

## Town & Country

Rainster Rocks, High Peak Trail, Friden, Long Dale, Gratton Dale, Elton, Birchover, Darley Bridge, Snitterton, Matlock, Riber, High Peak Junction, High Peak Trail, Harborough Rocks

Distance = 47.8 km (29.7 miles); off road = 32.1 km

Total Vertical Ascent = 1009m

Ride Time = 3.5 to 4.5 hours

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

Variety is the spice of life and this route has it all – easy and difficult, boring and exhilarating, fast and slow, wild and urban. But at nearly 50km long and with two monster climbs, it should not be underestimated.

Head out of Brassington in a westerly direction on the road to Bradbourne. About 300m beyond the final house (Hipleigh Farm), turn right up the road signposted to Ballidon. Go up and over the hill to where the road turns a sharp corner to the left. The first off road section begins here.

Go through the right hand of the two gates and follow the bridle path across the grassy field with ridge and furrow. On the far side of the field, a steep, rocky ridge appears to block the way on, but the path manages to squeeze through by sticking close to the wall. Escape into the field on the other side of the wall via the wooden gate. Continue north past some farm buildings to emerge on the main road (B5056).

Turn right up the road towards Longcliffe and less than 50m after passing under the bridge, go through the stile on the right to join the High Peak Trail. If you reach Longcliffe crossroads, you have gone too far.

Loop around to join the trail proper at the bridge over the main road. Turn right, cross the bridge and head northwest up the trail for 8.8 km to the car park at Friden. Leave the trail here by turning left down the car park access road and then right at the road. Pass beneath the bridge and go another 600m to the start of Long Dale.

The path down Long Dale leaves the road to the right, just around the left-hand bend where the road enters the dale. Even though it is signposted 'public bridleway', it is still quite easy to miss. Pass through a small wooden gate and follow the wall-lined path strewn with rocks and roots. This exits into a field of bumpy grass. Beyond a large metal gate is another field of even bumpier grass. On the far side of this, a faint track crosses the valley from right to left and a fence blocks the way forward. Turn leftwards up the track to a metal gate, but before going through it, turn right and go through a wooden gate with a sign indicating 'access land'. Follow various sheep trails along the rim of the valley for 700m to a large metal gate on the left and a 'public bridleway' sign. Turn diagonally right away from the gate and drop steeply back down to the valley floor on a well defined track. At the bottom is a wooden gate. Admire the sculpture to the right, then go through the gate and cruise on easy grass down to a large wooden gate at the head of Gratton Dale.

Go through the gate and immediately turn left through a smaller wooden gate. Follow the very rocky path down Gratton Dale, keeping to the right hand side of a low wall. After about 500m, switch to the other side of the wall where the path is less rocky, but more bumpy (muddy in summer). Towards the bottom of the dale, the path becomes a track and this leads to an exit onto a small country lane near a red phone box. Turn right up the hill towards the village of Elton.

Pass straight through Elton and go down the hill to a crossroads with the B5056 crossing left to right. Turn right and follow the main road for 300m. On the inside of a sharp, left-hand bend is a narrow, wall-lined path signposted 'restricted byway'. This byway packs a surprising amount of fun into its 400m length with small jumps, rocks and roots. It also comes out by Winster Cemetery which is handy if you wipe out big time.

Turn left and take the next right onto Birchover Lane. Follow this for 1.3km, up a wickedly steep hill, to Uppertown Farm. Opposite the set of stocks (suitable punishment for those who don't make it up the steep bit) is a wide, limestone track – the start of Clough Lane. Turn down here.

Beyond the ostrich farm (yes, really!), the smooth track surface gradually fades out. It is replaced by packed soil and, in places, the flagstones of the original packhorse route. The track contours along the rim of a wooded valley before dropping down a steeper section made tricky by ruts and rocks. At the bottom, do a right-left shimmy onto a potholed tarmac lane. Blast down here to a junction with a better road. Turn right and go 400m to a T-junction with the B5057. Turn left, go around the corner and, before crossing the bridge over the river, turn right onto the gated road to Oker (signposted 'Oaker'). After 400m the road turns right up the drive to Wenslees Farm, keep straight ahead through the gate and follow the road along a dike through grassy meadows.

Soon after passing through Oker, a T-junction is reached. Turn left and ride along a quiet country lane with gentle ups and downs. After 1.6km, turn right up another lane with two national speed limit signs. Follow this along the side of the hill to a steep descent into Matlock. The descent passes through a vehicle barrier (bikes are allowed) and emerges onto the A6 by the bridge over the River Derwent. There are many routes through Matlock, but the best I have found is to turn right along the A6 for 100m, then turn left down Olde English Road, cross the river by the footbridge and head rightwards through the park on the other side. Please note there is no cycling allowed in the park. This leads to the A615 and the crossroads in Matlock Green.

