

Notes relating to the circular walk, Ilam, Milldale, Dovedale and back.

1. Dovedale House was originally the Vicarage for the Parish of Ilam and would house the Vicar, his family and a substantial staff. It has been a Residential Youth Centre since 1960's, and welcomes groups from schools, churches and numerous other organizations. It has been enlarged recently, with further improvements due shortly. DDH is linked closely with the Diocese of Lichfield. St Paul's have been coming every year since 1983.

We walk through the back gate of Dovedale House and into the meadows adjoining Ilam Country Park. We pass Ilam Church on our left.

Church History "The Parish Church, Holy Cross, is a small but beautiful Gothic structure, rebuilt in 1618, and a large portion of the west end is thickly shrouded with ivy. It contains the tomb of St Bertram, who is said to have confirmed the truth of his religious faith by many surprising miracles in this country. An octagonal chapel, lighted with stained glass windows, was added to the church about 20 years ago by Jesse Watts Russell, Esq, who deposited in it a white marble monument, in memory of his late lady's father, the late David Pike Watts, Esq. This much admired monument is one of the finest works of that late eminent sculptor, Sir Fras Chantrey. The vicarage is in the patronage of JW Russell, Esq, and incumbency since 1801 of the Rev Bernard Port, MA."

[From *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, William White, Sheffield, 1851]

2. As we pass through the steel 'kissing' gate you will see Ilam Hall directly ahead of you. **Ilam Hall** is situated in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside, one of the most beautiful scenic places in the UK. It is a majestic building, sadly half the size it once was and is now owned by the National Trust and the YHA.

The estate has a long history. From the time of the Reformation until the early 1800's it was the seat of the influential Port family. From 1809 it was sold on to a David Pike-Watts and upon his death the Hall passed to his daughter Mary. The Hall we see today dates from 1826 from when Mary's husband, Jessie Watts-Russell hired renowned architect of the time James Trubshaw who also built Alton Towers. After the death of Jessie in 1875 the estate passed to the Hanbury family who then sold it on to a Mr. Blackhouse. He tried to turn the hall into a growing concern, converting it into a hotel including a restaurant and golf course. This venture unfortunately failed and he sold off the hall to a demolition company.

Sir Robert McDougall (the flour magnate) saved the Hall from destruction and donated it to the National Trust. The National Trust decided to let the YHA use the Hall as one of its premier hostels and has been since 1935.

3. Continue left through Ilam Country Park, behind the East end of Ilam Church and down towards a walled enclosure. This one of the many wells (springs) in the area.

4. The Bridge in front of you Crossing the River Manifold is **Bertram's Bridge**, a beautiful access bridge for the old Hall and leads to the SW Lodge of the Estate.

Note the weir a little upstream. Above the weir would have been a crossing (ford) point of the river. Notice how much water is flowing across the weir.

5. The River Manifold disappeared **underground** some 8 miles away at **Wetton** and for many miles is a mere trickle on the surface. As you reach the end of the meadow you will see '**boil-holes**' on your right, where the Manifold emerges from its journey underground. Watch as the water re-joins the water course. The River appears to flow backwards as the springs of water spew out and 'back up'

6. You are at the beginning of Paradise walk. Notice:

- the carved Limestone balustrade on your left
- the avenue of lime trees to your right
- Hinkley Wood on the valley side facing; devastated by Dutch Elm Disease, but now recovering
- the River, gradually becoming shallower
- the smell of wild garlic, in profusion to your right

7. Continue over a stile, keeping to the right of the River Manifold. Notice the wealth of wild flowers, the decomposing tree trunks, lambs, cattle, almost dry river-bed and eventually reach the **North Lodge** of the Estate.

8. Carefully cross the road, turn left and (single file) cross the cattle-grid, keeping to the right side of the road. Gradually commence the long ascent out of the valley. Beautiful views across the Manifold Valley. Notice the clumps of trees on hill-tops, generally Beech Trees. You will pass newly planted trees with cages to protect them from grazing animals. The most strenuous part of the walk – take your time.

