

Mam Tor & The Great Ridge Geocross V57

Text & photos for Facebook

This Geocross links two of the best known geographical features of the Peak District National Park, Mam Tor and The Great Ridge

One is a much loved mountain, although in a continuous state of collapse, the other is one of Britains best loved walks.

For The Great Ridge I have mentioned a few 'National Treasures' who would approve its celebrity status, and one special Local Treasure, Sheffield's King of the Ramblers, Bert Ward.

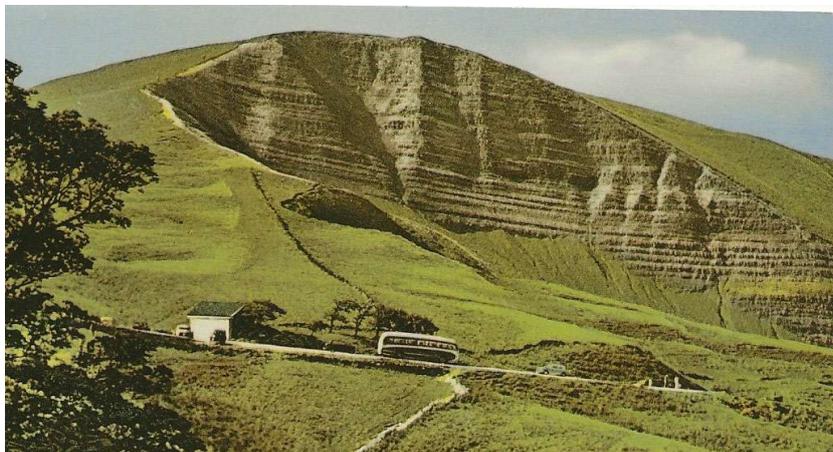


Mam Tor

The Shivering Mountain is probably the most frequently climbed hill in the Peak District. It has been very popular for over 3500 years when Bronze Age man first built a defended hillfort on the summit.

It is called The Shivering Mountain because its south-east face is continually falling down, due to its structurally weak composition of thinly bedded shales and gritstone.

Climbers stay away from it because it is too loose. However, it can be climbed in a hard winter frost where the rock is held in place by ice. Even in winter it is hardly safe, and a roped pair of climbers will be hard pressed to find a stable stance for a belay.



Mam Tor is famous for being a never ending disaster. There are other landslips nearby but Mam Tor gets the top prize for being very visible and very unstable, towering over Castleton at the head of the Hope Valley.

This historic post card shows what might be one of 'Hulleys of Baslow's single decker buses descending a tarmac A class highway which has since disappeared. If you walk down the old road you will see layers of old tarmac, on top of earlier layers which have slipped away and never been replaced.



At the foot of the Shivering Mountain is an abandoned stretch of the old main road between Sheffield and Chapel-en-le-Frith where you can see this cast-iron milestone on the old A625.

The milestone was built to last and is still standing but the road has collapsed, beaten by the forces of nature.

After many years of unsuccessful road repairs and numerous landslides in 1912, 1933, 1946, 1952, 1966; 1976 a particularly bad slip in 1979 caused the troubled Mam Tor A625 road to be closed permanently.

The A625 road was built in the early 19th century and was the major through route between Chapel-en-le-Frith and Sheffield.

The chosen route may have been a good idea in the days of horse drawn carts and coaches, but methods of road transport has become much heavier.

In 1979, UK regulations allowed maximum weights for articulated vehicles of 44 tonnes for 6 axles.

During the Second World War a new tarmac road was engineered up Winnatts Pass as a back-up in case of road failure. Other than an occasional avalanche in a hard winter this road still remains open.

Mam Tor's ongoing landslip is a rotational slump where the higher permeable gritstone layers overlie weak impermeable shales and mudstones. The interface between these two rocks becomes saturated and lubricated, causing the overlying slope to slide slowly downhill. This process, active for thousands of years, has resulted in a broken road. In cost-engineering terms it is 'unrepairable'.

The engineering disaster of the broken road itself has now become a magnet for tourists. The abandoned road is a visual representation of geological activity, a large-scale testament to the landslip, featuring significant cracks, broken sections, and visible layers of past repair attempts.

It is now a popular walking and mountain bike route.

In 2018 I took a visiting senior Chinese Civil Engineer to see the landslip. He was very familiar with repairing landslip roads and railways in earthquake zones in South China. He was explaining how the Chinese built roads and railways, constructed on concrete piles (pillars) as a 'bridge' over unstable landslips. A local Civil Engineer from Sheffield was standing nearby and overheard our discussion. He understood the Chinese techniques used to 'bridge' the loose strata. He agreed that it would probably be a successful solution but at a capital cost the British Government wouldn't pay. Our government would not justify the capital cost of building a 'fail-safe' solution.

