

The WHITE

A gift to all walkers on our 25th birthday: a new weekend trail

Words: Nick Hallissey Photos: Tom Bailey



to DARK

linking the greatest scenery in the Peak District. Come join us!



Free fold-out
**WHITE TO
DARK MAP**
TURN TO PAGE 35

WHEN SOMEONE HAS a birthday in the *Country Walking* office, they buy cakes. (If it's Jenny, she bakes them herself.) This requirement is non-negotiable. It's in our contracts. So we're good with birthdays, and when we realised CW had a big one coming up – our 25th – we thought we ought to cook up a treat for our readers. So here it is: the White to Dark Way.

The idea is simple: a 25-mile trail (a mile for each year of CW) threading together the best of Britain's most popular national park, easy to reach and perfect for a long weekend. But the White to Dark is not just a walk, it's a journey. We wanted this to be an adventure through the landscapes that make the Peak District unique: limestone dales and wildflower meadows, frothing woodlands and heather moors, vast reservoirs and tiny streams, gritstone edges and rocky hilltops. It's the first walking trail to link together the White Peak and the Dark Peak (hence the name), via everything in between.

Along the way you'll discover the colours and flavours of the district: the crazy fetes and festivals, the local ales and world-famous puddings, the literary landscapes and rare wildlife. You'll see some of the clearest skies in the country, visit unique museums and beautiful churches, and follow in the footsteps of Roman soldiers, Victorian engineers and bomber pilots. You'll visit places you know and places you've never heard of. And we think you'll love it.

In July we'll return to the Peak to put up the waymarks – and you're invited to join us. But in the meantime, the next 14 pages have everything you need to walk the White to Dark now. So that's our cake, hot and fresh out of the oven. Come and get it...

The WHITE TO DARK **THE LOWDOWN**

Total length: 27 miles/ 43km over three days. We tried to get it to 25 dead-on, but that would miss something special, so we thought you wouldn't mind!

Course: Bakewell to Hope, roughly south to north, with overnight stops at Litton and Hathersage.

What you'll see: Monsal Head, Cressbrook Dale, Eyam, Stanage Edge, Ladybower Reservoir, Win Hill and stacks more. Plus three cafés and at least two pubs per day!

Grading: Three medium-length days (seven, nine and 11 miles), with plenty of modest climbing. Only the third could be termed 'challenging' – and it's well worth the effort!

WE'VE PLANNED IT ALL FOR YOU...

- ▶ Full three-day route description.....page 32
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- ▶ Where to stay and eat, and all transport linkspage 36
- ▶ Join us on the trail for a reader weekendpage 37



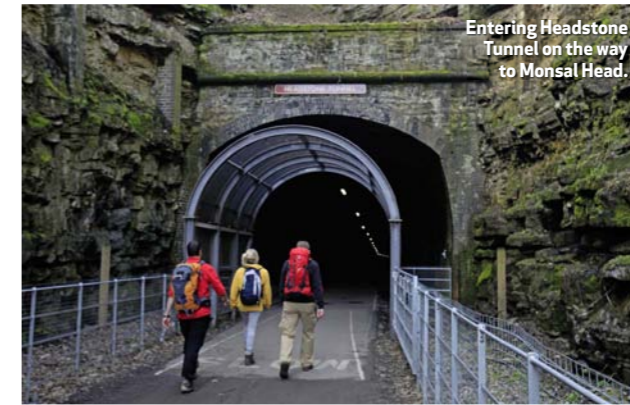
Adios Bakewell: the start of the trail.



Benchmark: the joys of going White to Dark, summed up by a poem en route.



The White to Dark treads along the Monsal Trail for a couple of miles.



Entering Headstone Tunnel on the way to Monsal Head.



Soaking up the classic White Peak view over Monsal Dale from the Headstone Viaduct.



DAY ONE:

Bakewell to Litton

(11km/7 miles)

“The secret lies within.” So says the glass case in the Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop, referring to the secret recipe contained inside. But I'm hoping (as I stuff a small pudding into my rucksack to keep me company) that these words will be just as true for the trail I'm starting out on. The much bigger secret is the Peak District itself, a complex recipe of madly different landscapes, and I'm about to get in and mix it all up a bit.

