

# Kinder Scout:

## taking the high ground

75 years ago a group of outdoor enthusiasts banded together for the most significant event in the battle for access to Britain's mountains and moors: the mass trespass on Kinder Scout. Roly Smith takes a look back while exploring the new commemorative Trespass Trail.



**E**aster weekend of 1932 was a big occasion for the Lancashire branch of the British Workers' Sports Federation (BWSF), a Communist-inspired working-class movement that organised sporting events for workers.

Its regular camps, held at places like Marple, Rowarth and Little Hayfield, had already introduced many young people to the illicit pleasures of walking on the then-forbidden Peak District moors. But this particular weekend was special, because they were hosting a group from the London branch where the BWSF had started four years previously.

The group had decided to take their London comrades on an exploration of Bleaklow, at 633 metres (2,060ft) the second highest point in the Peak District, and a favourite among many Peakland bogtrotters for its wildness and solitude. But like most of the Peak District moors at the time, this once common land was barred to walkers by the landowners who preserved them for the red grouse which they would then happily blast out of the moorland skies in August.

The group set off from Old Glossop, up the narrowing valley of the Yellow Slacks Brook towards the shattered gritstone outcrop known as Yellow Slacks, where they encountered a group of burly gamekeepers who were charged by their

masters with keeping the ramblers off their land.

According to mass trespass leader Benny Rothman: "They (the ramblers) were abused, threatened and turned back. The people from the London group were astounded by the incident, and the Manchester ramblers felt totally humiliated."

Back at their Rowarth campsite, the group resolved that if there had been enough ramblers, no number of keepers would have kept them off. Thus the idea of a well-publicised mass trespass on Kinder Scout – the highest point of the Peak District and the Holy Grail of many frustrated walkers – was born.

The rest, as they say, is history and the events of Sunday 24 April 1932 have long since entered the realms of walking and outdoors mythology.

On the weekend of 21-22 April this year, walkers from across Britain will congregate at the former milltown of New Mills to celebrate the 75th anniversary of that iconic and pivotal event.

Among the features of the weekend will be the inauguration of the 23km/14-mile Trespass Trail

From top, clockwise: The mass trespassers walking up William Clough towards Kinder Scout, 1932; Gamekeepers attacking ramblers; Making the headlines in the national dailies; No trespassing sign in the Peak District before access was granted.



following in the footsteps of the trespassers, the idea of Natural England chairman Sir Martin Doughty, who will lead the celebrations.

The trail starts and finishes at New Mills, where the six who were arrested after the trespass were held overnight in cells in the police station in Hall Street. A plaque commemorating the imprisonment of the trespassers was unveiled in 1994 by Benny Rothman.

The day after the trespass, Rothman and four others were charged at New Mills Police Court (now incorporated into the Town Hall) with unlawful assembly and breach of the peace. One John Anderson was also charged with causing grievous bodily harm to a keeper.

All six subsequently pleaded not guilty and were remanded to be tried at Derby Assizes – 60 miles from their hometown – in July 1932.

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Five of the six were found guilty and jailed for between two and six months. The condemning jury was later described by Prof CEM Joad in *The Untutored Townsman's Invasion of the Country* as "two brigadier generals, three colonels, two majors, three captains, two aldermen and 11 country gentlemen."

The Trespass Trail starts at the New Mills Heritage Centre off Rock Mill Lane (behind the bus station), and descends into the Torrs gorge, crossing the spectacular £525,000 Millennium Walkway – an inspiring 160-metre (525ft) long modern icon to access.

Following the River Goyt through the Torrs Riverside Park, the trail passes a cast iron milestone commemorating the opening of the 362km/225-mile Midshires Way trail which links the Trans Pennine Trail at Stockport with the Ridgeway in Buckinghamshire. This milestone was also unveiled by Benny Rothman in 1994.

Leaving the river, the trail climbs up to the Children's Inn at Rowarth. It was here, while camping at Easter, that the BWSF planned the trespass. The trail climbs again towards Lantern Pike (373m/1,224ft); a topograph on the summit commemorates the pioneering Manchester-based access campaigner, Edwin Royce.

It then descends to Clough Mill and Little Hayfield, which was another favourite BWSF campsite in the 1930s. Crossing the A624 Glossop Road, the trail enters the National Trust woodland of the Park Hall estate and runs on to Middle Moor. It then joins the Snake Path – for long the only footpath crossing Kinder – and on to White Brow above the Kinder Reservoir, following the route the 1932 trespassers took after their rally at Bowden Bridge. From Kinder Road, they climbed up the steep bank to White Brow then

followed the Snake Path to Nab Brow and into William Clough.

About halfway up William Clough, the trespassers scrambled up towards the Kinder plateau to reach the 450m (1,475ft) contour. It was here that they came face-to-face with the Duke of Devonshire's gamekeepers.

