

Three Shires Head Walk

Visit the beautiful waterfalls at the point where Cheshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire meet

About the walk

This pleasant circuit of a little over 4 miles takes you out to Three Shires Head and back. Taking in secluded river valleys, mature woodland, a couple of miniature waterfalls, open sheep pasture and heather moorland, there are also some gentle hills to stretch the legs nicely – 285 metres (935 feet) ascent and descent in total. Could take as little as 1¼ hours if you don't hang about, but on a nice day there are plenty of excuses to dally, particularly at the packhorse bridge at Three Shires Head, so allow a good 2 hours, plus extra for a swim and picnic :-)

The route remains within Cheshire throughout, but follows the county boundary with Derbyshire, and then Staffordshire, near Three Shires Head. Technically, you could stand with one foot in Cheshire, one foot in Derbyshire and a hand in Staffordshire, but you'll get very wet trying...

Need-to-know

- **Free parking** (car park has three picnic tables, but no toilet facilities; no height restriction; no overnight parking or camping). Sadly, there's NO PUBLIC TRANSPORT to this location.
- **4½ miles (7¼ kilometres)** circular walk.
- Almost **1,000 feet (300 metres)** of ascent and descent.
- **2 to 2½ hours** at a leisurely pace.
- Mixed terrain (including **rough rocky tracks**, and **boggy ground** after rain); not suitable for wheelchair users or for pushchairs. Smaller children may struggle with some of the rougher and muddier terrain.
- **3 stiles** (including one ladder stile).
- **Dogs** *must* be kept under effective control (ideally on a short lead) for most of this route, as it uses Public Rights of Way to cross Open Access Land with restrictions in place to protect moorland birds. There are also many fields containing sheep and other livestock. Moorland birds (such as Curlew and Lapwing) are easily disturbed by loose dogs.

You may need to carry your dog down the ladder stile (approx 7 feet tall).

Getting there

Start and finish at **Clough House Car Park** (arrowed on the following map). The following may help if you use a satnav:

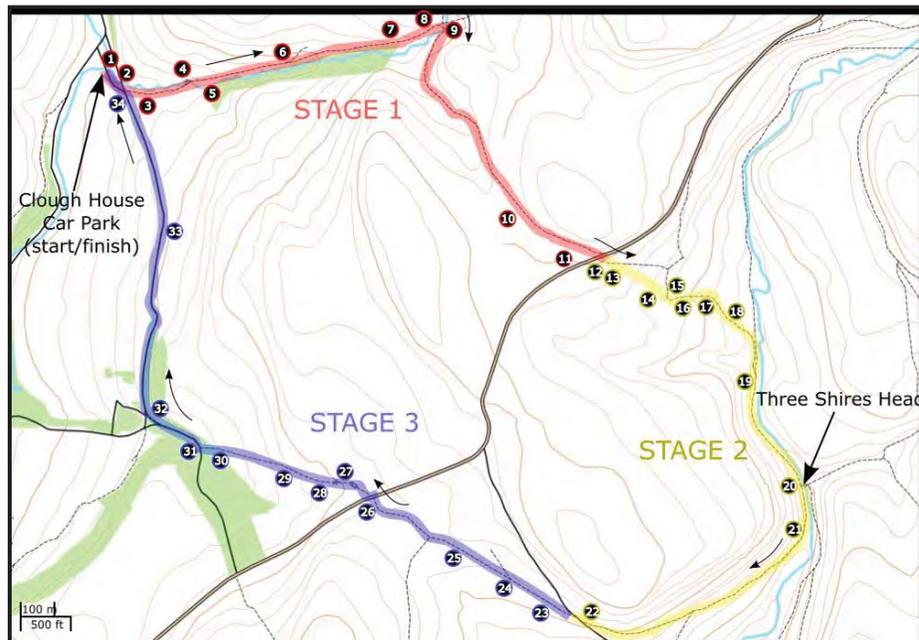
- nearest postcode: **SK11 0BD** (this postcode is actually in Wildboardclough village, about 1 kilometre south of Clough House Car Park)
- what3words: *infinite.firebird.glossed*
- Latitude, Longitude: **53.225, -2.020**
- Ordnance Survey grid reference: **SJ 987 698**

Map & directions

This simplified map provides guidance for the route described – the numbers refer to the numbered steps in the walk description. This map is not suitable for detailed navigation, for which you should use a copy of the relevant Ordnance Survey map.

The Ordnance Survey map covers a bigger area along with important information such as place names, official rights of way, and areas of Access Land.

For this walk, the ideal map is the Explorer Series **Number OL24: The Peak District - White Peak Area (Buxton, Bakewell, Matlock & Dove Dale)**, which includes the whole area of the walk at 1:25 000 scale (4 centimetres to 1 kilometre).



Contour interval: 10 metres; index contours, 50 metres. North at top (approximate).

Map data from OpenStreetMap (available under the Open Database Licence). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright & database right 2010–2023.

Base map generated by OpenOrienteeringMap (created by Oliver O'Brien). OpenOrienteering map is supported by British Orienteering.

