


Peak District walk - 2½ miles round trip

Ilam Park to Dovedale Stepping Stones

Discover the limestone countryside of the southern Peak District, famed for its wildlife and geology. Starting at the tranquil Victorian landscape and woodland of Ilam Park, this easy walk takes you into Dovedale, an iconic and spectacular gorge carved out by the river Dove. There's plenty to explore at both ends!

Start: Ilam Park - grid ref: SK 131507 - map: OS Landranger 119 & Explorer 259

How to get here

Ilam Park and Dovedale lie near Thorpe about 5 miles northwest of Ashbourne. Both are signed off the A52 and A515. From Ashbourne there is a regular bus to Thorpe and a weekend bus to Ilam. Nearest  are Matlock (11 miles) and Derby (21 miles). National Cycle Network route 68 about 4 miles east, then on-road ride along Narlow Lane through Thorpe to Ilam. This road can be busy at times.

Facilities

National Trust visitor centre, WC, café and car park at Ilam Park

Look out for...

Ilam Hall

A Tudor mansion once stood here, but in the 1820s, a local industrialist, Jesse Watts-Russell built the current Ilam Hall. The hall fell into ruin in the 1930s and two-thirds of it was demolished, before Sir Robert McDougall, a member of the flour-milling family, bought what remained for the National Trust. Everyone now has the chance to stay here, as it is run by the YHA as a youth hostel!

Thorpe Cloud and Bunster Hill

Rising up on either side of the river Dove, these are both reef knoll - immense piles of calcareous material, or underwater lifeforms, which accumulated on an ancient sea floor over 350 million years ago! Thorpe Cloud is an especially distinctive, conical hill. Its slopes are covered with loose stones, called 'scree', rock that has been weathered by freezing and thawing. It's a short but challenging walk to the top...

The Stepping Stones

The Stepping Stones at Dovedale were first set down for Victorian tourists to cross the river. If you're still feeling energetic when you get here, the footpath continues for 2½ miles to Milldale at the north end of the gorge, or else, a set of steps climb to a limestone promontory called Lover's Leap. The original steps were built by Italian prisoners of war captured in WW2.



Ilam Park is a beautiful open space at the south end of the Manifold Valley. It was designed in the 19th century as an idyllic setting for Ilam Hall and is home to many dramatic mature trees. The Manifold and Hamps rivers re-emerge here after several miles flowing underground. The places where they rise are known as 'boil holes' as the water appears to bubble and boil at the surface!



The historic estate village of Ilam was mostly demolished and replaced by these unusual alpine-style cottages in the 1830s. They were almost certainly designed by George Gilbert Scott, who is most famous for his imposing Gothic cathedrals and workhouses, plus the 'Midlands Grand Hotel' at St Pancras Railway Station.



