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There are innumerable watersheds the length and breadth of Britain. Every hill, every little bit of higher ground acts as a divide for water, separating the drops and trickles which flow down one side from those neighbouring drops and trickles which make their way down the other. Before long, however, these rivulets and streams are likely to join up and continue on their way together.

There is however one watershed in England, *the* watershed, where this doesn't happen. This is the line of high ground (and sometimes, more surprisingly, much lower ground) which separates water which is making its way westwards to the Irish Sea and the Atlantic from that heading in exactly the opposite direction to end up in the North Sea. A few yards, perhaps a few feet or – in theory – even a few inches, can be all that it takes. When it comes to the map of England and its river systems, this is the divide that really matters.

It can be an interesting exercise to plot the line of this watershed as it meanders through southern England and the Midlands, round the edge of the Thames basin through Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, along the line of the Cotswolds to the hills of Northamptonshire almost to Market Harborough, then through Coventry and round the west side of Birmingham, squeezing between the Severn and the Trent headwaters close to the Potteries and then north-east to the hilly ground between Macclesfield and Buxton. But I'd decided to set my sights on the route that the watershed takes north of here, once it reaches the Pennines proper and begins to make its way up through the north of England. I was interested in the line it takes where England has a backbone of hills to divide the two sides of the country.

Not that the watershed is entirely single-minded in its choice of direction even when it arrives at the Pennines. The general direction may be northwards, but there are all sorts of deviations and diversions needed to get round the headwaters of the streams and rivers which run off the hills: here a tack to the west, there a big sweep around to the east. Furthermore the watershed doesn't like to be obvious. It shuns some of the best known hills in the Pennines – Pendle, Ingleborough, Whernside, Great Whernside and Great Shunner Fell, to give a few examples – and instead seeks out some lesser-known summits like Boulsworth Hill near Haworth and Great Knoutberry in the northern Yorkshire Dales.

How do you know where the line of the watershed goes? In my case, I simply pulled out the maps and worked it out mile by mile, though I also found that there are maps of England's river systems on the Environment Agency's website which helped me in my task. Just once or twice my pencil faltered: south of the Yorkshire Dales near the Leeds and Liverpool canal and again in limestone country where streams have the knack of disappearing underground without notice to reappear sometimes miles away. Initially I got the line slightly wrong much

further north, too, near Cold Fell, where I had unilaterally tried to reroute a tributary of the Tyne to flow instead to the Solway Firth. The local RSPB reserve manager put me right.

But in general it didn't take long: soon I had a set of seven Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 maps from the Dark Peak to Hadrian's Wall, each marked with a long thin pencil line. And then the task was simply to get out to follow this line on the ground.

I'm not suggesting that you will necessarily be planning to retrace my steps – this is not intended as a walking guide – but it is perhaps worth making the point that it's only a handful of years since it's been possible to follow the Pennine watershed in this way. Before the legislative changes which introduced the concept of open access land came into force in 2004 and 2005, most of the line of the watershed was private moorland where access by the general public was not permitted. Admittedly, there is still a short section of the Pennine watershed in Lancashire where it enters farmland and where it's still necessary to make brief diversions from the route to seek out rights of way, but with this small proviso the whole line of the watershed is now access land and available for all to enjoy. Someone will almost certainly come forward to correct me, but I'd like to claim that I was the first person to take advantage of this new right in this way.

So if this isn't primarily a walking guide, what has been my intention in writing the book? It's partly a travel book, partly a traditional celebration of a fine stretch of countryside, helped of course by John Morrison's beautiful landscape photographs. But I've tried to do something beyond this: my real objective has been a little more ambitious, and that is to provide a way of interpreting the northern English landscape.

My journey along the Pennine watershed for this book is not just a physical one, it is also a journey of discovery which I try to share. I attempt to offer a range of keys which can open up a sense of understanding of why the land looks as it does. This involves exploring what has happened in the past and, particularly, what is going on up in these hills now to create the countryside we look at and enjoy today.

For some people, the upland Pennine moorland from Kinder Scout to Hadrian's Wall may seem one continuous expanse of emptiness and wilderness. It's not. The landscape is ever changing, and – as the book seeks to demonstrate – a wide variety of people live and work up here on the high ground. There are clues to their activities wherever you look: a recently erected wire fence, a curious metal pin sticking out of the peat, a pile of white grit, a footpath through the heather. Small features like these, taken together, help to build up the full picture.

