

The Big Easy

Harborough Rocks, High Peak Trail, Parsleyhay, Tissington Trail, Tissington, Bradbourne

Distance = 38.9 km (24.1 miles); off road = 31 km

Total Vertical Ascent = 408m

Ride Time = 2 to 3 hours

Map = OS White Peak Area (OL 24) 1:25,000

Yes, yes, I know – cycling on disused railways is about as exciting as going to Hartington Dairy to watch the cheese maturing. But what better way to blow away the cobwebs of a pub crawl around Brassington? And why not anyway? When the riding is this easy you have time to enjoy the things around you – the landscapes, the skyscapes, the birds, the flowers, the sheep...okay maybe not the sheep, but you get the idea.

Leave Brassington via the uphill road heading north to Longcliffe. After 700 metres, turn right in front of the telephone exchange onto the road to Wirksworth. This soon levels out and passes in front of a large factory (Hoben's Industrial Minerals) behind which are the looming crags of Harborough Rocks. Immediately after the entrance to the factory is a stile and sandy path leading to the High Peak Trail. Reach the trail and turn left for Parsleyhay (signpost).

That's about it until you get to Parsleyhay. No turns, junctions, hills or technical bits to worry about. Just keep pedalling and marvel at the audacity of the Georgian engineers who conceived and built the railway. Take care crossing any roads and tracks, especially the busy A5012.

Once Parsleyhay is reached, you have a choice to make. Either turn sharp left onto the Tissington Trail or go straight on to the cafe. If the cafe option is taken, you can reward yourself with a piece of cake and an extra 1 km to the route distance. The people who are tempted into eating two cakes though have to do the whole route again as punishment.

The Tissington Trail has a different character to the High Peak Trail. It has long sweeping bends, more bridges and embankments and feels less disconnected from its surroundings. It is also quite noticeably downhill as the huffing and puffing cyclists coming the other way will tell you.

Be careful on the embankments as they are generally unfenced unlike the High Peak Trail. Some of them are very exposed and if the wind is gusting strongly you can suddenly find yourself going sideways, or backwards, or approaching light speed depending which way it is blowing.

Sixteen kilometres from Parsleyhay junction, the picturesque village of Tissington is reached. Turn right out of the trail car park and then right again onto the road. Cross the bridge over the trail and stay on the narrow tarmac road all the way down the hill to Tissington Ford. It is recommended that the bridge is used to bypass the ford, unless you like wet feet.

Ahead is a junction with a busy main road (the B5056). Avoid riding along the main road by crossing straight over and using the dedicated cycle path. This curves around behind Bradbourne Mill to emerge on a minor road. Turn right and go up the hill to Bradbourne village.

In Bradbourne, follow the road leftwards for Brassington, which is reached after a further 3 km of up and down riding.

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31st March 2008