IMPORTANT It isn't possible to park at or drive to Three Shires Head, which is some distance from a public road. The walk described below starts from one of the closest public car parks (at Clough House, near Wildboardclough).

Stage 1: Clough House Car Park to A54 road

1.

Leave the car park by following the exit road beside the nearby farm buildings on the right.

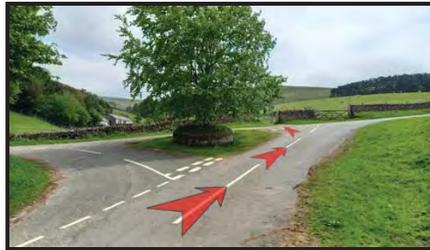
If you're lucky, the farm may have a stand offering local produce (eggs, veges etc.) that you can revisit when you finish your walk.



2.

Approaching a triangular road junction (with a small tree on the central island, enclosed by a circular stone wall), keep right, then cross the road ahead to the left-hand metal gate.

A Peak & Northern Footpaths Society sign (no. 104) marks the public footpath to "Cat & Fiddle Inn".



3.

Go through the metal gate, and continue up the stony track ahead, with Cumberland Brook and farm buildings on your left.



4.

Continue on the main track, crossing a footbridge over the brook and continuing up the main track on the other side.

The track is very rough and rocky underfoot in parts.



5.

Shortly after crossing the footbridge, go through a second gate on the main track.

The stile beside the gate is in a state of disrepair as of May 2025 – however, the gate is not locked, so this shouldn't pose a problem.

The sign on the stile outlines the restrictions on dogs (these MUST be kept on a short lead, and restricted to the Public Rights of Way as followed by this walk). As of May 2025 the sign is out of date, but the restrictions on dogs continue to apply until October 2029.

Continue on up the main, often rough and rocky track, climbing steadily now with woodland enclosing Cumberland Brook down to your right.



6.

After about 250 metres, ensure that you keep right to stay on the main stony track where a track bears left uphill to Cumberland Cottage.



7.

After another 400 metres of steady ascent on the stony track, you will leave the woodland behind, and a pretty waterfall comes into view ahead and to the right.

(This fall may be absent following prolonged dry weather.)



8.

As you approach the waterfall, go through a second gate, and follow the main track around to the right.

This area can sometimes be quite wet underfoot.

**9.**

Cross the river behind the top of the waterfall, and continue to follow the main track up and around to the right (initially alongside a wooden fence), then gradually back left, all the while climbing across the open hillside.

There are great views from here back down Cumberland Clough and over to Shutlingsloe (the prominent hill).

**10.**

Continue along the main track. This is very stony in places, and is also becoming severely eroded from water run-off.

Pass through a gate across the track and then, still gaining height, pass a stone building (Sparbent) in the field off to your right.

From here, you can see the A54 Buxton to Congleton road (which you will soon cross) and "The Roaches", an obvious hill on the skyline in the direction of Sparbent.

Breeding Curlew and Lapwing are frequent hereabouts from April to July.

**11.**

The track eventually reaches its high point just after Sparbent, and then descends slightly down to the A54.

Go through the wooden gate adjacent to the metal gate, then carefully cross the road and step over the crash barrier on the far side (or walk round the end of the barrier a few metres to the right).

Climb down the ladder stile onto a field.

(Dogs and small children may need assistance descending the ladder stile.)



Stage 2: A54 road to Three Shires Head to minor road

12.

Walk a few metres down hill, crossing the narrow field, then go through the metal kissing gate.



13.

Having passed through the kissing gate, the onward route may not be clear (there's often no visible path across the grassy field).

Continue down hill in the same direction, aiming for the patch of bare ground on the far side of a small gully (circled in the photo).



Continue in this direction until you reach a steepening, where a rough path appears in the grass.

Note that although this route is the most commonly used, it is to the right of the official right of way, which you'll pick up again at the gully. If signage or temporary fencing indicates a different route to that described here, be sure to follow these local instructions.

These fields are often full of sheep (and lambs during spring/early summer), so if you have a dog, be sure to keep it on a short lead.

14.

Follow the short section of rough path down the steeper bank to reach a gate between a stone wall and wire fence.



15.

Go through the gate, and turn immediately left.

(The steep bare ground immediately in front here is not a path or right of way.)



16.

Follow the track along a grassy terrace, slightly downhill, and never very far from the stone wall on your left.

Keep clear of the low ground close to the wall and below the track, as this may be very wet.



17.

After about 150 metres, pass an open gateway on your left, and then follow the track round to the right, passing a second gateway on your left.

Keep the stone wall/fence to your left, and don't go through either gateway.

The ground in this area can get quite churned up and muddy.



18.

Continue along the edge of the field (which can get quite muddy), staying fairly close to the wall or fence on the left as you gradually descend towards the River Dane, curving right and reaching a gate after about 200 metres.

The hillside on the far side of the river here is part of Derbyshire, the river marking the border between Derbyshire and Cheshire.



19.

Go through the gate (often quite muddy beneath after wet weather), and cross the bridge ahead.

The path is now much narrower, rocky, and fringed with bracken (a lush green in the summer, turning golden brown in the autumn).