The Great Ridge

Situated between the Vale of Edale and the Vale of Castleton, The Great Ridge is a great natural divide. The only road crossing is at Mam Nick, just west of the summit of Mam Tor. This is a 240 metre climb and if you intend to cycle over it from Edale you will need fresh legs or an e-bike.



Until Edale had a consecrated Church of England in 1633, corpses had to be carried over Hollins Cross to Castleton, then on for burial in the churchyard in Hope. The direct route was 3 miles, the road route 8 miles. There was a resting table for the coffin on the ridge top. This very memorable story was told by my school geography teacher who led

a hike over Hollins Cross on a school Field Trip to Castleton in 1966. It has stuck with me ever since!

He also rewarded me with a very tough month at Eskdale Outward Bound School in March 1968. That has also stuck with me ever since.

The River Noe in the Vale of Edale is fed by many steep moorland streams which tumble off Edale Moor, Brown Knoll and Lords Seat. These are all gritstone streams, carrying a large burden of gritstone silt and gravel, and larger rocks in times of flood. The water is acidic, coming off Kinder Scout's peat bogs on the moorland plateau.

At a very late stage in completing the Derwent Valley Reservoirs, in 1951 a River Capture scheme was added. An intake weir was built on the River Noe near the village of Edale. A stone masonry dam 4 metres high slows the River Noe and diverts some of the flow into a tunnel which passes under the Hope Cross - Win Hill ridge, to deliver a clean water feed into Ladybower Reservoir. That enables the Ladybower Reservoir to pump water up to the gravity flow Rivelin Tunnel, thereby ensuring that Sheffield receives the full amount of 'compensation' water.



Unfortunately, the dam has the effect of slowing the rate of flow of the River Noe, which then 'dumps' its silt and gravel behind the weir, requiring regular dredging and disposal of the silt on nearby fields. The road into the Vale of Edale is unsuitable for heavy vehicles to carry the waste away.

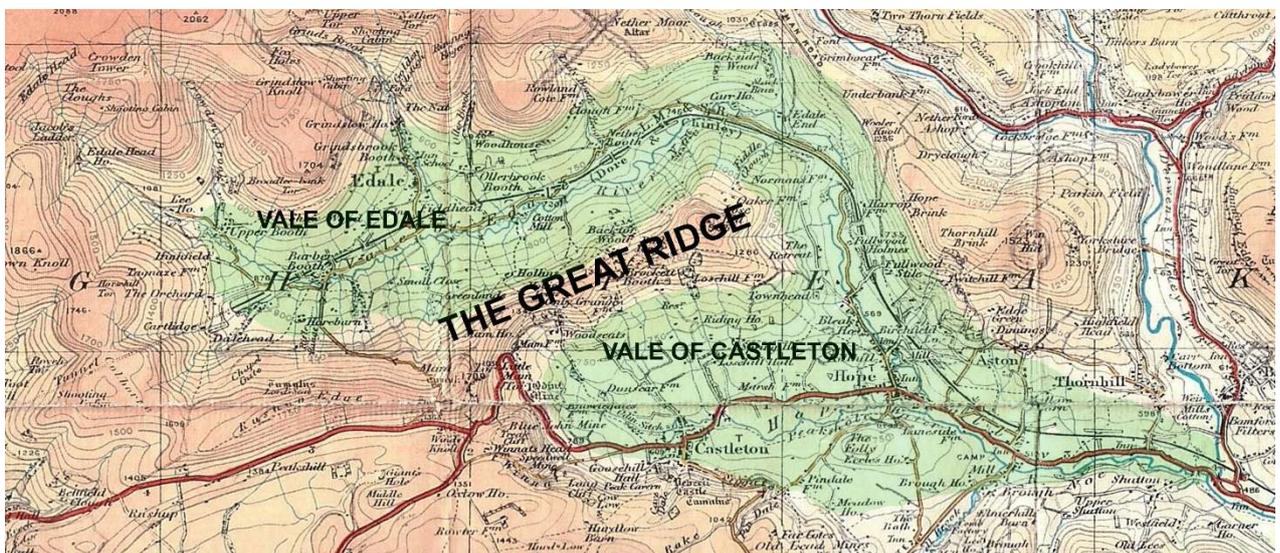
The river in the Vale of Castleton couldn't be more different than the turbulent River Noe. The in-elegantly named Peakshole Water is an emergent cave stream from Peak Cavern. Peak Cavern has a more famous and in-elegant name: the Devils Arse. Once released from the cave the Peakshole Water is very well behaved and flows all year round. The water temperature is a minimum 7C in winter.