To meet the task I set myself involves a number of forays into what might normally seem the territory of more specialist books. You may not necessarily be expecting to read, let's say, about moorland hydrology, or about the European Landscape Convention, or about carbon sequestration, about moorland grips and Larsen traps. But I promise this is not a book for specialists only. Whatever the subject, I try to tackle it gently. And I will have failed if I don't convey to you my own fascination with what I discovered. I hope you, too, will enjoy the journey through this special area of England.

*Day gives way to night around a North Pennine farmhouse.*



# I. KINDER SCOUT

Mam Tor – Brown Knoll – Kinder Low – Crowden Head – Mill Hill – Snake Pass (A57)



I started at Mam Tor. Or, more precisely, I took a train from Manchester Piccadilly early one Saturday morning in July. The train wove its way through the Stockport suburbs, crossed over the rivers Etherow and Goyt (both west-flowing out towards the Mersey estuary, I noted with more than usual attention), and then turned and headed for the hills.

I wasn't the only person heading for those hills. The Hope Valley line between Manchester and Sheffield is one of the few railway journeys in England you can make where there is a whiff of the outdoors as soon as you enter the carriage. The only other line which has the same sort of feel for me is the train out from Leeds past Skipton on the Settle–Carlisle line, where cheery walkers and accompanying rucksacks congregate patiently, waiting for the Yorkshire Dales national park to come alongside the window.

*Mam Tor, the 'shivering mountain', marks the point where the White Peak of gleaming limestone scars gives way to the Dark Peak, a more rugged landscape of peat haggs and Millstone Grit.*



There may be, of course, people who take trains like these for ordinary, workaday, reasons. But on a Saturday in summer, heading from Manchester to the beautiful wild lands of the Dark Peak, they were in a minority. Next to me in my compartment were three young people, getting out the sun cream from their rucksacks almost as soon as the train pulled out of Piccadilly. Standing over by the sliding door was a cyclist sporting a bright lycra top. (There was no sign of his bike, but nobody advertises Credit Agricole on their body if they haven't got a bike secreted somewhere close.) There were more rucksacks parked on the floor at the far end of the carriage. And there was a palpable buzz of anticipation, which fitted my own mood perfectly.

We, most of us, disgorged from the train at Edale. Edale station serves a village with a population of about 300, so some people might think that it's fortunate still to have a station served by regular hourly trains each way. I expect the locals appreciate their good fortune, but for anyone wanting to get out to the heart of the Peak District countryside Edale station is a wonderful facility to have. You can come here for a stroll up Grindsbrook to visit, say, the rocky outcrop known as Ringing Roger. Or you can stride up Edale's main street to take your first few steps on the 270-plus mile journey on the Pennine Way, since Britain's most famous long-distance footpath conveniently starts just up the road beyond the village church.

But though I had a journey ahead of me north to Northumberland, perversely I initially turned due south. I left the station and headed up the old bridleway track out of the Vale of Edale, accompanied for a time by a redstart which darted out of the hedgerow beside me, showing off its orange rump and chest. I was making for the prehistoric hill fort at Mam Tor. Here was where I'd decided my journey along the watershed would start.

Mam Tor's earth banks and ditches are impressive, and so too is the view south towards Castleton and the head of the Hope valley and north to the heartland of the Dark Peak behind Edale. The hill fort itself dates back at least to the Iron Age, though the site was almost certainly occupied before this, back into the Bronze Age, the era which is usually taken to have begun around 2000 BC.

The earthworks at the summit of Mam Tor have survived the centuries, but lower down the hillside to the east it's a different matter. Mam Tor bears an alternative name of Shivering Mountain in recognition of the propensity of the loose shale to slide away downhill after heavy rain. The main A625 from Stockport to Sheffield used to come this way before the road was carried off in a landslide in the 1970s. Now both ends of the road end abruptly, the trunk road has been purged from road maps, and to get through by car at all involves diverting on to a minor road through nearby Winnats Pass.