After climbing slightly, the path gradually drops down to the confluence of the River Dane with an unnamed tributary (about 400 metres / ¼ mile) where you'll also see the old packhorse bridge ahead.

**20.****Welcome to Three Shires Head!**

This is the perfect spot for a picnic and a paddle/swim, with grassy banks and rocky outcrops next to the river.

Crossing the main packhorse bridge will take you from Cheshire into Derbyshire, then cross the second (smaller) bridge to pass from Derbyshire into Staffordshire.

There are plenty of photo opportunities too, with the small waterfalls and pools making for a very pretty scene.

When you're ready to go, be sure to continue along the same path that you arrived on, as there are many paths to different places hereabouts.

**21.**

Continuing along the path that you arrived on (with the River Dane down on your left), follow the path as it gradually climbs and curves right.

The path is slightly wider than previously, but still quite stony and rough underfoot.

There are great views to the left here, over the Dane Valley towards Ramshaw Rocks and The Roaches.

**22.**

Continue along the main path for 1¼ kilometres (¾ mile), climbing gently all the while, until you eventually reach a gateway just before a minor road. (As of May 2025, the gateway here is damaged and the gate not in use.)

Pass through the damaged gateway (a sign on the right points back to Three Shires Head), then cross the minor road diagonally and go through a kissing gate on the far side (circled in the photo).



Stage 3: Minor road to Clough House Car Park

23.

Having gone through the kissing gate, follow the grassy path across open ground, which curves to the right and gradually climbs towards the ridge ahead.

The ground here can get quite wet and boggy in places after rain.

You've a good chance of hearing and seeing breeding Curlew here from April to July.

These fields are often full of sheep (and lambs during spring/early summer), so if you have a dog, be sure to keep it on a short lead.



24.

About 300 metres from the kissing gate, as the path rises towards an obvious gateway on the horizon ahead, bear left (a waymarker post points the way).

Don't continue towards the gateway (marked with crosses on the photo), as this is not the right of way.



25.

After about 100 metres, the path reaches the top of the slope and crosses a broken-down stone wall, followed by a fence with a stile (and dog gate).

Shutlingsloe (the obvious hill on the horizon) comes clearly into view here.

Cross the stile, then bear slightly left to continue along the obvious grassy path, heading almost directly towards Shutlingsloe.

About 20 metres after the stile, be sure to bear right, away from the stone wall, to stay on the path that's heading in the direction of Shutlingsloe. Don't follow the left-hand path here.



26.

Continue along the grassy path (which can get quite wet underfoot after rain), crossing occasional planks over small streams and boggy areas.

The path continues in the direction of Shutlingsloe (roughly northwest) for about 300 metres from the stile, before reaching the A54 Buxton to Congleton road (which you crossed earlier, nearer to Buxton).

Go through a gate to reach the road, then cross the road and go over the stile on the far side.

Take care crossing here; there's a blind summit to your left, and vehicles often travel quickly on this stretch of road.



27.

Having crossed the stile, continue along the well-formed path, first crossing a longer section of boardwalk, then two shorter sections.

Despite the boardwalk, the path in this area can get very wet and boggy after rain.

Continue along the path for about 150 metres from the stile, until you reach a dilapidated gate across the track, just before a small stone building.



28.

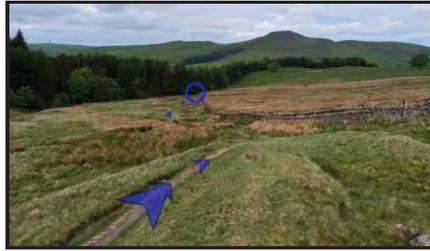
Go through the gate (which, as of May 2025 is barely hanging together), and continue to follow the path, passing the small stone building on your left.



29.

Continue following the path, gradually downhill now, until you reach a gate across the path at the edge of the forest, circled in the photo (about 200 metres from the building).

This section of the path can also get very wet and boggy after rain.

**30.**

Go through the gate (the ground approaching the gate can be very boggy), and continue among trees down an exceptionally rough, wet and rocky section of track for about 30 metres, until you meet a minor road.

This short section of track can be quite wet and slippery, even after an extended dry spell.

**31.**

Turn right onto the road (next to a Peak & Northern Footpaths Society sign, number 132).

Follow the road about 150 metres downhill to a road junction (ignoring the stony track that climbs away from the road to the right).

**32.**

Turn right at the road junction, in the direction indicated by the road sign ("Macc. Forest 2¾"), and keep on the road as you pass the numerous buildings of Crag Hall on your left, and a colourful display of Rhododendrons (from mid-May through June) on the bank to your right.

Continue along the road as it gently climbs through a wooded area for the next 150 metres, then levels out a little after leaving the trees.

**33.**

Continue along the road, which starts to descend quite steeply about 300 metres after leaving the trees.

Clough House Farm and Car Park (your starting point), is now clearly visible ahead and to the left.

**34.**

After another 300 metres on the road, you'll reach the entrance to Clough House Car Park on the left.

If the weather's good, this is a pleasant spot (with picnic tables) to relax following your walk out to Three Shires Head and back.

