

Walk: WB1

Wildboarclough, Gradbach and Three Shire Heads

Starting Point: Old quarry car park in Wildboarclough, 200m north of the Crag Inn – near a junction, and a sign to 'Buxton 6'. SJ983688.

How to get there: turn off the Macclesfield-Buxton Old Road at the Stanley Arms. Drive down the minor road for 2½ miles to a junction with bridge crossing river.

Map: OS Explorer OL 24 – The Peak District, White Peak Area

Length: 6½ miles

Grade: Moderate

Duration: Two and a half hours

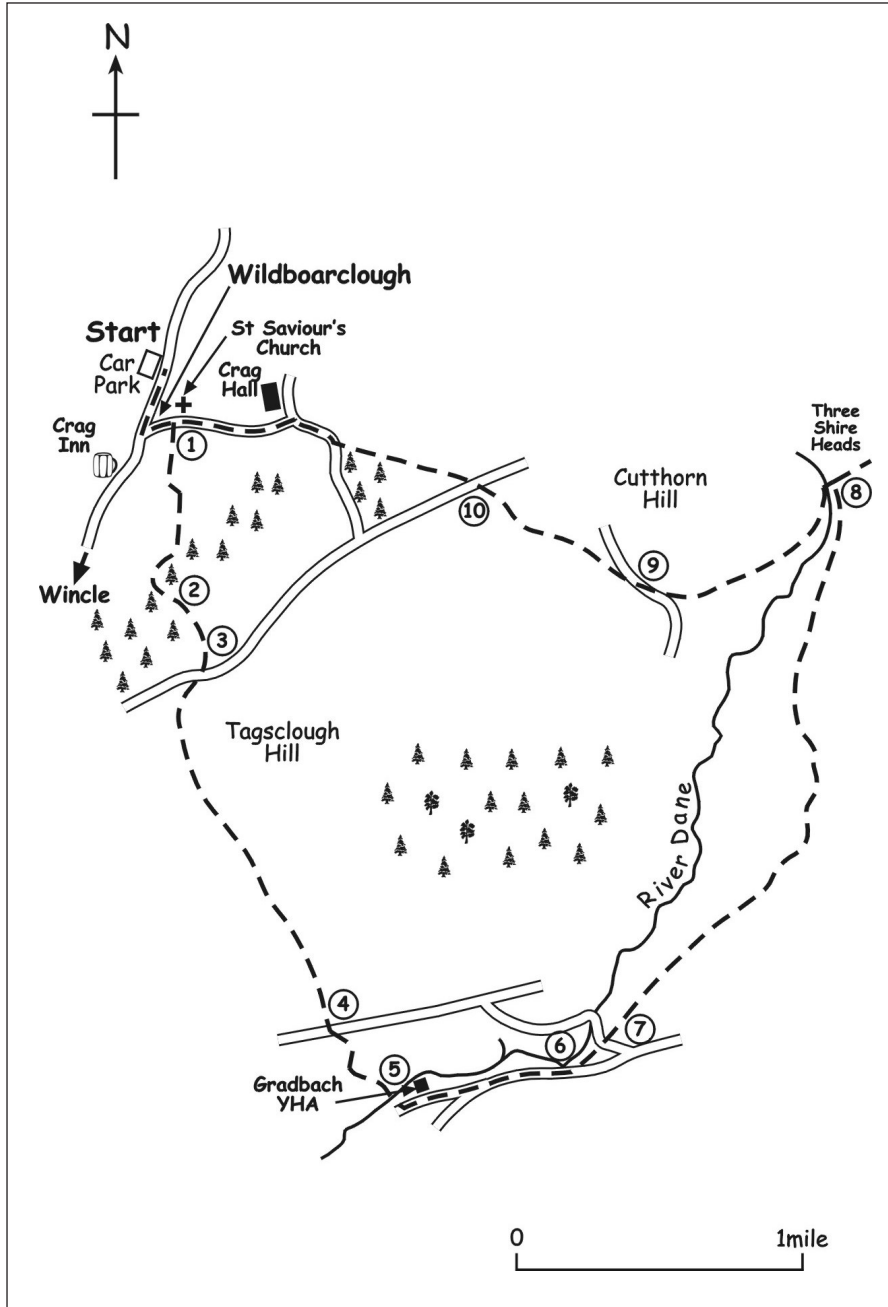
Both Wildboarclough and Gradbach are pretty places to visit, while Three Shire Heads is ruggedly impressive and is also a very popular tourist spot – so, try to avoid summer weekends!