I set off from Mam Tor west along the ridge which marks the effective boundary between the two halves of the Peak District. It's a geological divide. To the south is limestone country, the light colour of the stone giving this area the name of the White Peak. This is where to go to visit the famous Derbyshire caves, the 'bottomless' pit of Speedwell Cavern, Blue John cavern, and the Devil's Arse or, more politely, Peak Cavern. Here too is a gentler, predominantly agricultural landscape, with the limestone being used to create the network of field boundaries. To the north is something very different: the much rougher, more muscular lands of the Dark Peak, reflecting the Millstone Grit rock which predominates.

I noticed the change immediately, as I turned northwards beyond Lord's Seat to cross the moorland at the head of the river Noe, the river which flows through the Edale valley. From here on, the ground gets squelchier. This was my first encounter with the terrain known as blanket bog, a reference to the deep blanket-like covering of peat which clothes the ground



*The Edale valley, fields neatly defined by walls and hedges, has the Kinder escarpment as a backdrop.*

and which can be six, twelve, even eighteen feet deep in places. There is a lot of blanket bog to enjoy along the Pennine watershed.

A prominent air shaft marks the route of the railway underneath, passing through Cowburn tunnel. I'd been under there, a short time earlier. But now in the fresh air I was striding ahead, a pair of curlews accompanying me, past Brown Knoll, down to the bridleway where the Pennine Way comes in from Edale, and then up again to the rocks at Kinder Low.

From Kinder Low, most sensible people keep heading northwards, along the edge of the Kinder escarpment until the waterfall known as Kinder Downfall is reached. This is the way the Pennine Way takes you, and this is the place and the view celebrated in the Manchester Rambler song, written by Salford-born Ewan MacColl and perhaps the best-known anthem of the outdoor movement:

I've stood at the edge of the Downfall  
And seen all the valleys outspread  
And sooner than part from the mountains  
I think I would rather be dead.

But for anyone following a watershed, the rule is simple: *never cross running water*. Arriving at a waterfall is a sure sign that something is wrong. Instead, keeping to the Pennine watershed here means making a detour into the heart of the barren peat lands of the Kinder plateau, heading towards the inconspicuous lump of peat known as Crowden Head where a small pile of stones fights a losing battle for attention.

If you're bashing about at the back of Kinder, it helps to have the right vocabulary. The peat channels which crisscross this land, and there are plenty of them, are groughs. The residual mounds

of peat teetering on the brink of falling into the groughs are known as hags or, perhaps, hags.

This is a distinctive landscape. Louis Jennings, a nineteenth-century gentleman from Lewes in Sussex who came rambling this way, talked of the ‘savage beauty’ he found here: ‘There is a mass of stern and lonely hills, many of them with rounded tops, and beyond them again is a wild and trackless waste of moss and heath and bog, intersected by deep runnels of water, soft and spongy to the tread, and dotted over here and there with treacherous moss. So strange, so wild, so desolate a region it would be hard to find elsewhere in England.’

Nevertheless, Jennings admitted he found the landscape curiously compelling: ‘There was, indeed, a somewhat forbidding aspect over this dark, weird, apparently impenetrable fastness. Yet it also had a strange fascination with it, and it was only when the twilight began to close in, casting blacker shadows than before over this domain . . . that I reluctantly began to retrace my steps.’

Jennings’s view of Kinder, forbidding and fascinating, is one that many have held since. Indeed, despite the hags and groughs, despite the apparent desolation of the landscape here, Kinder Scout is for many hill-walkers today a favourite location. But more than this, Kinder has an iconic status in the story of the outdoor movement in Britain, as the result of an event which took place here in April 1932.

For much of the nineteenth century right through to the 1950s, Kinder Scout was forbidden land – or, at least, forbidden to the vast majority of the population. The moorland here was reserved for grouse shooting, with gamekeepers employed to keep the heather in good condition, to eradicate vermin and also to stop the general public from venturing up this way. Jennings himself had been warned off exploring the moorland plateau: ‘The first discovery which my inquiries brought to light was that Kinderscout is regarded as strictly private property,’ he wrote. ‘It is not unusual for the game-keepers to turn strangers back even when they are upon paths which are supposed to be fairly open to all.’

