



Derbyshire Days

through 360 Degrees

22-25 July 2021

29 July – 01 August 2021

A four-day all-inclusive break to experience the hills and dales of north Derbyshire with multi-award-winning naturalist and author in his home patch.

Buxton and the High Peak

North Derbyshire is a fabulous area for natural history with a distinctive rural culture and a proud record as the site of the UK's first-ever national park – The Peak District, which was designated exactly 70 years ago this year. Our wildlife breaks are centred in historic Buxton. The town stands atop the thermal springs for which it has been renowned since Roman times, but it also straddles the two characteristic geological formations of the High Peak, the limestone plateau and the gritstone uplands. The life of 350 million years ago is never far from the surface and has shaped the region's environmental present, as well as its industrial past. Only a single English spot to the south of here is higher than Axe Edge, the ridge running just west of Buxton. This formation is a central watershed for English rivers (ie those flowing off one side join the North Sea, those heading west from Axe Edge flow to the Irish Sea). For our purposes Buxton is perfectly placed because it is so close to a range of great wildlife areas and our excursions will involve minimal driving. The breaks are also timed to catch the region at its summer best.



Our Westminster Hotel is a five minute drive from Lightwood and on our first evening we will make an excursion to enjoy its flowers and insects, although the place is drenched in willow warbler song and holds a number of upland birds including golden plovers. Lightwood is a blaze of colour at this time with orchids and foxgloves set against banks of fiercely yellow horseshoe vetch. Depending on its precise flowering season we will also search for a beautiful, scarce orchid broad-leaved helleborine that grows nearby..

Our first day will be spent in the fabulous Chee and Millers Dales, where the River Wye cuts a steep-sided gorge into the limestone valley and the old railway line provides a perfect broad track through what is otherwise difficult terrain. The area is celebrated for its flora and we will visit at least two Derbyshire Wildlife Trust reserves to enjoy the limestone gardens that are thick with colour and beauty.



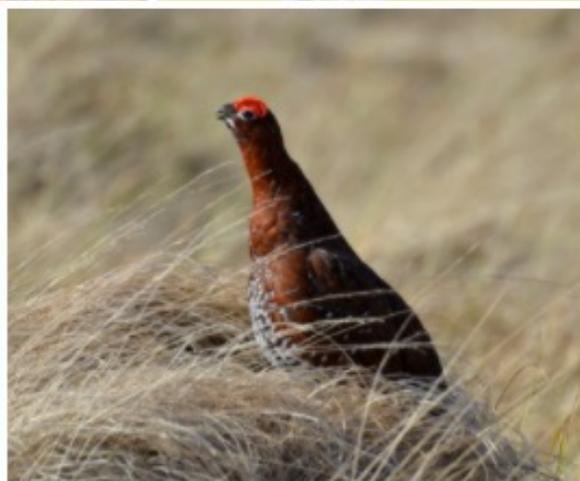
If we are blessed with sunshine the area is a great place for butterflies (eg common blue, dark green fritillary and small copper), lizards and grasshoppers. We also meet some of Derbyshire's avian specialities such as common redstart, spotted flycatcher, dipper and, more recently, the gloriously colourful mandarin ducks. This Asiatic import has taken very well to the tree cavities in the ash and sycamore woods that line the steep valley sides.

However it is the flowers for which the area is most famous and at this time they are in their pomp with riotous banks of colour and life everywhere, created by the abundant bloody cranesbills, wild marjoram, thyme, dark mulleins, knapweeds, scabious, St John's-wort, fragrant and bee orchids, twayblade and vetches. For all its flora diversity, the preponderant colour in Millers Dale is often green. It is probably the most chlorophyll-saturated landscape I know.



After the lush almost subtropical photosynthesing power of the dales we head on our second full day for the more austere, open character of the Derbyshire-Staffordshire tops. In fact Dane Bower quarry is just over the border into Cheshire and in a short walk we will take in all three counties. The whole area is one of the best moorland landscapes for all the birds traditionally associated with the uplands – curlews, golden plovers, lapwings and common snipe. It also holds a small number of breeding ring ousels as well as the more numerous stonechats and wheatears.