Peakshole Water flows from Castleton to join the River Noe in nearby Hope, and a couple of kilometres later the combined rivers join the River Derwent at Bamford, too low to contribute to the Derwent Reservoirs.

Peakshole Water only has one tributary due to the subterranean nature of water in its limestone valley. The man-made Odin Mine Sitch (drain) rises on the slopes of Mam Tor and joins the Peakshole Water in Castleton.

The cave water is slightly acidic. Being a cave outlet, the water flow is fairly consistent and doesn't have the violent flood surges that can cause the River Noe to be a bit boisterous and burst its tree lined banks from time to time. It only takes one tree to be washed downstream to block the river and cause a flood. Being parallel to the main railway brings other flooding risks.

The Great Ridge was voted 10th place in a 2017 poll of Britains Favourite Walks. Unlike some favourite walks, it has no serious difficulties.



If you walk The Great Ridge you will probably see many smiling people. This walk makes people happy.

You will be walking in the footprints of Julia Bradbury. She has listed Mam Tor and The Great Ridge as one of her favourite walks. The walk was featured in her television series, and she has also participated in the "Great Ridge Light Night."

Why is The Great Ridge so popular?

Location, location, location.

Property experts Kirstie Allsop and Phil Spencer would not be able to put a monetary value on it, but they would agree that it does have these three key attributes which make it great:-

Location. A mountain ridge which straddles the heart of the Peak District National Park.

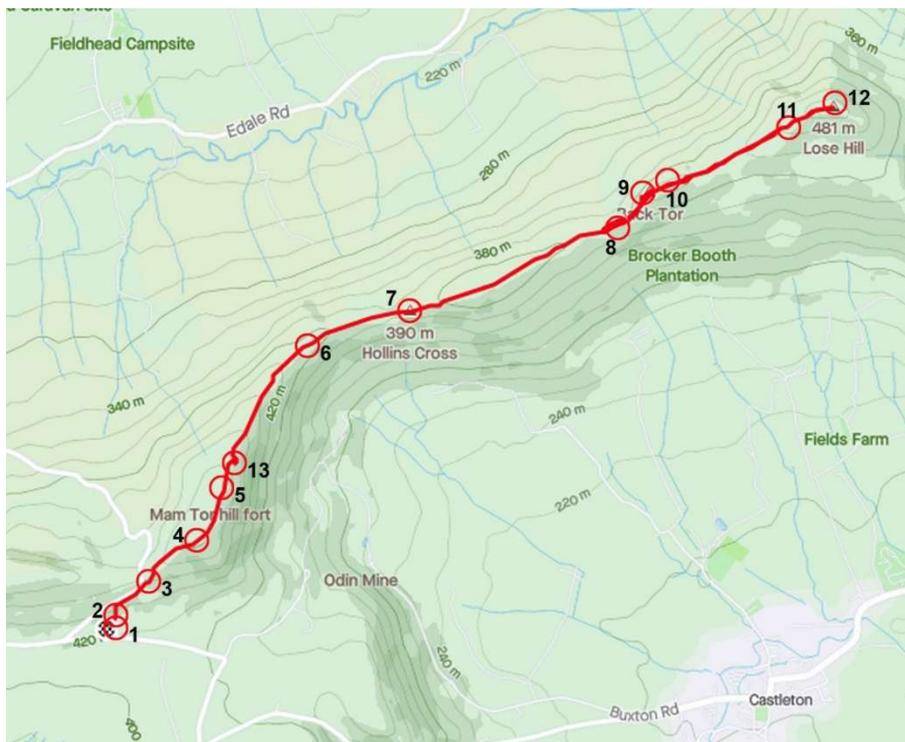
Location. Unrivalled long distance views.

Location. Accessible to a population of 20 million people living within a one hour drive.