These restrictions were not unique to Kinder, but there was a particular frustration for the people who lived in Manchester and the industrial cities and towns near by who wanted to get out to the countryside and who could see the Kinder escarpment and the Downfall on the horizon, tantalisingly out of reach.

Here’s how one young man put it at the time:

We ramblers after a hard week’s work, and life in smoky towns and cities, go out rambling on weekends for relaxation, for a breath of fresh air, and for a little sunshine. And we find when we go out that the finest rambling country is closed to us. That because certain individuals wish to shoot for about ten days per annum, we are forced to walk on muddy crowded paths, and denied the pleasure of enjoying to the utmost the countryside.

The demand was, he said, for ‘access to all peaks and uncultivated moorland’. It was, he added, nothing unreasonable.

The speaker’s name was Benny Rothman and the speech itself was made to a jury in a court room in Derby in the summer of 1932, where he was conducting his own defence on charges of riotous assembly, assault, and incitement to riot. Shortly after delivering the speech (the text comes from his hand-written notes prepared shortly beforehand), he was to find himself beginning a four-month prison sentence. Four other young people were found guilty of similar charges and also sent to prison.

The alleged riotous assembly which this case at the Derby Assizes was concerned with took place on 24th April 1932, and the venue was the hillside flank of Kinder Scout. The event was what has now become known as the Kinder mass trespass.

Benny Rothman was the main organiser. At the time, he was no more than twenty years old, a young man who’d grown up in the north Manchester inner-city area of Cheetham. Like many in this part of Manchester at the time, his parents were part of the city’s large Jewish immigrant community. (‘Both my father and mother originated from villages, and had an affinity with growing things, trees, plants etc., although neither of them knew much about the countryside,’ Benny recalled later in life.)

The early 1930s were not a good time to be young and working class in Manchester. The country was passing through the worst part of the inter-war great depression. The National Government decided the way out was by cutting back drastically on public expenditure (a route which the economist John Maynard Keynes was later to suggest was about the worst possible thing they could have done). Unemployment pay was reduced, and the much-hated means test introduced. The unemployed fought back, sometimes literally. In October 1931, for example, the National Unemployed Workers Movement organised a major demonstration across the Irwell river in Salford which ended with several demonstrators injured after very heavy-handed police tactics. It was a time of acute political tension, in other words.

Benny Rothman was fortunate in that he did have a job. Although he had won a scholarship and could have continued his secondary education, the death of his father when he was twelve meant that the family badly needed whatever income he could bring in. His first work experience was as an errand boy in the motor trade. He was also discovering the countryside beyond the confines of north Manchester. Like many others from working class areas of the city he joined the Clarion Cycling Club. ‘I was a seasoned camper and cyclist at the ripe old age of sixteen, or so I thought when I paid my first visit to the Lake District. I was a townie on a heavy ‘sit up and beg’ bike, home made tent and Woolworths map,’ he later recalled.

He was becoming politically active. He was one of the many at the time whose journey towards socialism came in part from reading Robert Tressell’s classic novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*. When he was about sixteen he began to be drawn in to the activities of the Young Communist League, and to sell the *Daily Worker* to his workmates. He was arrested when he was eighteen for chalking an advert for the newspaper on the pavements of central Manchester.

Politics and outdoor interests naturally came together. In his late teens, he helped establish a Lancashire branch of the British Workers Sports Federation and quickly became its secretary. Benny was inspired at the time by a successful protest in Tottenham, north London, where the BWSF had persuaded the London County Council to provide football pitches and changing facilities for local working class amateur football teams.

It was an incident which took place at the BWSF’s 1932 Easter camp which provided the spark for the Kinder event a few weeks later. The camp was being held at Rowarth, a few miles due west of Kinder Scout, and the programme included an organised ramble from Glossop on to Bleaklow. Or at least that was the plan. Benny himself tells what actually happened:

The small band was stopped at Yellow Slacks by a group of gamekeepers. They were abused, threatened and turned back. To add to the humiliation of the Manchester ramblers, a number of those present were from the London BWSF on a visit to the



One of the many gritstone outcrops around the edges of Kinder Scout.

Peak District, and they were astounded by the incident. There were not enough ramblers to force their way through, so, crestfallen, they had to return to camp.