The first ingredient is water, for the White to Dark Way starts at Bakewell Bridge, the five-arched, 13th-century bridge which crosses the River Wye at the north-west edge of the town. And I'm off, pudding in pack, crossing the meadow beside the Wye and heading up the gently rising grassy hillside that carries me out of town. The view behind me quickly becomes tremendous, the spire of Bakewell church rising out of an early spring haze. Instantly there's a feeling of infinite Peakness: I'm on a beautiful track over a rolling hill, enclosed by immaculate drystone walls. Today I'm walking with David James, the head honcho at Visit Peak District, and he sums it up neatly: “You couldn't be anywhere else, could you?” Too right.

That sentiment is just as true as we descend to join the Monsal Trail – an endeavour on a scale barely equalled anywhere in the country. The trackbed of the old Midlands Railway is now a well-manicured and pancake-flat footpath, shared with good humour by walkers and cyclists alike. Tinkle tinkle go the bike bells, as today's cyclists glide smiling by.

The White to Dark route follows the Monsal Trail for just under two miles. Lately the high foliage that used to enclose it has been trimmed back to show off some wonderful viewpoints, so I can see how the old railway line chugs through a changing landscape of meadow and hillside. Context is everything, and rarely more so on a walk that's going from White to Dark.

I pass the serenely abandoned Thornbridge Hall Station and enter Headstone Tunnel, one of the five Victorian-era tunnels that were reopened last year to make the trail even more of an experience. “The soot from the steam trains acted as a bonding agent,” David tells me. “It helped to hold the stones together as strongly as mortar.” Swiping off a bit with my fingers feels like touching the Industrial Revolution.

The light at the end of the tunnel is not an oncoming train but the iconic Monsal Viaduct. It seems bizarre, today, to think that this great sweep of stone

The climb away from the mill takes me into Cressbrook Dale, and now we're in cast-iron, no-mistaking White Peak territory.



was hated on its construction. For me, it's a rare example of human endeavour actually helping out a beautiful landscape. Monsal Head without its viaduct seems unthinkable.

The best pub-stops on Day One sit high above the viaduct – the Monsal Head Inn and the Packhorse at Little Longstone. Great options both, but munching a sarnie on the viaduct, on a warm spring day, takes some beating.

Next comes the tightly squeezed mini-valley of the River Wye known as Water-cum-Jolly Dale. There's only one dale with a better monicker than this, and I'll be going there tomorrow. Water-cum-Jolly Dale sounds like something from a Noddy book, and it's as beautiful as the name suggests. Descending to the valley floor, I'm met by the Georgian majesty of Richard Arkwright's Cressbrook Mill, framed by woodland and limestone cliffs and tickled by the wending River Wye which once powered its turbines.

The climb away from the mill takes me into Cressbrook Dale, and now we're in cast-iron, no-mistaking White Peak territory. Here are turrets of sheer limestone, jutting out from the steep, green-grass sides of a glacial valley. The hubbub of Monsal and Bakewell has vanished; now it's just me and the landscape. After a long and leisurely time in its deeps, I escape via the narrow side-valley of Tansley Dale and head over lush meadows to reach Litton.

This tiny place high in the White Peak is the perfect end to Day One, with its village green and old stocks – although for an extra mile you could carry on to the bigger town of Tideswell. But on no account miss the Red Lion, our "official" end point, and hailed by many (including Mike Rhodes, the Peak National Park's head ranger) as the finest pub in the White Peak. A pint of Peak Ales' Swift Nick (a regular companion on the White to Dark and brewed down the valley on the Chatsworth Estate) is essential here. Wonder if it was named after me?

TART OR PUDDING? THE TASTE TEST

The saga of the birth of the Bakewell tart and Bakewell pudding has been told many times – a cook at the White Horse Inn pours egg-mix over jam instead of adding it to pastry and jamming over; people like it; she makes more. The tart uses shortcrust pastry, the pudding uses puff pastry.

