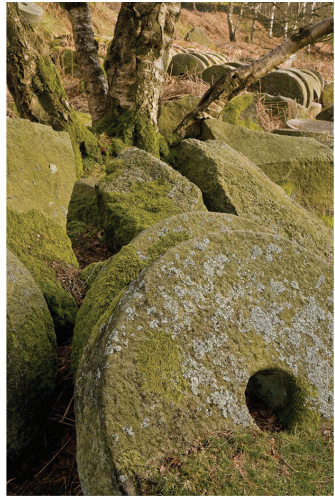
## GEOLOGY

The Peak District was once a shallow tropical sea, and had you been riding 350 million years ago you would have been close to the Equator and completely underwater (perhaps that'll be more believable to those visiting on a dull wet day!). Fringed by coral reefs and sea lilies (crinoids) with shellfish swimming around, the calcium carbonate of their remains went on to form limestone.

Later on (325–300 million years ago) the tropical sea slowly drained away when a huge river delta to the north advanced slowly southwards. This river delta dropped first mud, then coarser layers of sand and grits, today known as gritstone.

These two types of rock – limestone and gritstone – are the main constituents of the Peak District. The differences in colour and the distinctive separation of the two types of rock – roughly gritstone to the northern, western and eastern fringes, and limestone in the central and southern areas – led to the popular names of 'White Peak' and 'Dark Peak' for the southern limestone and northern gritstone regions respectively. Gritstone is sometimes also called 'millstone grit' due its long-standing use for millstones.

There is also a third, lesser known type of rock: an area of shale, formed from the early mud layers deposited by the encroaching river delta. This is often exposed on the boundary between the older limestone and



*Abandoned millstones at Lawrencefield (near Route 16) – a common use for gritstone, hence its alternative name 'millstone grit'*

more recent gritstone – the 'shivering mountain' of Mam Tor (Route 17) is a good example of this intermediate layer.

More recently (geologically speaking) the region was lifted and folded to form a gentle dome. Overlying deposits of coal were eroded, followed by some of the gritstone and shales, revealing the weaker limestone beneath the higher parts of the region. Being weaker, this limestone has eroded more quickly, leaving behind gritstone edges such as Froggatt, Stanage (Route 16) and Windgather Rocks (Route 18).



*The bright yellow siskin can frequently be seen near the River Derwent; Finches, like this chaffinch, are a common sight*

### **WILDLIFE**

There is a surprising variety of animals to be seen in Derbyshire and the Peak District. Aside from the ubiquitous Derbyshire sheep, llamas and alpacas are farmed at many locations across the region, and there are even a few ostrich farms. Wilder creatures such as deer, foxes and rabbits are all frequently seen, but quiet footsteps can also reward you with glimpses of startled stoats and even adders.

Other less common sightings are of mountain hares and red-neck wallabies. The original group of wallabies escaped into the wild from a private zoo near the Roaches (Routes 15, 20

and TdPD) in the late 1940s. Their descendants were thought to have become extinct around 2000, but recent sightings in the Roaches and Buxton areas suggest otherwise. At least one yak also escaped at the same time; it was last seen on the moorlands in 1951, so yaks are unlikely to be part of Peak District wildlife these days – but like Scottish wildcats, you never know!

Near water or hay meadows, dragonflies and all sorts of butterflies are frequently sighted. More rarely, water voles can sometimes be seen beside streams, and the strange sucker-mouthed river lamprey exist

in our waterways (although these are usually only sighted by experts).

Any cyclist interested in birdlife will find the Peak District a fantastic location, with a wide abundance of species, from the tiny goldcrest, the redstart and the brightly coloured siskin to curlews, buzzards and geese. Kestrels are frequently seen hovering over fields and moorlands, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting small mammals. Grouse are a common sight and sound on the moorlands, but more common still is the pleasant warble of the skylark, high above the ground; lower down, the weaving acrobatics of swallows also provide entertainment.

In the vales and dales, dippers are often seen bobbing alongside limestone streams. Ducklings, stonechats (named for their distinctive call which

sounds like small stones knocking together) and finches of all descriptions are a common sight, especially in early to mid-summer, and the lucky viewer may get to see a kingfisher along the banks of the River Derwent. On the reservoirs and other larger bodies of water, goshawks often hover high above honking geese on Ladybower (Route 1), while osprey in the migratory season and lapwings in winter grace Carsington Water (Route 4).

### **PLANTS AND FLOWERS**

While snowdrops are often the first to flower, it's usually March before more wild flowers are in evidence, with daffodils being among the first (Route 19 has a surprisingly good display up the hill to Wessenden Moor). Soon after that, bluebells form carpets of blue for

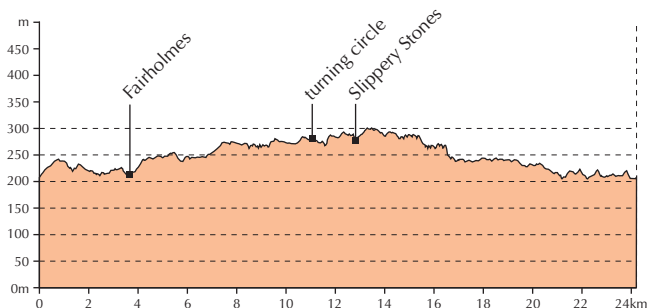


**ROUTE 1***Ashopton loop via Derwent Reservoir*

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Roadside parking at Ashopton Viaduct on A57 just west of A6013 (SK 195 864). Alternative start at Fairholmes beside Ladybower Reservoir (SK 171 893).
<b>Distance</b>	24km (15 miles)
<b>Total ascent/descent</b>	290m
<b>Grade</b>	Easy
<b>Surface</b>	55% road, 45% trail
<b>Refreshments</b>	Kiosk at Fairholmes
<b>Parking</b>	Free at Ashopton Viaduct; pay & display at Fairholmes
<b>Cycle hire</b>	Available from Peak Cycle Hire (Fairholmes)
<b>Road bikes?</b>	Rough surfaces in places – minimum gravel/hybrid bikes

This route is good for parties of mixed abilities, with a variety of options to keep most cyclists happy. The route is fairly flat, on tarmac all the way from Ashopton to the turning circle shortly before Slippery Stones, then a mixed surface beyond the turning circle. The surface may be moderately rough past Slippery Stones to Howden Dam, particularly near Cold Side.