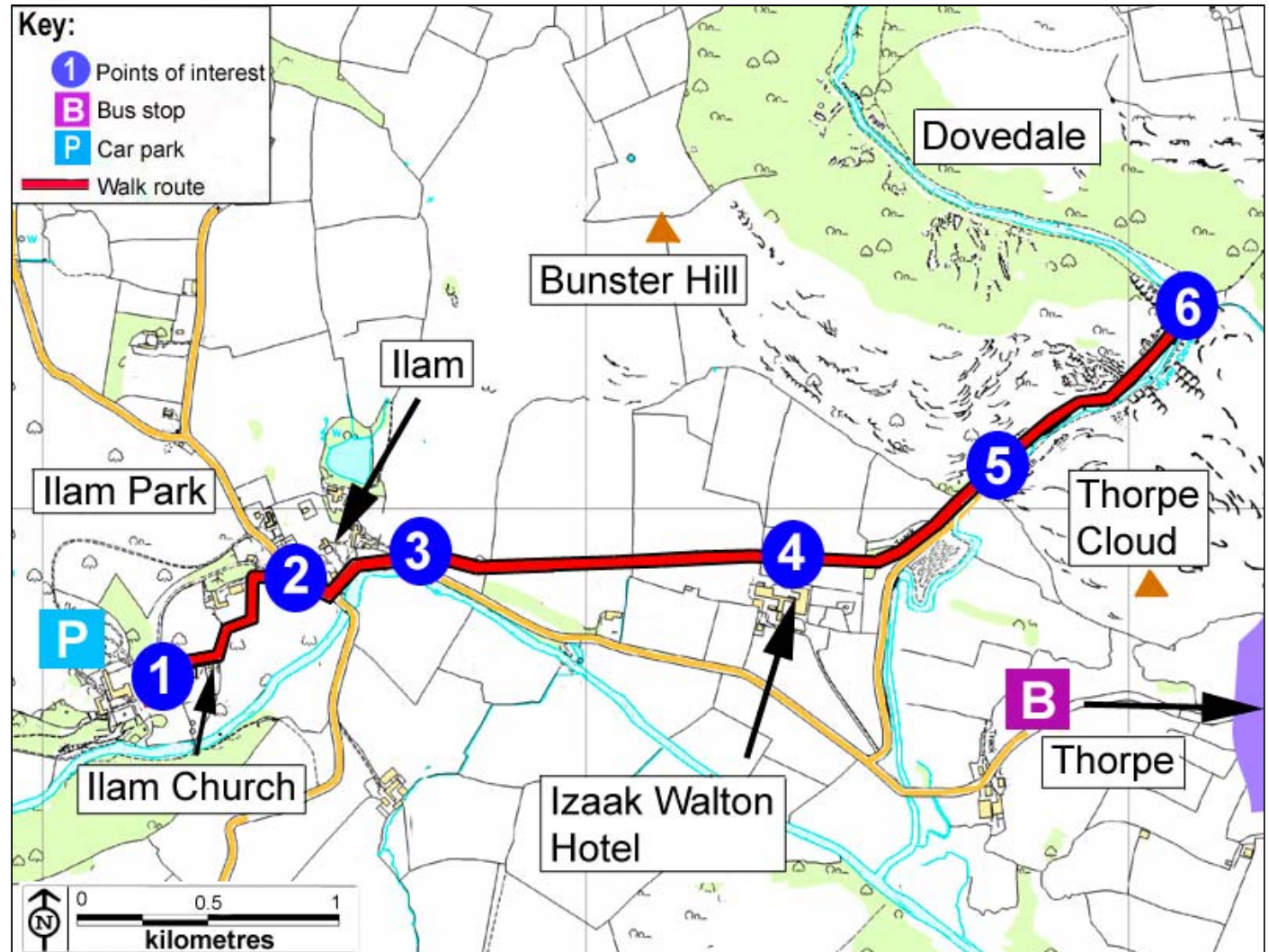
Dovedale is said to be the finest Karst landscape in the country. It has been shaped by water seeping into the limestone rock over millions of years. Despite greeting over a million visitors a year, this three mile gorge support a vast range of rare habitats and wildlife. For this reason, it became a National Nature Reserve in 2006.

Route and directions

1. Start at Ilam Park and take the footpath towards Ilam Church. Look out for the shafts of two 1000 year old Saxon crosses lie in the churchyard.
2. Follow the path past the Church into Ilam village. Here you will find alpine-style houses and school, provided for locals by Jesse Watts-Russell. Continue until you reach the Mary Watts-Russell Memorial Cross. It was built in 1840 in memory of Jesse Watts-Russell's wife. Carry on along the road until you leave the village.
3. On leaving Ilam village at a lay-by, cross the road, go through a wooden gate and up a short steep slope to the footpath. Turn right onto the track and go through a squeeze stile into the fields, where there are wonderful views of the Manifold Valley.
4. Follow the paths across the fields behind the Izaak Walton Hotel. The hotel is named after the author of a book called 'The Compleat Angler'. He fished the River Dove in the mid 17th century. The hills of Thorpe Cloud and Bunster can be seen from this point.
5. Cross a stile and follow the footpath downhill to join a road. Turn left and walk along this path with the River Dove on your right to enter Dovedale. The name is derived from the old Norse word 'dubo', meaning 'dark'. An information panel here tells you more about the work the National Trust does to care for this area.
6. Congratulations, you have reached the Stepping Stones! Take a minute to absorb the fantastic scenery. Put in place in the middle of the 19th century, the stones have long been a magnet for visitors to the area. Cross the stones to continue your walk or return to Ilam Park.

Terrain and accessibility

2 ½ miles round trip. Mostly even path surfaces but some uneven ground, especially across the field. Stiles and a slight gradient in places.



If you have been inspired by what you see on this walk, find out more, and how you can help support the National Trust on our website:

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk / peakdistrict](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/peakdistrict)