The Mam Tor Geocross V57 visits some of the highlights of Mam Tor and the Great Ridge. Its an out and back route, but a circular route from Castleton is easily planned.

| Location | OS grid reference | W3W | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| | | First word | Second word | Third word |
| 1 | SK 12386 83232 | dishing | shady | fishnet |
| 2 | SK 12386 83287 | gathering | soda | courage |
| 3 | SK 12512 83405 | drama | resolves | deeds |
| 4 | SK 12770 83612 | rinsed | dreading | measure |
| 5 | SK 12792 83661 | motorist | womanly | headlines |
| 6 | SK 13102 84327 | clashing | relief | shuttled |
| 7 | SK 13589 84517 | broccoli | aboard | refuse |
| 8 | SK 14384 84849 | crass | captions | averages |
| 9 | SK 14565 85004 | painted | forwarded | yard |
| 10 | SK 14626 85032 | besotted | mush | matrons |
| 11 | SK 15114 85277 | veto | compacts | frowns |
| 12 | SK 15312 85357 | tastier | season | informed |
| 13 | SK 12890 83912 | admiral | puzzle | solicitor |

Each of the locations can be found on the route below.



Start from Mam Nick car park.

Location 1 OS ref SK 12386 83232

Mam Nick car park – information boards

W3W [dishing.shady.fishnet](https://www.dishing.shady.fishnet)



This small car park is very heavily used. Mam Tor itself is possibly the most visited summit in the Peak District National Park.

The sign tells the story of a late Bronze Age hilltop fort built 3500 years ago, but very few visitors actually see or explore the earthwork fortifications. Perhaps it is because the magnificent views distract from the distinctive atmosphere of the place, the genius loci?

Location 2 OS ref SK 12386 83287

Mam Tor history trail paving plaque

W3W gathering.soda.courage



The path leading to Mam Tor summit has a number of inset bronze plaques. This one depicts a Bronze Age round house, many of which would have existed at the hill fort.

Location 3 OS ref SK 12512 83405

Mam Nick sign

W3W drama.resolves.deeds



Mam Nick is the starting point for the ascent of Mam Tor. Mam Nick is a dramatic gash in the ridge which separates the Edale and Castleton valley catchments.

The Great Ridge is at the heart of the Peak District National Park. It is also on the boundary between the Dark Peak to the north and the White Peak to the south.

Rainfall south of the ridge enters underground streams in the limestone 'White Peak', while rainfall to the north enters the River Noe in the gritstone 'Dark Peak'.

Location 4 OS ref SK 12770 83612

Mam Tor trig point

W3W rinsed.dreading.measure



Visible from a great distance at 517 metres high. Mam Tor is possibly the most visited of the 81 trig points in the Peak District. Unlike most of the other trig points, this is not a white concrete pillar. It is hand built from local gritstone.

The surrounding ground has been paved with gritstone to withstand the thousands of feet which visit here.

The Great Ridge which leads east to Lose Hill is one of the most famous ridge walks in Britain, and it is free of charge, unlike many of Castleton's other activities. It gets very busy in spring and summer.

The hill fort on Mam Tor was home and gave safety to thousands of Bronze Age people who lived there in wooden round houses 3500 years ago. The climate was warmer then and the valley bottoms covered in dense woodland. High places gave guarded hill forts like this the chance to see approaching enemies and prepare defences.

Location 5 OS ref SK 12792 83661

The Great Ridge – footpath drain diverter

W3W motorist.womanly.headlines



The photo shows the Great Ridge heading east from Mam Tor. The footpath had been repaired just before this picture was taken. It does see a lot of foot traffic, and mountain bikers.

The annual Castleton Fell Race on 6 June 2025 attracted 89 runners. The race is 10km long and starts and finishes in Castleton. Runners visit both end of The Great Ridge so they covers the ridge from Mam Tor to Lose Hill. Twice. That's a lot of foot traffic in well under an hour; the fastest time was 39 minutes.

The Great Ridge was voted 10th place in a 2017 poll of Britains Favourite Walks. Unlike some favourite walks, it has no serious difficulties. However it does require significant ascent and descent.

Here are its Unique Selling Points.

It is a proper mountain ridge which straddles the heart of the Peak District between the Dark Peak and White Peak.

Unrivalled long distance views.

Accessible to a population of 20 million people living within a one hour drive.

A proper small mountain and lesser summits.

Location 6 OS ref SK 13102 84327

Ancient gate stoops

W3W [clashing.relief.shuttled](#)



Along the route are remnants of historic gate posts and a number of gates and stiles. The steeply sloping fields are grazed by sheep.

Location 7 OS ref SK 13589 84517

Hollins Cross

W3W broccoli.aboard.refuse



A col junction of north–south and east–west footpaths.

The modern pillar replaced an ancient coffin 'rest stone'. Before 1633 when Edale had its first consecrated church, coffins were carried from Edale over Hollins Cross to Castleton and from there to the churchyard at Hope for burial.

Location 8 OS ref SK 14384 84849

Back Tor gate

W3W crass.captions.averages



Back Tor is another landslip mountain. It faces north and has a bleakly unique dark character, like the Bleaklow Moors to the north.

