



# 27 STAFFORDSHIRE/DERBYSHIRE BUNSTER HILL & DOVE DALE

▶ Distance: 8 miles/13km ▶ Time: 6 hours ▶ Grade: Moderate



## THE DOVE FROM ABOVE

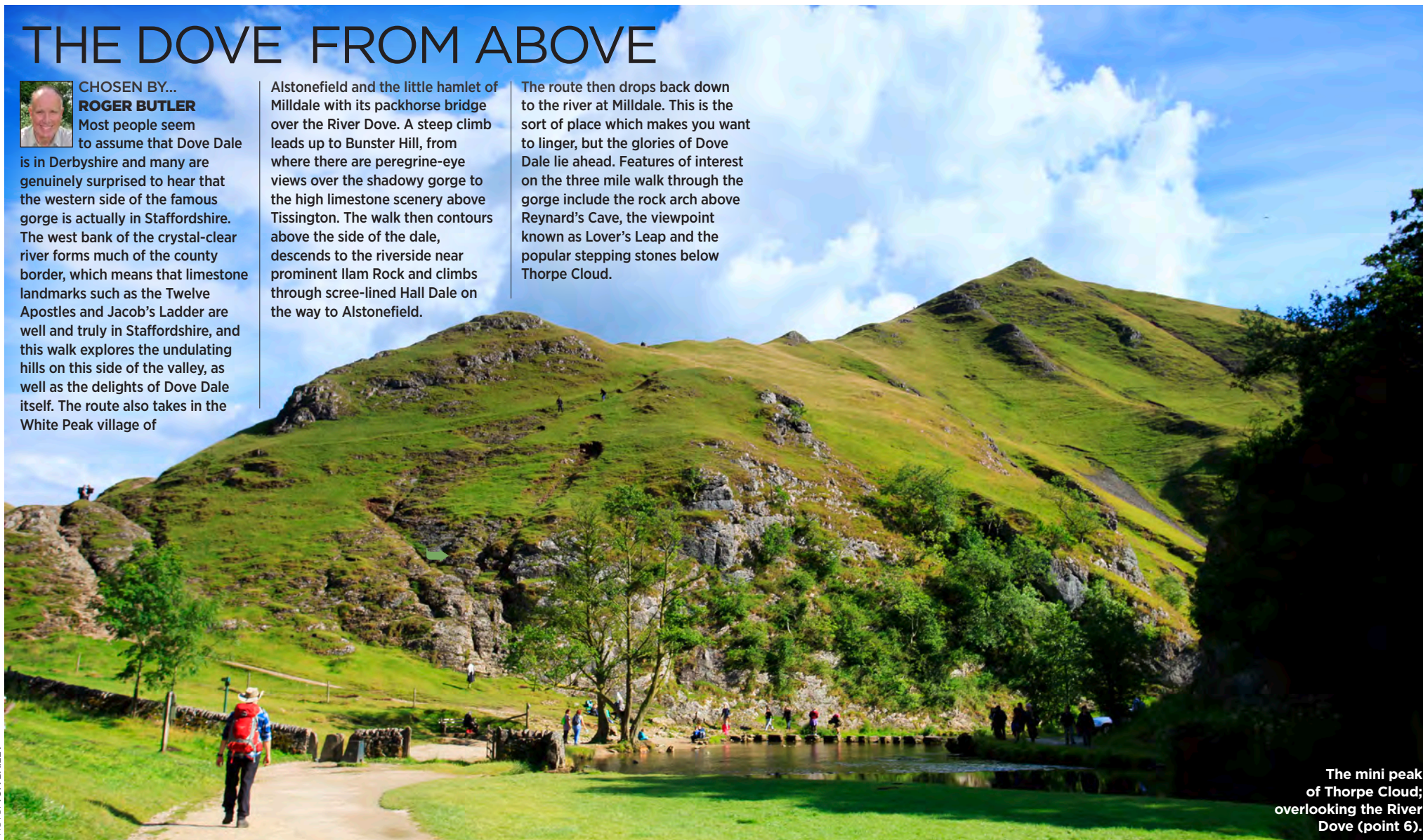


CHOSEN BY...  
**ROGER BUTLER**

Most people seem to assume that Dove Dale is in Derbyshire and many are genuinely surprised to hear that the western side of the famous gorge is actually in Staffordshire. The west bank of the crystal-clear river forms much of the county border, which means that limestone landmarks such as the Twelve Apostles and Jacob's Ladder are well and truly in Staffordshire, and this walk explores the undulating hills on this side of the valley, as well as the delights of Dove Dale itself. The route also takes in the White Peak village of

Alstonefield and the little hamlet of Milldale with its packhorse bridge over the River Dove. A steep climb leads up to Bunster Hill, from where there are peregrine-eye views over the shadowy gorge to the high limestone scenery above Tissington. The walk then contours above the side of the dale, descends to the riverside near prominent Ilam Rock and climbs through scree-lined Hall Dale on the way to Alstonefield.