The walk runs through an old abandoned quarry and we will plan to have our picnic overlooking the wonderfully named Wolf Edge, near Flash, the highest village in England. If it is a good vole year this is a great place for breeding short-eared owls and there are breeding hobbies nearby. If time allows we will run down into the Gradbach area and follow the River Dane through the woods to visit Lud Church, a rather eery cleft in the rocks, where the persecuted Lollard sect was said to gather in the fifteenth century.



Our last day in England's most landlocked county will be at its most iconic location – Kinder Scout – where the Pennine Way starts, where the famous 1932 Mass Trespass unfolded, and where Britain's national parks began 70 years ago. Its summit is the highest part of Derbyshire and from Hayfield involves a 300m climb. We will save that for another day but we will get to see the area's beautiful scenery and wildlife, including red grouse, redstarts, ravens, spotted flycatchers and hopefully peregrines. The area also holds a small population of mountain hares, which may have adopted their drab summer pelt but are still beautiful creatures.



Kinder is most famous for its blanket bog but the Kinder valley into the lovely village of Hayfield holds great oak woods and these are excellent for wildlife. Purple hairstreak butterfly is one of its scarcer resident insects and the local abundance of three flowering heathers is a major draw for a range of bumblebee species. Another local speciality is the solitary heather bee, whose colonies riddle the exposed shaly outcrops with their tiny burrows. The foot of the Scout is a great spot for our picnic, while the panoramic views are a perfect finale for our Derbyshire break..



The 360 Degree Approach

Our approach has been worked out over many years of sharing wildlife and its place in human culture with others. The break is intended to be a form of alfresco salon where the landscapes and life of Derbyshire are a stimulation for reflection, thought and unending conversation, as well as laughter and great fun.

We shall never be in a rush. There will be no concern whatsoever for listing. And while Mark is not expert in everything, we will look at everything. The aim is to pack each day with wonder so that you have the richest and most imaginative engagement with all parts, whether it is peregrines or periwinkles. It is not a writing trip in any sense but the approach lends itself to creative responses. If you feel inspired all the better, and impromptu readings in the evening are a routine part of our holidays.

The trip includes easy walking at a relaxed pace, with plenty of time to take everything in. Walks range from half a mile to 2 miles, so they're not long, but we'll be out all day on our feet, taking picnic lunches with us, so do bring poles or a mat to sit on if you wish. However, we will really take our time, so all the walks should be perfectly achievable for a reasonably fit person of any age.



Your guide

Mark Cocker is an author and lifelong naturalist. For more than 30 years he has contributed to the Guardian country diary. His 12 books of creative nonfiction, including *Our Place*, *Birds and People* and *Crow Country*, have been shortlisted for many awards including the Samuel Johnson Prize. *Crow Country* won the New Angle Prize in 2008. In a previous life he led wildlife holidays all over the world and the 360 Degree approach is a distillation of that experience.

Our Hotel

Our base is the four-star Westminster Hotel, a family-run 12-room establishment on Broad Walk at the heart of the town, with lovely views over the Pavilion Gardens' lakes. The breakfasts and packed lunches are hearty and based on locally sourced produce.

In the evenings we have three-course dinners at a small privately-owned and -run restaurant called La Brasserie Bar. It is just ten-minutes walk from the hotel and located in the most vibrant part of Buxton's scenic centre. There are terrific micro-brewery pubs around this area and our hotel is chosen to give you easy access to Buxton's famous historical architecture, such as the St Anne's Crescent and the Devonshire Dome.

You can find out more about both at their respective websites:

www.westminsterhotel.co.uk and www.thebarbrasseriebuxton.co.uk.

Prices and Arrangements

Shared room: £750
Single supp.: + £100

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tbc: 2022

Included are all transport, guiding (entry fees), all meals including daily packed lunches and accommodation. Mark will be with you on all excursions.

The only additional costs are your travel to/from Buxton, drinks or snacks during the day, evening drinks with your dinners.

The tour will have a maximum of seven participants.

Our programme is based on 9am – 6pm excursions. We will provide a detailed daily plan closer to departure. We can make reading and equipment recommendations.

A £200 deposit is payable on booking.