Parties with young children may wish to start at the Fairholmes car park (cycle hire centre) and do a shorter (17km/10½ mile) version of this route; those with extra energy can extend the route along the Ladybower and Thornhill trails (see Route 1a).



## ROUTE 1 – ASHOPTON LOOP VIA DERWENT RESERVOIR



Start from the on-road parking and follow the pavement-based cyclepath westwards over the **Ashtopon Viaduct**, then turn right up the road towards Upper Derwent Dams.

This runs alongside the north arm of Ladybower and gently climbs past **Crookhill Farm** before undulating past the first of several intermediate car parks and Ashtopon War Memorial (moved here from its drowned village when the reservoir was built).



## *CYCLING IN THE PEAK DISTRICT*

Stay on this road for nearly 3km to a roundabout by the entrance to **Fairholmes car park**. Continue straight across (or right for refreshments/the cycle hire centre); the road is normally closed to all vehicles (other than estate management vehicles) at weekends and bank holidays from here onwards. It rises more steeply past Derwent Dam, and just over 1km later bends left to start the long detour round Ouzelden Clough.

**Derwent Reservoir** was made famous by 617 Squadron's precision training flights in preparation for delivering Barnes Wallace's bouncing bomb to the German Ruhr Valley (although no bouncing bombs were actually dropped here).

It's a gentle descent and re-ascent past **Ouzelden Clough**, but the bend is fairly sharp. Once back beside the main reservoir, look out for an information board on the right.

This marks the site of Tin Town – **Birchinlee village** – a planned settlement by the Water Board for 600–1000 navvies and their families during the building of the Derwent and Howden Dams in the early 20th century.



*Derwent Canteen – remnants of a 'Tin Town' social building*

Continue past **Tin Town**, rising up gently as you near the imposing structure of Howden Dam. Bend left to start a long 1.5km 'detour' westwards to cross the **River Westend** inlet, again with a gentle descent and re-ascent to the old stone bridge across the stream.

Returning to the main body of the reservoir, bend left to start following the northern arm at a point where a triangular patch of conifers juts out into the water. Stay on the tarmac public road to its end, overall descending gently to a roundabout. Go through a small wooden gate onto the hardpacked gravel bridleway towards Slippery Stones, then descend moderately to a bridge made of cobbled stone slabs. (You're not yet at Slippery Stones, but the bridge may be slippery!) Rise uphill on a good but steep track through the pine plantation.

The track now undulates briefly for 1km before descending to a wooden gate on the right, shortly before the bridge at **Slippery Stones**. Descend through the gate to cross the bridge and continue upstream on the far side for roughly 100m to reach a junction of paths.

Turn sharp right, following cycle route signs, to take a downstream course. Rise uphill gently on a good solid sandy track below **Cold Side** (some people may find this rough at times, depending on the current state of erosion/maintenance). As the gradient eases you can now see the track gently descending round the reservoir basin for several hundred metres ahead. Bend gently left, then descend on a moderate gradient to cross the inlet of **Howden Clough**.

As you pass Howden Dam again the Slippery Stones bridge is 3km behind you, and it's roughly another 500m ahead to cross a bridge over **Abbey Brook**. Continue along a good smooth track, past a stand of beech trees, and then descend once more. Beware of gravel and speed-humps.

If the wind is strong and (typically) from the SW, you may see the **spray** being blown back and upwards from the central spillway of Howden Dam – it's quite a bizarre sight.

A further 1km brings you to a gentle bend left, where the view suddenly opens out wide across to Derwent Dam. The track continues to roughly contour along through very pleasant beech woodland, before crossing an old stone bridge over Hollin Clough. Go through a small wooden gateway to briefly regain tarmac, then at the end of the track join a minor road. **Turn right down the road to cut the route short and finish at the cycle hire centre at Fairholmes.**

Bearing left to continue, rise up the tarmac lane, and as you pass Old House Farm look right to see an aqueduct stretching across the reservoir, which looks somewhat out of place. The trail now has a couple of short but steep descents over the next 1km. Keep your speed down if it's busy, and if you look left along this



section you may see a rare example of the ancient art of hedge-laying. The second descent leads to a bridge over **Mill Brook**, which was once the power supply for an ancient corn mill.

The surface now reverts to well compacted dirt-gravel. Continue gently uphill, passing through a small wooden gate as Ashopton Viaduct comes into view. Stay right to keep on the main track, and go over a small rise before descending on a rougher surface to another wooden gate.

Bend right across the bridge over Grainfoot Clough and the track now undulates for just over 1.5km, rising slightly overall. As the first gradient eases, stay right on the main track and continue uphill over slightly rough ground.

Approaching the Ashopton Viaduct again, a wooden gate leads to a tarmac lane at a sharp bend. Take the downhill fork to the **A57**. Cross this onto the cycle-path and either return to your start point at **Ashopton Viaduct** or continue onto the extensions around Ladybower/Thornhill (Route 1a).