This was written fifty years later, but the sense of humiliation which Benny clearly felt that day – and in front of his southern comrades too – clearly comes through in the writing. Back at camp, retaliation was planned. What was needed, the young people decided, was a body of ramblers so numerous that the keepers would have to give way. What was needed, they decided, was a demonstration on the hills. Someone came up with a name: the mass trespass.

Benny threw himself into the preparations. Flyers were typed: ‘If you’ve not been rambling before, start now, you don’t know what you’ve missed. Roll up on Sunday morning. . . . Come with us for the best day out you have ever had.’ Pavements were chalked with the details. Benny also went to the local press, who quickly sniffed out a good story and stirred things up with some provocative headlines. ‘Direct action by ramblers,’ read one. ‘Peak Trespass Protests: Mob law on the moors,’ read another.

It meant that when the chosen day, Sunday 24th April arrived, both the landowners and the police were well prepared. Extra gamekeepers had been drafted in to help patrol the edge of the Kinder plateau, while the police had both uniformed and plain-clothes officers in Hayfield, the village below Kinder where this novel type of demonstration was to commence.

The story of that day has been recounted several times, and the broad outlines of what happened are fairly clear. Benny Rothman later wrote his own account, published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary in 1982. The original plan, to begin with a rally in Hayfield, was altered at the last minute to outwit the police, and instead several hundred young people gathered in an old quarry a short distance from Hayfield in the direction of the open moors. Benny Rothman clambered up to address the crowd. It was, he said, an inspiring picture:

‘There were hundreds of young men and women, lads and girls, in their picturesque rambling gear: shorts of every length and colour, flannels and breeches, even overalls, vivid colours and drab khaki (khaki shorts and shirts were fashionable at the time), multi-coloured sweaters and pullovers, army packs and rucksacks of every size and shape.’

By the time he had got down from his rock, the front of the demonstration was already well down the lane leading to the moors and Benny had to content himself with joining the body of the march. The atmosphere, like so often on demonstrations, was good-humoured, and there was plenty of singing: the Red Flag, according to one press report, but Tipperary too according to Benny. And there was another song produced for the occasion, a parody of Harry Lauder’s famous *The Road to the Isles*, its words recalled fifty years on by one of those who’d sung it:

For by Kinder, and by Bleaklow, and all through the Goyt we’ll go  
We’ll ramble over mountain, moor and fen  
And we’ll fight against the trespass laws for every Rambler’s rights  
And trespass over Kinder Scout again . . .

The idea planned by Benny Rothman and one of his friends was to head northwards close to Kinder reservoir, taking the established right of way up what is now known as William Clough (it was then more frequently called Williams Clough), before breaking off to scramble up the steep hillside towards the Kinder plateau. Another of the trespassers, Sol Gadian, later described the way things worked out:

When we reached William Clough a whistle sounded and we all stopped, then turned right facing up Kinder, as a second whistle sounded. It was then that I saw against the skyline a line of keepers, some of them wielding sticks. A third blast of the whistle and we started scrambling up the steep incline. The keepers offered little or no resistance and we just walked past them . . . I was busy helping a girl up the steep slope. Having got past the keepers we lined up and marched about 400 yards on to the moors where we met a group of ramblers from Sheffield.

The plateau of Kinder had been reached, albeit some distance north-west of the Downfall. It was good enough for Benny Rothman. As he put it later, ‘We were on the holy of holies, the forbidden territory of Kinder.’

The 1932 trespass on Kinder Scout was by no means the first attempt to raise the issue of access to the hills. Year after year in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s the more organised (and more respectable) ramblers’ movement was organising rallies in the Peak District, held at Winnats Pass just to the south of Mam Tor, which were also calling for a legal right of access to open countryside. These rallies typically attracted several thousand, more than the three or four hundred who had climbed up William Clough that day. Indeed by 1932 there had already been almost fifty years of campaigning in an attempt to persuade Parliament to pass an ‘Access to Mountains Act’. The first such bill (at that stage to be restricted to the Scottish hills) had been introduced at Westminster in 1884, and thereafter regular attempts had been made by MPs to bring forward the same legislation: in 1888, 1892, 1898, 1900, 1908 and 1909, each time without success. After the war, there were similar attempts, by now

calling for access to mountains and moors throughout Britain. In 1931, for example, the Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson had tried with her own Access to Mountains Bill. It met the same fate as the others.