Two competing outlets – the **Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop** and the **Bakewell Tart Shop and Coffee House** – now produce their own versions of both. So we decided to do a blind taste test, blindfolding Nick and forcing him to consume a medium pudding from the Pudding Shop (£3.40) and a medium tart from the Tart Shop (£3.95). Yes, he has a hard life.

His verdict? "The tart is a real mouthful – a big, solid bite with lovely almonds in there too, and it gets softer as you go through. The



pudding is light, gooey and squidgy right from the off, and the jam and cream are more to the fore. Overall the tart tastes somehow cleverer and classier, good for a civilised dinner party, whereas the pudding is just pure indulgence. Both good for the trail, though!"

THE WINNER: Bakewell Pudding by a whisker. Why not test for yourself: bakewelltartshop.co.uk; bakewellpuddingshop.co.uk



The overhanging limestone cliffs at Water-cum-Jolly Dale.

DAY TWO

Litton to Hathersage

(15km/9 miles)

The trail heads north-east on Day Two, meeting the head of Cressbrook Dale and staring out at the colossal limestone reef of Peter's Stone which stands in its jaws. The first half is all about meadows and pastures: the paths are obvious, the fields bucolic, the squeeze-stiles easy and the cattle well-used to walkers. It's a lovely warm-up for the bigger stuff that follows.

Between Wardlow Mires and Foolow, I pass through Silly Dale. I mention it because it's pretty but also because I believe it's the best-named valley in the world. There was no way I could resist routing the White to Dark past it. Foolow is next. I have a problem with Foolow. When I was ten, my dad made me stand next to a sign for the village, blocking out the 'ow', while mum took a picture of him pointing at me. The resulting familial hilarity has scarred my opinion of Foolow forever. It doesn't help that it comes so soon after Silly Dale. But my gosh, there's nowt daft about Foolow. It's lovely, another perfect little village green, this time with pond, and another fabulous pub, the Bull's Head.



Touching a bit of the Industrial Revolution in Headstone Tunnel.



Nick pays homage to his dad's gag from 1986.

At the Bull I meet walkers Brett, John and Peter. They are the first “normal humans” ever to hear of the White to Dark, and quite coincidentally they’ll be doing a short stretch of it when they leave the pub. I promise them some sort of a certificate. They promise to come back and walk the rest. Before I leave Foolow, in a cathartic moment, I recreate dad’s picture. No hard feelings, Foolow.

A sequence of eight squeeze-stiles and 12 mini-gates (yes, I counted) takes me on to Eyam, nestling beneath a high wooded hillside. It’s yet another gorgeous village, but this time with a sinister twist – a history of plague and pestilence. The plague turned up here in 1665 in a box of cloth sent from London to a local tailor, and went on to wipe out most of the village. It could have spread across the whole county, had the villagers not taken the noble decision to isolate themselves and bury their own dead. Poor Elizabeth Hancock buried her husband and six children in eight days, yet was unaffected herself. Today, walkers can follow its devastating progress through the streets, thanks to plaques on cottages and grave plots that tell the story. The full history unfolds inside Eyam Museum – and no White-to-Darker should miss it.

The climb out of Eyam is steep, but the final stretch to the Roman road over Sir William Hill is magnificent – a gentle bounce along a pristine grassy sward. And then comes one of my favourite parts of the whole trail – the crossing of the open moor down to Stoke Ford. It’s the first trace of Dark Peak wildness, and it brings me past my big Day Two discovery. Bretton Clough, which sheers away to the left, is an utterly beautiful mini-valley that appears to be completely hidden from civilisation.

The moorland becomes woodland as I reach Stoke Ford and turn east along the flank of Eyam Moor, with Highlow Brook trickling away below. Juxtapose this bit against the wall-stiles and meadows of Foolow and my brain can barely accept that it’s the same walk.

