

Mills and Hills

THE VALLEY WHERE HISTORY WAS MADE

A delightful 6 mile or 8 mile walk through some of the key places within the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. Woodland and canalside paths, plus a historic railway.

Parking: At Cromford Wharf. Turn right off the A6 at the crossroads in Cromford (traffic lights), signposted to Lea and Cromford Mill. The car park is on the right hand side just after the wharf buildings.

Refreshments: Arkwright's Mill and Cromford Wharf. Several pubs in Cromford.

When Richard Arkwright came to Cromford in 1771 it was a sleepy backwater on a bend in the River Derwent. All that was to change when he decided to build here the world's first water-powered cotton spinning mill. Within 20 years he had built two more and had constructed a whole new town around them - Cromford had become the 'home of the Industrial Revolution'.

A From the car park, cross over the road and pay a visit to Arkwright's first mill at Cromford. The buildings are being restored, and it is not hard to imagine the harsh working conditions of the mill workers, including children. Then walk up the road to the A6 and cross the busy road into the village of Cromford, built by Arkwright for his workers. Walk up the main road through the village, with the market square on your right, noting the particularly attractive cottages in North Street.

Turn left up Bedehouse Lane which turns into a narrow tarmac alley after rounding some almshouses. At the top of the lane by a street of 1970s housing, follow the signpost to Black Rocks to meet a lane. Turn left along the winding lane which soon divides. Take the right fork, on reaching a house with woods behind turn right through a gate, and follow the top field edge.

After climbing some steps, ascend left through the woods of Dimons Dale and up to the Black Rocks car park and picnic site. Detour up to Black Rocks for a good view of the town, Riber Castle and the Derwent Valley.

B Returning to the car park, turn right onto the High Peak Trail, the former railway track of the Cromford and High Peak Railway, and follow this down to High Peak Junction, where it meets the canal. There is a small information centre here and the workshops which date from the earliest days of the railway, are virtually unchanged since then.

The railway opened in 1831 and stretching 33 miles was considered to be an engineering masterpiece, linking Cromford Canal with the Peak Forest Canal at Whaley Bridge, south east of Manchester. A railway was chosen to provide this link because of the topography and difficulties in ensuring a water supply for a canal on the limestone upland. It was used to transport minerals, corn, coal and other commodities from one canal to another, across the high plateau of the Peak District.

Wagons were hauled up and down inclines on cables by steam driven winding engines. Initially horses pulled the trucks along the flatter parts of the route, but they were later replaced by steam. It is now a haven of wildlife along the route with an abundance of wildflowers.

C At High Peak Junction you have the choice of adding on an extra loop to the walk to create a slightly longer walk. The longer one involves a pleasant walk along the Cromford Canal and past the former home of Florence Nightingale.



High Peak Junction

Completed in 1794 the canal was built to carry limestone from local quarries to the iron foundry at Butterley and extended to Cromford serve Richard Arkwright's mills. It was intended as the first stage of a canal system to link the East Midlands with Manchester but (as described above) a railway was eventually used to cross the high central limestone plateau. The waterway was finally abandoned in 1944.

Short route to Lea Bridge

Turn right along the canal towpath and follow it until you come to a ruined cottage on the left. Then follow the sign to Lea Bridge.

Established in 1783, the John Smedley factory is the only mill site in the Derwent Valley where there has been continuous textile production for over 200 years. Factory shop on site.

continued overleaf...

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Longer route to Lea Bridge

Turn right along the canal towpath and follow this for about one mile. At the entrance to a short tunnel take the path leaving the towpath to the right. Follow the path straight ahead, then through a metal gate signed 'Holloway 1/2 mile' into a deer park. Continue up the grassy path, past a cottage on your right.

The big house over to your left is Lea Hurst - the summer residence of Florence Nightingale and her parents. She was a descendant of Peter Nightingale who bought Lea Hall and consequently became Lord of the Manor.

After passing through the next metal gate turn immediately left and follow the hedge on your left, crossing over the driveway to Lea Hurst and onto some stone flags. Follow the wall on your left round to a stile in the wall ahead and then down this path, through a kissing gate, then diagonally

across a field to a stile by a gate into Lea Wood. Keep to this pleasant wooded path, which bends sharply to the right (do not go straight ahead here). When you meet a track at the bottom, turn right down to the road, then left down the road.

D At Lea Bridge, just before the mill buildings, look for a footpath sign (near a bus stop) pointing up a track through woods (do not take the one pointing to 'Splash Farm') and follow this along a very pleasant path until you emerge onto a lane shortly after a house on your right. Follow the road down to the left until you get to a stile into a field on the right - turn here and cross several sloping fields and through a small wood, then turn left almost immediately and follow the path down to the road. Turn right along the road and cross the Derwent back to the car park.

