

Dovedale and Ilam (9.2 miles, 14.8 km)

At A Glance

- Distance: 9.2 miles
- Time: 3-4 hours
- Grade: Easy ●●●●●
- Terrain: Country lanes, trails and field paths
- Accessibility: Uneven ground, steps, stiles and gates
- Map: Ordnance Survey Explorer OL24

This wonderful route takes you on quiet trails and lanes into the stunning limestone valley of Dovedale. From there it crosses the iconic stepping stones and heads to the very pretty village of Ilam, before returning on peaceful field paths beside the crystal-clear River Dove. There are two pubs en route for refreshments if needed, as well as a snack kiosk in Dovedale and a National Trust tearoom in Ilam.

1. Leave the park by the main exit and carefully cross the road to join the lane immediately opposite (Spend Lane), signposted for Thorpe, Dovedale and Ilam. Take care walking along this lane as there are a few short sections with no pavement, but it is usually quiet.



2. After approx 500 metres look out for a large railway bridge across the road. Immediately before the bridge go through the wooden hand gate on the right and take the path that twists up a set of steps and emerges on to the Tissington Trail. Turn right on the Tissington Trail and walk along this peaceful, tree-lined former railway track for approx 2km. There are lovely views on both sides.

3. Just after a bridge over the trail, look out for a crossroads of paths. Take the path on the left, signposted to Thorpe. Go through the gate and follow the clear path across the field towards the treeline.

4. Go through a small wooden hand gate in a hedge, and then straight on across a further field with a fence to your right. A short distance ahead you'll find a further hand gate. Proceed carefully through this gate as the path emerges straight onto a road. Cross the road and take the lane immediately opposite, signed 'Access Only'.

5. Follow this quiet lane for approx 600m, ignoring all paths off. There are beautiful views on both sides. The lane eventually meets houses and emerges at a T-junction in the pretty village of Thorpe. Turn left at the T-junction and follow the road as it bears right uphill.



6. After approx 200m look out for a red telephone box and bus shelter on the right. Take the public footpath on the right just afterwards, signed towards Dovedale. Go through the gate beside the picturesque Pasture Gate Cottage and follow the path into the spectacular countryside of

Thorpe Pastures. The distinctive conical-shaped hill to your left is Thorpe Cloud.

7. Walk straight on until you reach an area of rock marked with 'Danger' signs (there is a rifle range over the hill). At this point turn left and walk down the hill, heading slightly diagonally right into the obvious valley ahead of you, with Thorpe Cloud to your left.



8. Still keeping Thorpe Cloud on your left, walk to the right of a stone wall and fence, heading downhill through the beautiful valley of Lin Dale. Be aware that the conditions underfoot may be wet and the limestone rocks slippery.

9. The path bears to the left and eventually reaches a gate that leads into the beautiful valley of Dovedale, with the stepping stones ahead of you. This is a great place to pause for a picnic and a paddle, but please help to protect this landscape and take all your litter home with you!



10. Cross over the stepping stones and turn left on the broad track to walk with the River Dove on your left. (If you don't fancy braving the stepping stones, you can walk along an alternative path with the River Dove immediately on your right and cross to join the broad track at a footbridge after approx 500m.) Continue along the broad track for approx 600m, going through a gate beside a cattle grid on the way.

11. As you draw level with the car park, note that there are public toilets and a snack kiosk to your left here if needed. To continue with the walk, turn right through a gate, following the signs for the public footpath to Ilam and Alstonefield. Join a wide access road and turn left for a short distance, before turning right to follow the footpath up a set of steps.



12. Go through the gate ahead of you and walk straight on across the field. The lovely Izaak Walton pub is on your left (accessible via a stile over the fence from the field) if you're in need of refreshments. To continue the walk, go straight on across four fields, following the clear path through a succession of gates, with wonderful views all around you.

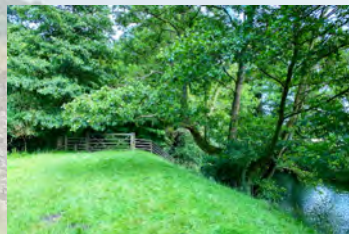
13. You will eventually reach a squeeze stile. Go through the stile and follow the clear path ahead of you. At a fork in the path take the left fork and head down a series of steps to reach a road. Turn right on the road and walk into the very pretty village of Ilam.

14. If you want to explore Ilam and the National Trust parkland at Ilam Park (with a tearoom if needed), turn right at Ilam Cross, which is the distinctive monument ahead of you as you walk into the village. The entrance to Ilam Park is approx 150m along the road.



