



Viewpoint

Kinder surprise



Time: 15 mins

Region: East Midlands

Landscape: rural



Location: Kinder Scout from Mam Tor, Derbyshire

Grid reference: SK 12750 83600

Getting there: Park at Mam Nick car park on the minor road from Castleton to Chapel-en-le-Frith, Hope Valley, Derbyshire S33 8WA

Directions: Take the signposted path from the back of Mam Nick car park. When you reach the road, go through a gate and ascend the paved track to the summit of Mam Tor.

The hillfort-capped Mam Tor (517 metres / 1,696 feet) commands the head of the Hope Valley near Castleton, and gives a splendid view of the southern edge of Kinder Scout (636 metres / 2,088 feet), the highest hill in the Peak District.

Kinder Scout is a 15-square-mile plateau of blanket peat bog ringed by an impressive array of gritstone tors (rocky outcrops). In April 1932, it was the scene of one of the most iconic events in the century-long fight for access to mountains and moorlands, the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass.

How did a Sunday ramble on Kinder Scout lead to prison?



The Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries led to vast areas of open country and moorland, like Kinder Scout, being parcelled off to local landowners. Much of this land was previously common land, over which everyone had certain traditional rights - such as to walk, graze their livestock, collect firewood or cut turf to fuel their fires.

These rights were now lost, which was disastrous for those who needed the land to make a living, and disappointing for those who wanted to enjoy the countryside. Around Kinder Scout private landowners used the moors for grouse shooting. The public were excluded by the erection of legally-unenforceable 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted' signs, and by stick-wielding gamekeepers.

Despite the best efforts of the official Ramblers' Federations, and many failed Acts of Parliament, by the Great Depression of 1932 the land was still off limits to the public. Ramblers from the surrounding cities of Manchester and Sheffield were increasingly frustrated that the blue, inviting moors they could see from their homes and workplaces were strictly out of bounds to them.

Pressure for access built up, and what was known as "the gentle art of trespass" became a common weekend activity. One guidebook actually advised walkers where to watch out for a gamekeeper with a dog and gun on South Head: "His presence is usually an adequate deterrent, and the gun has not yet been used."

Things came to a head that Easter after a group of walkers from the Lancashire branch of the British Workers' Sports Federation was unceremoniously turned off the neighbouring hill Bleaklow. A few of the walkers, frustrated at the lack of action from the official federations, got together and decided that if enough people had been there, it would not have been possible to turn them away.

So a 'Mass Trespass' on Kinder Scout was advertised in local newspapers. On Sunday 24 April 1932, a group of about 400 ramblers gathered at Bowden Bridge quarry, above Hayfield on the western side of the hill. Watched by a large contingent of police, they were addressed by their leader, Benny Rothman, and set off, laughing and singing, up a right of way which led up William Clough.

At a pre-arranged signal, they left the path and ventured up the private slopes of Sandy Heys, where they were met by a group of gamekeepers. A few scuffles ensued, then the ramblers returned to the path to meet another group of Sheffield trespassers who had come over from Edale, and a victory meeting was held at Ashop Head.

The Manchester ramblers - immortalised in Ewan MacColl's famous anthem - returned to Hayfield where six of them were arrested. They were charged with public order offences (but not trespass). Later at Derby Assize Court, five of the ramblers were tried, convicted, and sent to prison for periods of up to six months.

The severity of the sentences united the ramblers' cause. More than 10,000 people attended the next rally held south of Mam Tor in the Winnats Pass, just outside Castleton.

The Mass Trespass on Kinder became a seminal event in the long fight to regain access to open country - a fight which was not won until the passing of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in 2000. Ramblers can now roam freely across Kinder without fear of assault or imprisonment.

Viewpoint created by Roly Smith. Roly is a keen walker and the author of over 90 books on the British countryside. He has been recently described as one of Britain's most knowledgeable countryside writers.