Head from the car park downhill for a few yards, then turn left over the bridge – noting the plaque commemorating the flood of 1989, which Laura, my elder daughter, and I well remember:



Aftermath of the 1989 flood in Wildboarclough: Laura in foreground!

Wildboarclough



Pass the old post office (see introduction to this section) and take a right turn along a track (1) just after a telephone box on your left.

The path continues straight ahead after passing the house on your left. Walk alongside a dry-stone wall and then cross a stile. Continue through the field to the top-left-hand corner, where you turn left and walk between two stone walls. Then, go over a footbridge at the wall corner on your right and aim for the top-left-hand corner of the next field. From here, follow the obvious uphill track between a pair of stone walls.

At the end of this track (also at the farthest reach of the wood), turn left over a stone stile and go straight ahead, towards the next wood (2). Keep this wood on your right, then head for a stone-built building straight ahead. Walk through the farmyard of this old farm and follow the grassy track towards the road (3), heading towards a stepped stile some 40m to the left of a gate.

Cross the road, and the stile almost opposite, leading upwards to a tarmac track around the hill. At the first fork in this track, where the tarmac ends, keep left and follow a stony track all the way to the road. As you reach the highest point on this track, you may be able to see the sharp peaks of the Roaches straight ahead while a backward glance over your right shoulder should reveal Croker Hill with its communication tower – depending on the weather.

Cross the road (4) and follow the farm track as far as its sharp bend to the right, where you continue straight ahead, over a stile and onto a permissive path. Head downhill with the wall on your right, then turn left when you reach the wall facing you. Walk alongside the wall and turn right through a wide gap, where there once was a stile, and fork slightly left to join a track leading downhill to Gradbach Youth Hostel (5), originally a silk mill.

It seems a shame that this, of all youth hostels, does not yet have a café on the premises – especially since the demise, due to EU bureaucracy, of the Eagle and Child café on the road above the hostel. The hostel once had a cold drinks machine – on a summer's day this was akin to a desert oasis, but the Peak District National Park didn't like it (Why? Wrong colour? Wrong drinks?) and enforced its removal. You can, however, now call into the hostel for drinks and chocolate bars – and there's a chance that a seasonal café may open. Unless, of course, the bureaucrats find out first.

From the hostel, follow the private drive to the left and uphill. At the end of the drive, turn left along a minor road. Some years ago, it was

Wildboarclough



The old post office, Wildboarclough

possible to follow a concessionary path parallel to the road, but it is mostly obstructed with vegetation and is impassable most of the time, even though it claims to be on the route of the Dane Valley Way (DVW). Therefore, walk along the road for about 250m, enter a car park and find the footpath in the far right-hand corner. Follow the footpath from here (DVW marker) along a riverside, then cross a footbridge (6) and follow the path alongside the River Dane on your left. Leave the field by a stile adjacent to a gateway and turn right.

Walk along the road for some 70m, then turn left (7) through a gateway with a public footpath sign. Pass Dane View House on your left and bear right, through a gateway and uphill through a small gate. From here, carry on straight ahead, with the wall on your left and enjoy a lengthy wallside walk for almost as far as the eye can see – no problems with navigation. Along the way, pass a large barn on your right and continue with distant buildings as a reference point.

After a second mini-gate, march up the final uphill stretch and, finally, you reach the very end of the wall. From here, continue in the same direction over two stiles. After the second stile, head for the top-left-hand corner of the field. Go through a gap then follow the wall on your left, crossing a hardcore track. Cross a stile into the next field then

walk uphill and to the left of the derelict building facing you. Where the path joins a farm track which is walled on both sides, turn left and continue straight ahead – ignore any footpath signs, side tracks or paths: just follow the main track with the River Dane over to the left until you reach the bridges at Three Shire Heads (8). Cross both bridges and turn left so that you are again above the Dane. Continue along the track circling Cutthorn Hill until you reach the road.

Cross the road (9), then immediately go over a stile to the right of a house and follow the path. Initially, this runs alongside the wall, then gently forks right to continue straight ahead, wandering across open moorland that had been classified as an ‘Environmentally Sensitive Area’ before ‘right to roam’ legislation. Eventually, the path crosses a gap in a stone wall – some 30m to the right of where the wall crumbles into oblivion.

Shutlingsloe is a beautiful sight ahead, as the path curves very slightly to the right and leads to the main road – you’ll see the footpath sign quite soon. Cross the road (10) and then the stile facing you. Continue along a well-maintained path, again towards Shutlingsloe. Where the path meets the road, turn right and follow the road downhill, passing to the left of Crag Hall (country seat of Lord Derby), St Saviour’s church (where you can buy a booklet about Wildboarclough) and the old post office, back to the car park.