



The gentle slope
of sunny
Mam Tor

MAM TOR

WHERE Derbyshire: Hope to Mam Tor (10km round trip)

WHAT Roads and disused roads in Peaks scenery

WHY Bizarre surface warped into roller-coaster by landslips

HOW Train to Hope station

This short, rugged road ride in the Peaks takes you onto something that looks more like an earthquake zone: 2km of extraordinary shattered tarmac on Mam Tor. You can easily add on a 30km largely traffic-free ride that is Britain's best reservoir cycle circuit to make a fabulous full day trip.



The shivering mountain that beat the road-builders



From Hope station head west along the main road through Castleton, past the shops and pubs. Instead of branching left up the 'main' road over Winnats Pass, which machetes its way through the hills to your left, stay straight on. This is a cul-de-sac, used as a car park by those walking on Mam Tor, the hill to your right. The road soon bends right, starts to rise, and (at an intriguing sign saying 'beware of live traffic') a gate bars motorised traffic from going further.

You soon see why. Until 1977, this was the A625, the main road across the Peaks from Sheffield. It made its way confidently out the town, turning right, up, and then sharp left, to hairpin its way calmly over the flank of Mam Tor. But the restless hillside is composed of horizontal layers of shale, and when they get wet, they slide across each other like a pile of trays spilt by an over-ambitious waiter. That year, storms – brutally contradicting the previous parched summer – saturated the mountain; the fragile surface broke up, and the road was pulled apart like a landslipped Andean pass in highest Bolivia. Repair proved impossible; the authorities gave up, closed it, and let the road crumble gradually down the hillside. It's now tarmac blancmange, and now cyclists have it all to themselves.

In a couple of places the road surface breaks up and drops away, evidence of why it would now cost an estimated £100,000 a year to maintain. Past the hairpin, the plasticine

peak does its most dramatic stuff. For a hundred metres or more the road is squashed, torn apart and ripped up, its entrails gruesomely displayed. At some points, fault-line shears expose a cross-section of the road's lavishly-layered structure. It still wasn't enough to resist the 'shivering mountain'.

At the greatest drop-off, a sheer wall the height of an ambulance shows why this stretch of abandoned road is best cycled uphill. Coming down, you could easily fail to see it. The scenery's pretty good, too. On the right, climbing up, there is a ridge flecked with walkers; Edale is on the other side.

Soon you arrive at another gate, and back to the spur of stable, motorable surface that returns you to the main road. From here, make sure that your brake blocks are healthy and go left and left. This is Winnats Pass, plunging over 200m in around 2km, with stretches of 1 in 5. This is the old road that the





A625 was built to avoid; now it's the only way over. The surface is smooth, there are no sharp bends, and the line of sight is good. But there usually is fast traffic, and the road is pretty narrow. So just take it easy and enjoy a steady free ride and the momentous gorge scenery, which is almost rudely un-English. The road levels out and brings you effortlessly back to Castleton and through to Hope.

A rainy day is not a bad time to visit the slithering summit and its downwardly mobile lane. Mist and drizzle enhances the feeling of being in some far-flung part of the third world; you half-expect to find indigenous peasants huddled in tents, and irritatingly seen-it-all foreign backpackers telling you it was much better ten years ago. In Castleton or Hope there are plenty of agreeable places

to sit out the downpour in a coffee shop or a tavern, in company with perhaps some of the dissolving walkers who themselves were huddled in tents that morning.

■ Also in the area...

Ladybower and Derwent Reservoirs are just a few kilometres north-east. The 25km circuit of the two is exhilaratingly scenic, mostly traffic-free, and arguably the best reservoir cycle circuit in Britain. There are some long stretches of mildly rough offroad, not suitable for a thin-tyred racing bike, but OK for a decent tourer or hybrid. From Hope, head a couple of kilometres east on the main road, then left through Thornhill right up to the dam. Cross the dam top to the right hand side, turn left and follow the cycle path up the side of the reservoir. Turn left on the main road, and where the other reservoir splits off on the right, turn right to fol-

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low its eastern bank. This offroad path takes you right up to the top of the 10km-long pair of reservoirs; you cross a little bridge and come back down the quiet road on the other side. There's a visitor centre halfway. It's gently uphill to the top of the reservoir, then steady, free-wheely downhill all the way back. The World War II dambusters practised here, in case you want to do any mock re-enactments.

For grittier stuff, the Peaks offer an unlimited number of ad hoc cycling trip opportunities, often with stunning views. Browsing OS maps, it's easy to string routes together from the hundreds of bridleways and surfaced lanes.

■ Other places like this

The east coast, from the Isle of Sheppey in Kent up through Norfolk to the plain of Holderness in East Yorkshire, is slipping away. The ginger-biscuit consistency of the cliffs, constantly being dunked in the swirling tea-coloured North Sea, munches the land away at rates of up to a metre a year in some places. As a consequence, many old lanes that used to lead somewhere now stop abruptly at the edge, sometimes blocked by flimsy barriers that will have to be brought back in a year or two anyway. If you're cycle-touring way off the beaten track in coastal East Yorkshire, explore Seaside Road in

Aldbrough, where a housing estate and its service road system is disappearing over the cliff in almost monthly instalments (see www.eriding.net/media/coast.shtml). This area is said to be losing up to two metres a year in some places, one of the fastest disappearing coastlines in the world.

In East Anglia, Happisburgh (north-east of Norwich, and pronounced 'hazeboro'; see the website www.happisburgh.org.uk) is another coastal village being eaten away by the waves, with financially crippling results for the unfortunate land- and home-owners. Whatever is currently left of the Clifftop Road might be interesting to cycle along, although most of it should now be called Cliffbottom Road. Dunwich, in Suffolk, is another steadily-dissolving place where you'd be advised to rent rather than buy. It's also the endpoint of a cult annual cycle ride, the Dunwich Dynamo (see page XXX).



Snackstop

Fish and chip shop, Castleton. *In centre of village, just south of main street, next to Youth Hostel. Cafes and tea rooms too.*

Quirkshop

Ye Olde Nag's Head, Castleton. *Old coaching inn in centre of village. Cask ales, food, good range of malt whiskies.*

Quirkshop

Sweaty after a hot day's riding? Hathersage, 5km east of Hope, has a heated outdoor hillside 33m swimming pool, open on summer weekdays. Float on your back and enjoy the curious sensation of being surrounded by Peak District scenery.

Tourer's tick list

- ✓ Ladybower Reservoir
- ✓ Visit some of the four caves
- ✓ Cycle Edale
- ✓ Panorama from Hollins Cross (1km bridleway from Mam Tor)