9. We arrive at **Castern Hall**, turning left behind the Hall, over a cattle grid and upwards towards a farm on your right. Facing the farm is a small stile, clamber up the slope and go through the stone stile – turn right. Notice the large drinking trough for cattle – climb a stile to the road. Walk down towards the farm (50m). You may see calves or ewes and lambs. Keep to the left of the byres and you will see a stile on your left. Bear to your right and contour round the hill. You'll see another stile on your right that goes over the wall and drops down into a field. Keep left and follow the wall. From here, keep the wall on your left and follow the signposts for Milldale.

10. On your right you will see the road that we eventually meet. On reaching the road, turn left. Keep single file on the right side of the road. And continue to **Stanshope** where we turn right down a bridleway to Milldale. The last 'up' of the day – it's downhill from then on. Notice the 'miles' of **limestone walls**, dividing the landscape into little boxes. A final stile and a gradual descent through meadows.

11. Through a stile again and then an extremely uneven and slippery path. Proceed with extreme caution, single file. Notice how smooth the limestone has become; worn down

with thousands of boots. On reaching the road, turn right and again, single file on the right into the village.

12. Lunch at Milldale. Toilets are above the shelter in the village. National Trust information point may be worth a visit.

13. Milldale is a tiny hamlet on the River Dove, and is the chief northerly access point for Dovedale. The hamlet derives its name from an old corn mill situated here but demolished in the mid 19th century. The foundations can still be seen and so can the pool where local farmers washed their sheep in the river prior to shearing - this practice was only abandoned here in the 1960s. Notice:

- the narrow pack horse bridge
- The mill stone abandoned in the River Dove
- The mill 'race' to power the mill wheel and the weir to raise the water level and direct the flow to the mill race and wheel.

14. Cross the pack horse bridge to enter Dovedale proper. Lots to look out for in the long stretch to Lover's Leap, about 3k. Point out:

- Steep limestone walls of the **Dovedale gorge**, once a huge underground tunnel or cavern with the roof collapsed.
- Many **caves and arches**, eroded by underground streams over millions of years.
- Many **springs** just below the footpath, oozing out into and swelling the river. (The water has soaked down through the limestone until it reaches an *impermeable* layer of clay. Water cannot pass through the clay so it emerges as a spring.)
- Numerous birds – Crows, heron, mallard, moorhen, coot, buzzard + others. You may be lucky to see a **Dipper**, small blackbird with white breast; generally bobbing up and down on a stone in the water.
- The many **weirs**, built by fishermen to 'pond' the river. Look out for trout.
- Spectacular **rock formations**, Tissington Spires, Twelve Apostles etc.



15. A short climb up shallow steps brings us to **Lover's Leap**. Lover's Leap is another site of interest at Dovedale, so called as a young broken-hearted lady attempted to take her own life when she jumped from the top. Happily, she survived, as the dense undergrowth broke her fall. Notice how the limestone is polished and smooth.

16. We come to the final stretch of Dovedale with **Thorpe Cloud** on the left. (Cloud is the common name for hills in the White Peak.) You can cross the Dove by the stepping stones and continue on the right of the river. The sluice on the river by the car-park,

monitors the river's flow and sends details automatically to a central water monitoring station for the whole region's river network.

17. Toilet stop at the main car-park, then turn right through addition parking and right again on a muddy track to a stile and open grazing behind the Izaak Walton Hotel.

18. See **Bunster Hill** on your right (an evening stroll, after tea) a favourite for hang gliders and parascending.

19. Finally descend to the road by a short track on the left. Take care as you cross the road. Again you see the River Manifold and elegant arched bridge beyond. The village consists of picturesque **swiss chalet style houses** built by J.W.Russell, and inspired by the buildings he encountered on a Swiss holiday. It is suggested that the previous houses by the river, spoil the view from Ilam Hall and were duly demolished.

20. **The cross** in the village was erected in 1840 in memory of a Mrs Watts Russell whose family had lived in the hall for generations. The top-most section, a cross, is the local war memorial, added after the 2nd world war.

Only a short walk through the village before you take those boots off! **Well Done!**