From Highlow Hall, the White to Dark Way briefly swerves away from today’s destination, Hathersage, which lies off to the right. Two reasons really: one is to avoid roads, the other is to take in the stepping stones across the River Derwent, a symbolic crossing from White Peak to Dark. The river then guides me into Hathersage, with the horizon beyond crowned by tomorrow’s superstar: a little thing called Stanage Edge.

“I meet walkers Brett, John and Peter. They are the first “normal humans” ever to hear of the White to Dark Way...”

THE COW AND THE SAW DOCTOR

For a real treat, try doing the White to Dark in the week of June 23rd-30th. For this is Wakes Week in Tideswell, a celebration of summer madness with the ancient Peak District tradition of well-dressing at its heart.

One very special part of the pageantry is **Tidza Saw Y’eds**, a mummers play performed by the masked players known as the Tidza Guisers (Tidza being a common nickname for Tideswell). The play tells the ancient story of a Tideswell farmer whose cow gets its head stuck in a gate. Rather than cutting the gate, the farmer decides to cut off the cow’s head. Thankfully, a doctor happens along, sews the head back on and magically brings the cow back to life.

“We perform it a few times during the week, sometimes scheduled and sometimes just turning up in the middle of it all,” says veteran guiser Gerard Rogers. “We like to think it fits with the Wakes Week ethos of surprise and misrule.”

Tidza Saw Y’eds is likely to be staged on June 25th and 30th in Tideswell, and on June 26th in Litton as part of Litton’s own Wakes Week. For dates of more well-dressings along the trail, see page 36.



Photo: Theatre Tideswell

DAY THREE

Hathersage to Hope

(18km/11 miles)

The climb out of Hathersage signals a change into wilder country, so the village churchyard, complete with the alleged grave of Robin Hood’s rugged henchman Little John, feels like the perfect place to start. And just a little further up the valley I reach North Lees Hall – another symbol of wildness, for literary history pegs it as the home of the original ‘Madwoman in the Attic’.

Charlotte Bronte stayed at Hathersage vicarage in 1845, and was so enchanted by the grandeur of North Lees that she cast it as Thornfield Hall, the home of Mr Rochester (and his demented, loft-based wife) in *Jane Eyre*. It’s now owned by the Vivat Trust and available for hire as arguably Britain’s grandest self-catering digs. It has been *Country Walking*’s base while checking the trail, in fact – and it’s a bit special, with its four-poster beds, trompe l’oeil furnishings, mullioned windows and roof terrace. It turns out the Madwoman in the Attic is actually our art editor Rob Holmes, pottering about in the Secret Upstairs Kitchen.

As Rob and I reach the crest of Stanage Edge, there’s a sense of a real walking icon jumping up and slapping us in the chops. If you’ve been reading this magazine for 25 years, chances are you know a thing or two about Stanage. A scarp of millstone grit sweeping in a 15-mile arc around the top of Hathersage, it is simply one of the most breathtaking places to walk in the country. Little wonder we’ve chosen it as our flag-carrier for the Dark Peak part of our trail. It’s all access land, but some of it is privately owned; thankfully the owners welcome responsible walkers along the enthralling path to the summit at High Neb.

Beneath the Neb lie hundreds of millstones, hewn from the edge when this was a virtual factory for the milling trade, but never taken away. All scale is mind-boggling on Stanage, and this abandoned industry is no exception.

At this point, the shapely cone of Win Hill hoves into view on the horizon, and

North Lees Hall: Not too shabby, eh?



Crossing the head of Cressbrook Dale at the start of Day Two.



From High Neb I get a smashing view of where I've come from – and the hill I need to cross to reach the finish.



beyond it, the great bulk of Kinder Scout. Win Hill is the final summit of the White to Dark Way – so from High Neb I get a smashing view of where I've come from, with Offerton Moor and Sir William Hill now sitting far away across the Hope Valley. I can see where I'm going, too. There are a few miles and a hill in the way – but I've been planning and poring over this route for weeks, and I console myself that it's all going to be worth it.

The long promenade around the flank of Stanage yields to a brief road-walk and then a gentle descent along Highshaw Clough, on the edge of the Derwent Moors. Happily we emerge next to the Ladybower Inn (it's almost like we plan these things), then cross the blanched-concrete viaduct over the astonishing Ladybower Reservoir.