Location 9 OS ref SK 14565 85004

Back Tor Summit

W3W painted.forwarded.yard



The summit of Back Tor had a large mound of stones until 2020. It is now a shadow of its former size. Visitors have rearranged the stones into pillars, and more are added daily. Very quirky and quite inappropriate.

The drystone walls were built by farmers to keep their grazing animals within fields. Perhaps the broken down walls should be rebuilt? This is one of the finest walks in Britain and needs mending.

The lonely Scots Pine is an iconic part of almost every photograph of Back Tor. It is a solitary remnant of a long gone conifer plantation. It stands alone in the teeth of every gale, leaning slightly away from the prevailing south-west wind. Being isolated it has plenty of horizontal spread root area in the shallow stony soil, but not enough to grow much bigger. Its narrow trunk isn't increasing and it doesn't grow any taller year by year.

Location 10 OS ref SK 14626 85032

Cairn

W3W besotted.mush.matrons



The old drystone wall fell down many years ago and has been replaced by a wire fence. Over the years the walling stone has been moved to form giant cairn mounds of stones, narrowing the footpath. They aren't needed to guide walkers as the way ahead is clear, even on a misty day.

This muddy section of footpath is still in need of restoration.

Location 11 OS ref SK 15114 85277

Losehill Pike Wards Piece sign

W3W veto.compacts.frowns



'Wards Piece' is named after **GHB Ward** who founded the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers in 1900. The club was disbanded in 2015, after 115 years of encouraging members to enjoy an adventurous outdoor healthy life.

Bert Ward lived from 1876 to 14 October 1957. He was an activist for walkers' rights and a Labour Party Member.

Sheffield Clarion Ramblers mainly walked in the Peak District. They often spent a long day out and covered many miles.

Bert Ward was a socialist who brought the rambling activity to workers in Sheffield. He showed his members where they had a legal right to walk, and played a major part in campaigning for Access to Open Country and the Right to Roam.

Two mottos feature in the yearly Sheffield Clarion Ramblers Handbooks which ran to 61 editions, from 1902 to 1963. These were:-

'A Rambler made is a man improved'

'The man who was never lost, never went far'

The Clarion Ramblers Handbooks contained dates and descriptions of weekly rambles throughout the year. Typically these were 12-20 miles and often on rough terrain. There were far fewer ramblers in the early 20th century. Leaders were appointed and the walks took place whatever the weather. Confrontations with gamekeepers were not uncommon as Bert Ward was a campaigner to recover lost public rights of way across moorland shooting estates. In the Handbooks he published a number of very detailed maps showing the traditional paths. This was at a time when landowners were trying to discourage access to their moorland shooting estates.

Location 12 OS ref SK 15312 85357

Losehill Pike summit

W3W [tastier.season.informed](https://www.tastier.season.informed)



In recognition of his lifetime dedicated to encouraging rambling, the Sheffield and District Federation of the Ramblers Association named and presented 'Wards Piece', a 30 hectare field comprising the summit of Losehill Pike, to Bert Ward in 1945. Ward subsequently presented the land to The National Trust. The circular bronze plaque viewfinder was placed in 1948.

Bert Ward would be delighted to know that the Great Ridge is the most walked ridge in Britain.

Location 13 OS ref SK 12890 83912

Mam Tor Hill Fort earth embankment – minor footpath crossing ditch

W3W [admiral.puzzle.solicitor](https://www.admiral.co.uk/puzzle/solicitor)



The Hill Fort footprint is shown by the green line. On the left side (east) the fortified bank has collapsed as the Mam Tor landslip face has progressed in the last 3500 years.

Visitors to Mam Tor often fail to see the incredible earth fortifications of the 3500 year old late Bronze Age Hill Fort. Take a few minutes to walk along the ditches. Consider the work involved to carry out defensive work on this scale with very primitive tools. It would have taken centuries to complete. How was it organised?

The shivering face of Mam Tor has been slipping for well over 4000 years, and now interrupts the earth embankments of the hill fort. This certainly helps with defence against attack from the south. The ramparts would have given protection to thousands of inhabitants over many centuries of continuous occupation.

The defences are vast earth ramparts enclosing 13 hectares of summit land, some 450 x 300 metres. That is larger than most shopping centre car parks. Initially the earthworks would have had a wooden palisade fence, but later this was improved to a steep stone revetted rampart fronted by a ditch. Within the protective walls families lived in wooden round houses and grew crops and kept animals for food.