The route then drops back down to the river at Milldale. This is the sort of place which makes you want to linger, but the glories of Dove Dale lie ahead. Features of interest on the three mile walk through the gorge include the rock arch above Reynard's Cave, the viewpoint known as Lover's Leap and the popular stepping stones below Thorpe Cloud.



The mini peak of Thorpe Cloud; overlooking the River Dove (point 6).



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► OS Explorer map OL24 ► Buy maps at: [ordnancesurvey.co.uk/shop](http://ordnancesurvey.co.uk/shop)



**1 Start**  
From car park turn R on lane for 100m. After field, cross stile on L (marked Open Access) and climb uphill on indistinct path through interesting limestone flora with occasional patches of scree. The steep ascent of approx. 100m climbs a southern spur of Bunster Hill with glorious views over Dove Dale and the pyramidal summit of Thorpe Cloud - the hills rise dramatically above the fertile pastures around Ashbourne. The crest of Bunster Hill now lies ahead - follow a series of undulating knolls which stretch for 450m to a stile on L, just before wood on skyline. Walk to next field corner, at the top of a long grassy ridge, turn sharp R and contour ahead for 370m with wall/fence on R. Join concessionary path at the gate on R, continue N, pass barn on R and after 200m turn R on track by Ilamtops Farm, leading E towards Air Cottage.

**2 1½ miles/2km**  
Follow footpath signs around S of cottage, descend into trees and turn sharp L on established woodland path (route varies from right of way shown on OS map) along western rim of Dove Dale.

Continue for 750m, over two stiles, to path junction. Turn R, steeply downhill, through dense woodland with many timber steps, to River Dove. Turn L for 400m, pass through squeeze stile, and go L up the dry valley of Hall Dale.

**3 2¼ miles/3.75km**  
Good path runs up the dale for 1.5km, with stiles and gates, and leads NW to fields at Stanshope. Walk up to track, turn L for 100m and go R at junction of lanes. Pass Grove Farm on R and walk downhill for 500m on path between walls. Cross lane, pass through squeeze stile and follow bridleway, initially steeply through trees, for 700m through fields to Alstonefield.

**4 4½ miles/7km**  
After exploring the attractive village, join Millway Lane which leads S past the church. Go through first small gate on R after church and walk S-SE to a squeeze stile near corner of field. Veer R and continue downhill, over sloping fields, via two small gates to reach small flight of steps into Milldale, where National Trust information barn can be found by the old packhorse bridge.

**5 5¼ miles/8.25km**  
Cross bridge and join the path running S along the E side of the river - you are now in Derbyshire. The walk is straightforward and twists between Baley Hill and Raven's Tor to pass the caves at Dove Holes after 1.3km. The valley widens, but narrows again near the spire known as Ilam Rock. A section of timber decking carries the path through the narrowest part of the gorge. Look for the stone arch by Reynard's Cave, high on L, and continue S to pass the rocky pinnacles known as Tissington Spires. The path climbs over a crag called Lover's Leap, with views over the river to spires steeply known as the Twelve Apostles. The valley is wooded but until sixty years ago tree cover was limited as the slopes were grazed by sheep - clearance has now taken place to help recreate the famous views.

**6 7¼ miles/12.5km**  
Continue to the stepping stones and, after 4.5km of scenic splendour, cross river here (if conditions allow) to join the lane back to car park or continue, after a sharp R bend, on riverside path below Thorpe Cloud to a footbridge linking to start. **CW**



## PLAN YOUR WALK



### ROUTE

**Start/parking** Car park (with fee) at south end of Dove Dale, DE6 2AY, grid ref SK146509

**Is it for me?** Field, wood and riverside paths with some steep ascents and descents

**Stiles 8**

### PLANNING

**Nearest town**

Ashbourne

**Refreshments**

The George in Alstonefield  
**Public toilets** Alstonefield; car park at south end of Dove Dale (charge)

**Public transport** Nearest station Derby, with bus links to Ashbourne and the on-demand Moorlands Connect bus (01335 342951)

**Maps** OS Explorer OL24; Landranger 119

## VIEW THE WALK ON OS MAPS ONLINE:

[lfto.com/cwroutes](http://lfto.com/cwroutes)

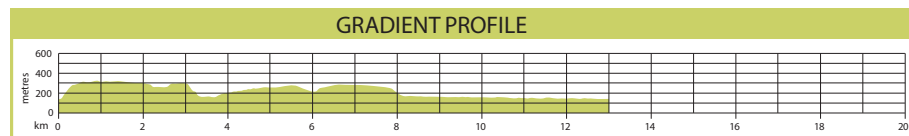
IN ASSOCIATION WITH



OS MAPS



Ordnance Survey



DATE WALKED

TIME TAKEN

YOUR RATING