It's easy to imagine the drone of Rolls-Royce Merlin engines overhead here: this valley is where the Lancaster bombers of the Dambusters squadron trained for their raid on the dams of Germany's Ruhr Valley in 1943.

Ladybower's dam is an engineering marvel, a mix of strong Dark Peak stone with a wall of clay concealed by smoothly manicured grass. Equally amazing are the "plugholes", two bell-mouthed overflows which give the impression of forcing huge holes in the surface of the water. Their tapering depths resemble the Circles of Hell from Dante's *Inferno*.

The forested lower slopes of Win Hill – the final climb of the White to Dark – now lie dead ahead. It's possible that at this point you won't thank me for putting a hill between you and the end of the trail, but trust me here – it's worth it. Lunatics can make a direct ascent via the steep chute of Parkin Clough, but I'm breaking the contours by skirting up through the plantations on good forest



Crossing the wall of Ladybower Dam.

tracks. The final assault on the summit is steep, but the legs of a White-to-Darker have been well-exercised by now, and when we get there, the feel of reaching a proper dramatic finale is spine-tingling.

Around me lies the Peak District, and I feel like I know it better than ever before. I certainly have a greater sense of how it fits together, and how it evolves from one landscape to the next. More to the point, I've had a damn good walk.

The descent into Hope (always better than a descent into Despair) is quick and simple, a lone hawthorn tree marking our path off the side of Win Hill. Hope offers several fine pubs – the Old Hall and the Woodroffe Arms are good – but our vote goes to the Cheshire Cheese, at the very foot of Win Hill and a four-minute walk shy of the end of the trail in Hope itself. Endorsed by *The Good Pub Guide* and run by mountain leaders Craig and Laura Offless, we've decided this is the "official" end of the White to Dark. But there's always room for a sneaky little pub crawl while you wait for the bus. Cheers! **CW**

YOU WIN SOME, YOU LOSE SOME

Win Hill, the final landmark of the White to Dark, squares off with its neighbour **Lose Hill** across the Noe Valley. Legend has it they get their names from a battle in 626AD, in which the forces of Wessex and Mercia had a rumble with their Northumbrian rivals, the two sides staking out two opposing hills. Despite facing far superior numbers, the Northumbrians won the day by building a wall and rolling boulders down on the other lot. The site of their victory became known as Win Hill, and the losers' hill became... you get the idea. We should point out that there's no historical evidence for the battle whatsoever. But it's a good story.



Heading for a big win: Nick and Rob hit the summit of Win Hill.



'I CAN SEE THE PUB FROM HERE'

The Cheshire Cheese (details on page 36) sits in the wooded dell at the bottom of Win Hill and

makes a fine final stop on the White to Dark Way. It was taken over a year ago by mountaineer Craig Offless (pictured) and wife Laura, who previously worked for adventure firms including World Challenge, helping young people explore the world's wildest places. As well as running the pub, they've also set up Altus Adventure (altus-adventure.co.uk), which runs everything from navigation and scrambling courses to full-on Himalayan expeditions. "I grew up in the Peak District and this where I learned to climb, so this landscape has been part of my life," says Craig. "Walkers are the lifeblood of this pub. I loved walking a bit of the White to Dark, and hopefully from now on we'll welcome plenty of elated White-to-Darkers for a well-deserved final pint!"



Toasting trail's end in the Cheshire Cheese.

THANKS TO...

The White to Dark Way is sponsored by Visit Peak District, TrailZilla and Hi-Tec. Thanks also to the Peak District National Park, in particular Mike Rhodes and the ranger team, and Derbyshire Rights of Way Service, for their invaluable help. Thanks to our guests on the trail, David James and Alina Tween from Visit Peak District, and Craig and Thomas Offless (at age two, the youngest-ever White-to-Darker) from the Cheshire Cheese.

WALK THE TRAIL YOURSELF: For the full three-day route, just turn the page. A complete planning guide, and news of how to walk it with us, are on page 36.