Benny Rothman was young and impatient and at the time of the mass trespass critical of the tactics being used by the ramblers' organisations. 'The policy of the Ramblers' Federation, the Footpaths Preservation Society and these similar bodies is futile, and is actually preventing ramblers from obtaining Access to Mountains,' he told the Derby jury. 'The numerous annual demonstrations which they hold in the different parts of the country are meetings just to ask ramblers to support this policy of leaving it to a few MPs and officials to ask for Access to Mountains. Nothing is obtained that way . . .'

The ramblers' federations responded in kind. The Manchester Ramblers' Federation, for example, dissociated themselves publicly from the trespass: 'We wish to record our protest against such a method, which we consider can only ultimately prejudice the objects which the orderly Rambler has at heart,' wrote the Federation's secretary to the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* in the run-up to the event.

Later, Benny Rothman accepted that he had made a tactical mistake in antagonising the official Ramblers' Federation bodies, though in the context of politics of the early 1930s his stance was perhaps to be expected. However, the bad blood between the trespassers and the organised rambling movement festered for many years and lingered on into the 1980s. It was only when Benny Rothman, by then in his eighties, began to be a regular speaker at Ramblers' Association rallies – still campaigning for the old demand of access to open country – that old ill-feeling was overcome.

Ironically, it was the intervention of the legal system and particularly the imprisonment of the five trespassers, a punishment which was widely felt to be unduly punitive and vindictive, which gave the Kinder event the importance which, by itself, it probably wouldn't have achieved. As the trespassers left William Clough for the top of the hillside, a number of scuffles with keepers broke out. Reports of what happened vary (not least among the police witnesses themselves), but in essence one keeper, a man named Edward Beaver, fell or was pushed to the ground and twisted his ankle. The incident gave the police the excuse they were looking for to bring charges.

Looking back in 1982, Benny Rothman was convinced that the trespass, the trial and imprisonment had been effective in raising the profile of the campaign for access. Public awareness grew, people started to think and started to comment, he said. And the continuing resonance which the story of the mass trespass still has today suggests he was right. The fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1982 were followed by similar events for the sixtieth anniversary in 1992 and again in April 2007 when the seventy-fifth birthday was celebrated. A commemorative plaque is now in place in the quarry near Hayfield where Benny Rothman addressed the demonstrators.

What else has happened since 1932? The long-awaited Access to Mountains Act finally made it on to the statute book in 1939, only for ramblers to discover that they had been conned: in many respects, it benefited only the landowners. The war changed attitudes. A 1945 government report argued for the first time for the benefits of conferring 'public rights of access over all uncultivated land (suitably defined)'. The subsequent legislation, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 repealed the unsatisfactory 1939 Act and introduced arrangements for access agreements, though England and Wales had to wait until the 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act for implementation of the 'not unreasonable' demand Benny

Rothman had put at his trail in Derby: access to peaks and uncultivated moorland. (Scotland had to wait for legislation from the Scottish Parliament in 2003.)

As for Benny Rothman himself, he remained committed to his political beliefs throughout his life. He took part in demonstrations in Manchester against Mosley and the fascist Blackshirts in the 1930s and for much of his working life was an active trade unionist in the engineering union. Later he became involved in the early environmental movement, campaigning for example to preserve green spaces in the Greater Manchester area and against motorway developments. He also kept an interest in Kinder Scout. In 1982 when the National Trust acquired three thousand acres of Kinder he set up the Kinder Scout Advisory Committee – basically as a ginger group, keeping a wary eye on the NT to ensure they did not backslide on access matters.

In the last years of his life, as interest in access as an issue grew again, he welcomed to his home a growing stream of journalists and TV crews keen to interview him and to hear again the story of the 1932 trespass. And in 1994, he and his wife Lily received a formal invitation from Derbyshire County Council to mark the 62nd anniversary of his trial by attending a reception – held in the Judges' Lodgings in Derby. He died in January 2002.

*Walkers can enjoy the views from Kinder Scout today, because of Benny Rothman and the mass trespass of 1932. This plaque, near Hayfield, commemorates the event.*

