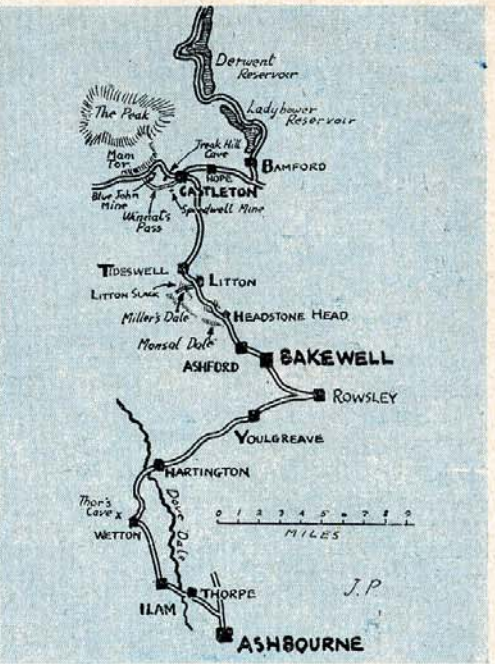


# PEAK OF PERFECTION



Stepping stones at Dovedale.

TEN years have rolled by since I last filled my tank with unrationed petrol and sallied forth in search of adventure, air and sunshine. The return of the life-giving fluid prompted me to set the radiator of my M.G. with a zest in the direction of the romantic and mysterious backbone of England, the playground of teeming cities, to renew my acquaintance with the lovely scenery.

First of all, it is no earthly good setting out on an itinerary of this kind without a prescribed route and the one I outline will keep you from taking the wrong road which may finish up in some far-from-pleasant manufacturing outlier, so tear it out and keep it for reference.

Thirteen miles west of Derby is Ashbourne, whither Thorpe and Ilam, on the threshold of Dovedale, are easily accessible. At Thorpe "The Peveril of the Peak" Hotel, in its own gardens, stands in a beautiful position. It is a joy to look at the noble outline of Thorpe Cloud from here. About two miles away stands the Izaak Walton Hotel at the entrance to Dovedale and close to Ilam. Close by is a spacious car park where everyone visiting Dovedale is obliged to leave his car.

There is nothing like Dovedale in the whole of England. An idyllic footpath winds up the vale for eight miles, disclosing lovely views of a deep valley bounded by limestone crags, ivy-covered and fantastic, and echoing the music of the crystal-clear River Dove as it leaps over small weirs and rapids.

In adjoining Beresford Dale came Izaak Walton to do some trout fishing, as recalled in the famous lines by John Drinkwater in his poem *Pike Pool*. It ends with

## *Rejoicing in restored petrol, JOHN PENN blazes the trail for readers over some delightful motor runs. His first tour takes him through the Derbyshire Dales*

"We've given the world the slip to-day, For the Mayfly's on Pike Pool." But why fish for trout in Pike Pool? I doubt if there would be any trout if the pool were named after that voracious fish. Therefore, to dispel this anomaly, the pike refers to a tall column of limestone rising from the water: close by stands Charles Cotton's fishing cottage.

Before proceeding I must give a word of warning about hotels. Small hotels such as at Ilam are often full, and calling there on the off chance for accommodation is usually unsatisfactory, so it is therefore advisable to book in advance. Matlock and Buxton are far bigger centres and here it is usually possible to find suitable accommodation without booking, except in the school holiday season.

### Thor's Cave

Leaving Dovedale, my favourite route is to follow the signposts to Wetton, where a turn to the left leads to a Peakland wonder, Thor's Cave, perched high above the Manifold, a fickle stream which flows above ground and then disappears into underground channels through "swallets." The climb up to the cave itself may be a good adventure, but if the river is in one of its wet moods some difficulty may be experienced in getting across.

Through Hartington and Youghreave to Rowsley, I always like to visit the Peacock Inn with its luxuriously furnished interior and good food. Here I can find peace, if I

wish, by indulging in some quiet fishing in the River Derwent in surroundings within sight of famous Haddon Hall.