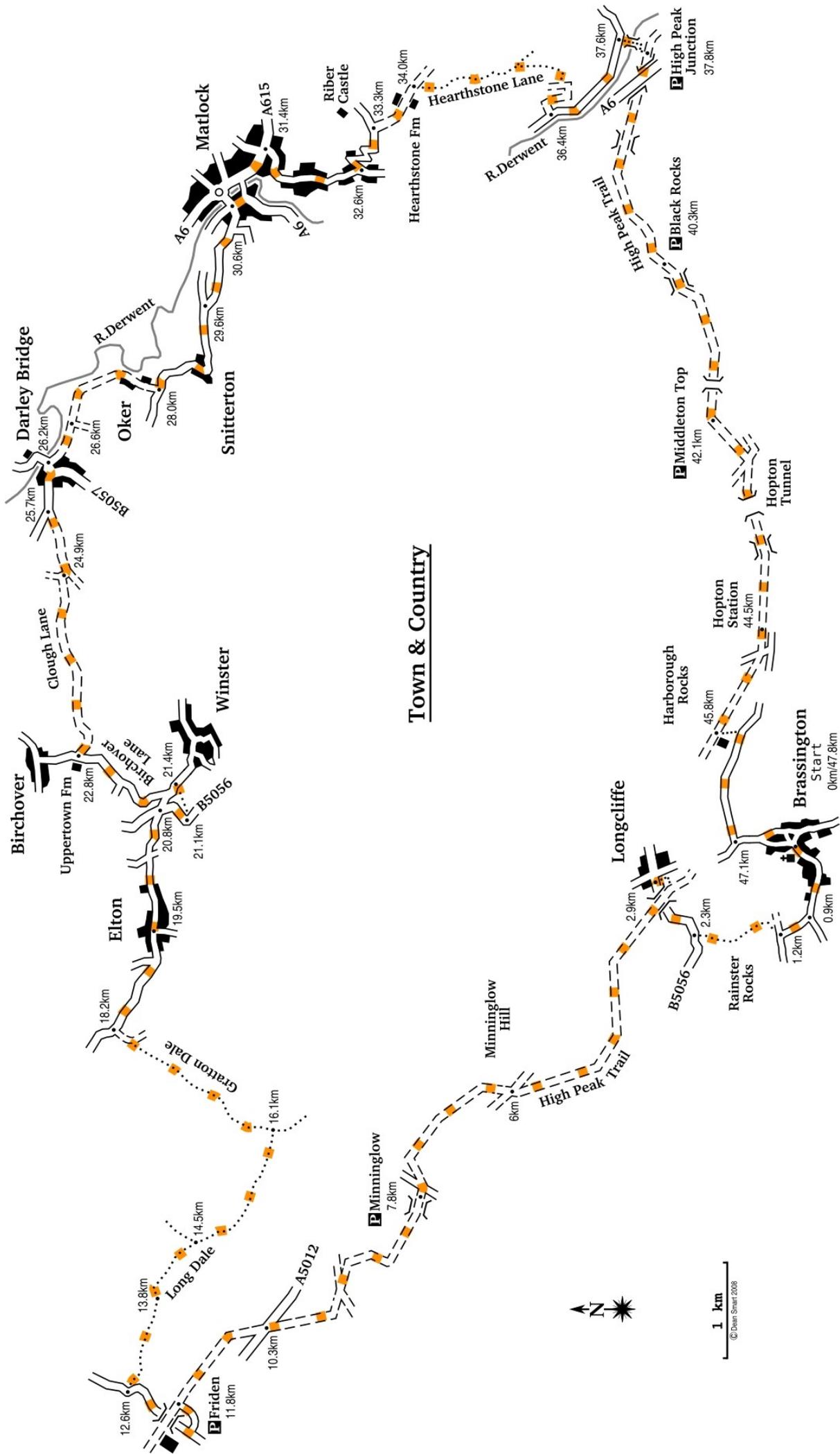
Turn right at the crossroads (opposite the Horseshoe Pub) and climb the hill to Starkholmes. This starts steeply, but gradually eases and leads to some nice views over Matlock Bath. Around 1.2km from the crossroads, turn left and climb the lung-busting, zig-zag lane up to Riber. This vicious little climb saves the steepest bit till last so take it steady at the beginning! At the summit of the hill and with Riber Castle visible to the left, turn right down the track to Hearthstone Farm.

Ride along the track and through the farm. About 150m beyond the farm, turn right up a walled-lined, restricted byway (signpost). If you reach a cattle grid in the track, you have gone too far. The byway is narrow and rocky and reaching the top of the hill is quite tricky without a dab. Once there though, you are rewarded with a huge panoramic view and a monster descent back to river level. The descent is steep and rocky to start with as it drops down through some woods. Ignore the turnings off to the left. Pass through a gate and follow an equally steep, grassy track across a couple of fields. After another gate, follow a narrow pathway rightwards to a tarmac drive. This drops sharply down to join the road in the valley bottom.

Turn left and head along the road by the side of the river for 1.2km. On the left-hand bend just beyond the car park, turn right off the road and onto a path. Follow this across a footbridge over the river, through the sewage works, around bends to the right and left, across another bridge over the railway and across a third bridge over the canal to the old railway buildings of High Peak Junction. There is a small café here. Behind the café is the start of the High Peak Trail which begins with the huge, unrelenting climb up Sheepwash Incline....oh oh, better carb up on flapjack bars and a cup of tea....

From High Peak Junction, the route follows the High Peak Trail all the way to Harborough Rocks – a distance of 8km. First of all, test your stamina up Sheepwash Incline, gaining 150m height in 1300m distance. Then continue on the flat past Black Rocks to another long grind up Middleton Incline (80m in 600m). More flat follows, leading through Hopton Tunnel, until the final, less demanding slog up Hopton Incline (30m in 400m). At the top, keep going along the trail until in front of Harborough Rocks.

Turn left off the trail and take the path leading to the road. Turn right and then left at the next T-junction. Freewheel triumphantly down the hill into Brassington.



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1 km  
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