In the ensuing scuffle, one keeper was slightly hurt, but there was little in the way of fisticuffs and the walkers were able to press on to the plateau. Here they were greeted by a group of Sheffield-based trespassers who had set off that morning, crossing Kinder from Edale. After exchanging congratulations, the two

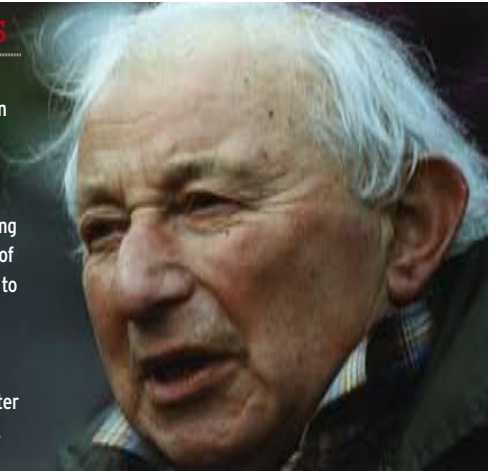


**PARDONED – AFTER 62 YEARS**

As Benny Rothman (right), then 82, unveiled the plaque on the former police station in New Mills in 1994, an old chap in the crowd started to heckle him.

It was John Anderson, who had travelled from his Lancashire home to protest his innocence. He said he had actually opposed the mass trespass, and had only gone along to see what happened, when he was arrested at the scene of the scuffle with the gamekeepers. He claimed he had gone to the aid of an injured keeper.

Anderson calmed down when Derbyshire's then Chief Constable, John Newing, stepped forward and told him he believed he was innocent. At the age of 83 and 62 years after the event, John Anderson returned to Lancashire absolved.



groups joyously retraced their steps, the Sheffield trespassers back to Edale and the Manchester contingent to Hayfield.

The trail now returns on the William Clough path and descends to the reservoir to take the reconstructed low-level path round the edge of the water into Kinder Road, passing the Bowden Bridge car park and former quarry, where a bronze plaque erected in 1982 commemorates the 50th anniversary of the trespass.

The disused quarry at Bowden Bridge was chosen by the trespass leaders to rally everyone before setting off for Kinder Scout. Benny Rothman, pressed into service when the main speaker failed to appear, made an impassioned speech here, calling for the mass trespass to be the start of a campaign to finally win the right of access to mountains. After Benny had scrambled down from his impromptu pulpit, the whistle blew and the 400 or so trespassers moved off arm-in-arm towards Kinder, cheerfully singing rambling songs as they went.

The route continues down Kinder Road into Hayfield, where a third of the Derbyshire Constabulary was reputedly waiting for the trespassers. As they returned to the village, the ramblers were arrested by police accompanied by keepers and taken to the Hayfield Lock-up. A large group had waited outside the lock-up to press for the release of their arrested colleagues. The police then smuggled the six out through a rear door and brought them to New Mills.

Today's Trespass Trail now heads back towards New Mills, crossing the A624 and takes the Sett Valley Trail, which

follows the route of the former railway line through Birch Vale. It then turns up from the river, past the Pineapple Inn, to climb up to New Mills High Street and Cross Street, to finish at the imposing Victorian splendour of New Mills Town Hall.

**THE MANCHESTER RAMBLER**

Tom Stephenson, another great access campaigner and secretary of the RA for 22 years, opposed the mass trespass along with most other RA officials. He said the best thing to come from the event was 'The Manchester Rambler', an anthem composed by Ewan MacColl, who was known as Jimmy Miller at the time, and which is now traditionally sung at trespass celebrations:

**I'm a rambler, I'm a rambler from Manchester way  
I get all my pleasure the hard moorland way  
I may be a wage slave on Monday  
But I am a free man on Sunday**

The arrest and subsequent imprisonment of the trespassers unleashed a huge wave of public sympathy. A few weeks later 10,000 ramblers – the largest number in history – assembled for an access rally in the Winnats Pass, near Castleton, and the pressure for greater access continued to grow.

It was to be another 17 years before the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act by the post-war Labour government in 1949. This legislation set up the mechanism for the creation of National Parks, and the process

for the negotiation of access agreements to open country. The Peak District was the first to be designated and, almost immediately, access agreements were negotiated with landowners for the former 'battlefields' of the 1930s: Kinder Scout and Bleaklow.

Even so, huge tracts of moorland remained inaccessible to the public for another 50 years until the passing of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act in 2000, and its final implementation in 2005.

In 2002, Andrew, the late 11th Duke of Devonshire, publicly apologised at the 70th anniversary celebration event of the Kinder trespass at Bowden Bridge for his grandfather's and the other landowners' 'great wrong' in 1932.

Justice was finally seen to be done.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Poet and folk singer Ewan MacColl celebrated the trespass in his song 'The Manchester Rambler'. It is also the subject of the song 'You Can (Mass Trespass, 1932)' on anarchist pop group Chumbawamba's 2005 album *A Singsong and a Scrap*.