Beautiful glimpses of the River Wye on the way to Bakewell make me pause on the Buxton side of the town to admire the lovely pack-horse bridge. At Ashford, a road through the village climbs all the way to Headstone Head, where one of Peakland's classic views is to be admired.

This is of Monsal Dale, where the railway is carried high above the River Wye by viaduct arches. From Headstone Head this viaduct appears dwarfed by its surroundings. It is a place well worth visiting except on Saturdays and Sundays, when it swarms with people. From here a road plunges down into the dale and climbs a steep hill to Litton. On this section a sharp elbow reveals a truly remarkable view of Miller's Dale and about a mile farther up the road a gate on the left gives access to Litton Slack, a famous test hill with a maximum gradient of 1 in 3 leading down into Miller's Dale. Here the smooth hydraulic brakes of the M.G. were very reassuring, and the hand brake amply strong enough to hold the car on the steepest gradient without having to put it in bottom gear as an extra precaution.

Litton Slack is no hill for the novice. A steady head for altitude (there is only a one-foot-wide verge) and a good car are essential. The view is quite spectacular and from the elbow the drop is almost frightening, the houses in Miller's Dale



appearing like a scene in Lilliput. If you do not wish to descend, it is possible to reverse before the elbow and return, thus saving driving down a dangerous section. Either way it is quite convenient to reach Tideswell and Lane Head, whither a road leads across the moors to Castleton with glorious views before the descent to this small town right in the heart of caveland.

First of all there is a remarkable vista of the Peak Castle perched at the top of its cliff directly above the Peak Cavern, from which issues the Peakshole Water. Here in Norman times, no doubt, several people were sent to their doom by being hurled over the fearful precipice. The Peak Cavern has an entrance arch of 120 ft. wide and 42 ft. high, the largest in Britain. In the Middle Ages it was used as a rope factory, and the cavern extends over 2,300 ft. into the limestone. In places, rushing cataracts may be heard, but these have never been discovered.

### Speedwell Mine

At the foot of the Winnats Pass, said to be a gigantic cavern that has lost its roof, is the Speedwell Mine, where after a steep descent the visitor boards a boat and is propelled along a tunnel 750 yds. long by the boatman pushing with his hands against the ceiling of the tunnel. This leads to an enormous cavern having a height of 450 ft. and filled by the fearful sound of thundering water.

At the summit of the Winnats Pass, a stiff climb for a car, Mam Tor, "The Shivering Mountain," comes into view. The huge gap torn out of its face is due to subsidence, and the main road which winds round at its base is always under repair for this reason. Close to this point is the Blue John Mine. This cavern, glittering with semi-precious stones, was explored by Lord Mulgrave with a party of miners who penetrated these subterranean fastnesses for a distance of three miles, discovering chamber after chamber of exotic crystals.

Farther down the road towards Castleton is Treak Hill cave with more wonderful things to see by floodlight.

### The Reservoirs

It would be a pity to leave this remarkable country without seeing a little of man's work as well. If the road be taken through Castleton to Hope and Bamford, the famous Ladybower Reservoir comes into view, a beautiful lake winding along a deep valley. The dam is a triumph of British engineering. Higher up the valley is the famous Derwent Reservoir, and this dam is even more spectacular because it is not grass covered.

In this district there are therefore seven or eight miles of superb motoring with views reminiscent of Lakeland; a truly noble piece of scenery so close to Sheffield.

**THOR'S CAVE,** near Wetton, makes a fine spectacle when seen from the road that leads down to Wetton Mill. The climb to the cave is good fun, but watch the water!



The lofty limestone cliffs in **MILLER'S DALE** are the most imposing in Peakland. The road follows the River Wye closely.



The M.G. saloon was put through its paces on **LITTON SLACK**, which has a gradient in places of one in three. The view is spectacular and the drop, in places, is frightening.



The end of the trip. The car is parked by the peaceful waters of the Derwent Reservoir at the end of a stretch of truly delightful motoring.