15. To continue the walk, turn left at Ilam Cross and walk over the bridge that crosses the River Dove. Immediately after crossing the bridge, take the footpath on your left. Follow this clearly-marked path for approx 1.75km through a succession of gates. The route passes through beautiful meadows with the River Dove always running to your left.

16. When you reach a finger sign post, continue straight on, going through a wide metal gate and then bearing slightly diagonally left to reach a wide stone bridge that you will see clearly ahead of you. Turn left through a wide wooden gate and walk across the bridge, with views along the River Dove in both directions.



17. Immediately after crossing the bridge, go through a further wooden gate and turn right on the clearly-marked footpath. Follow this path for approx 2.5km, through a succession of gates, twisting through fields and woods, with the River Dove on your right at all times.

18. The path eventually reaches a gate that leads on to a quiet road, with the pretty village of Mappleton away to your left. Cross over the road and take the footpath through the field directly opposite. Walk diagonally left across the field to emerge through a gate in front of the Okeover Arms pub. This pub is muddy boot- and paw-friendly if you need a break.

19. To continue the walk, turn right on the road in front of the pub and walk out of the village for approx 400m, until you see a playing field on the right. On the opposite side of the road from the playing field, turn left and follow a driveway that runs in front of a row of red brick houses.



20. At the end of the driveway, go through a wooden hand gate and walk straight on up the hill with a hedge on your right. At the top right corner of the field, go through a metal hand gate and then over a small stile. Continue walking straight on up the hill, keeping the hedge on your right. There are wonderful views over the village behind you.



21. The hedge on your right eventually ends, but carry on straight up the hill, now with a hedge on your left. Go through a gate beside a tree, with a squeeze stile immediately beyond it, and then cross the field heading slightly diagonally right.

22. Go through a wooden gate and walk along a path that runs through a caravan site. Cross over the road through the site and continue on the path, signed for Ashbourne. The path eventually leaves the site and widens to a wide grassy track, heading downhill. Follow the track straight on downhill, crossing a stile at the bottom into a field. Walk straight on across the field to reach a further stile, with steps beyond. Walk up the steps to rejoin the Tissington Trail and turn left.

23. Walk along the trail for approx 1km until you reach the bridge over Spend Lane. Turn right as soon as you have crossed the bridge and take the path down to the road that you walked up at point 2. Turn left and walk along the road to return to the park ahead of you.



Along the way...

The Tissington Trail

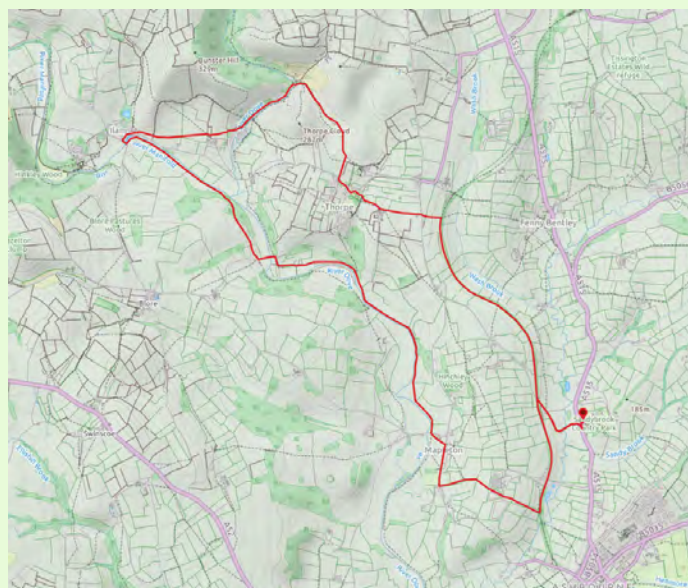
The Tissington Trail is a traffic-free trail that runs for 13 miles from Parsley Hay in the north to Ashbourne in the south. It follows the route of the former railway line between Buxton and Ashbourne, opened in 1899, operated by the London and North Western Railway. The railway was closed in the 1960s and the track is now a trail for walkers, horse-riders and cyclists.

Dovedale

The stunning limestone valley of Dovedale is one of the best-loved beauty spots in the Peak District, and indeed it's one of the most visited natural sites in Britain. Its steep crags tower over the clear River Dove as it tumbles through the dale, crossed by a picture-perfect set of stepping stones. The pretty name of the river has nothing to do with birds, but comes from the pre-Saxon word 'Dub', meaning black, referring to the river's dark course through the valley.

Ilam

The beautiful little village of Ilam is a gem. Although there is an ancient settlement here, most of the unusual buildings seen today were built in the 19th Century by a wealthy industrialist, Jesse Watts-Russell. He felt that the region reminded him of the Alps and so had many of the cottages built in a Swiss style.



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