

"We retraced our steps."—A6 near Matlock.

## DOVEDALE REVISITED

## TWO DAYS IN THE DERBYSHIRE DALES



by

Michael

Brown

CONNING the map in the direction of Derbyshire, your southern motorist is understandably intimidated by the sooty network of Wednesbury, Walsall, Wolverhampton and West Bromwich, not to mention Birmingham, Coventry and Kidderminster carpets. He need not be, for the route shown on the map skims skilfully between them with all the skill of a trick skater through a line of flower pots.

Provided, of course, that the line from the southerner's part of the south to Derbyshire runs near to Oxford, Banbury or Warwick. Ours picked it up at Henley, and with a 9.30 start we were lunching at Stonebridge (on the Coventry to Birmingham road) by 12.30 p.m. and pulling into Ashbourne by 2.30 p.m. After Sudbury the horizon had been excitingly broken by Derbyshire peaks, and the steep and thronged streets of Ashbourne gave a holiday suggestion with their similarity to those of seaside towns. We climbed out on the Buxton road; a mile from the last house we left it to the left, and in two ticks of an S.U. pump we were pulling up at the entrance to the Peveril of the Peak hotel.

I had not been to Dovedale since before the war, and the thought of the celebrated ravine added a flavour to the tea that was hastily drunk. "How do we get to the dale?" we asked, and the auburn-haired waitress bade us go through the gate, over, the pastures, and keep to the right of the peak; for Dovedale is a walking trip. Approached by car, you must go past the Peveril of the Peak, up the hill, down t'other side and round over the stone bridge over the Dove. Turn right, and shortly after you will see the stone pillars of the Izaak Walton hotel gate. The road to the hotel goes off sharply to the left inside the gate; the road to Dovedale (through the gate) goes straight on, with signs on either side saying that heavy traffic is forbidden.

Some distance farther there is a large car park on the right. Beyond this, as notices inform you, motorists must not park, although they can reach the stepping stones for the purpose of turning round. Beyond the stepping stones the ravine begins.

It beggars description, of course. How can one describe a swift green stream darting through trees that billow from the floor of the valley, up the sides until they thin out to

the solitary trunk which clings like a rock climber to the limestone crags above? How can one describe the path that meanders, clambers, scrambles or waltzes along the east bank of such a stream? How can one convey the dizzy height intoxication which seizes you as you peer cautiously over a rocky edge to catch the glint of the water far below? Far better to point out that it is a path that is easily negotiated (two wives of reasonable daintiness were not dismayed), the steeper gradients having been ironed out by rough concrete steps. In places there is mud at times, and a tendency to slipperiness, but a pair of stout shoes is all that the walker needs. At intervals the river tumbles over tiny waterfalls; at intervals the great crags frown on you for daring to disturb their ogre-like impassivity. If the cloud is heavy the ravine stimulates awe but no fear, for there are many other walkers present to keep you company. If the sky is blue it begets a delighted appreciation of such beauty. "If this," said my companion, "were encountered in Europe or America, tourists would rave about it. Because it is in England very few know that it exists."

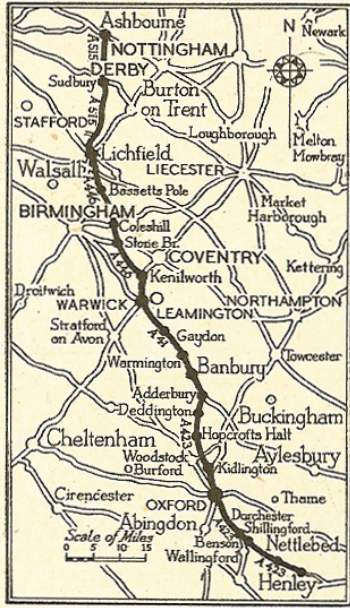
### UNKNOWN

That, I think, is not exaggerated. I have been shocked to find that beauty spots which to me are household names create only a took of puzzlement and a "Where's that?" in others. To the venturer abroad I have nothing but encouragement; to the overseas tourist who couples his praise of foreign countries with a contempt for England I feel a like contempt—and I may modestly claim to have seen quite a bit of the world. If he knows neither Scotland nor Wales I dismiss his Continental aspirations as travel snobbery, with, none the less, a certain gratitude that the Swiss, the French, or maybe the Spaniards must suffer him while I explore delectable Dovedale in company with those who really appreciate beauty.

This area is to be a national park, and one is impatient of the delay in making it such, with the protection that that implies. Mr. Dalton's resounding phrases inspire confidence in Government intentions, but the Minister of Town and Country Planning's decisions undermine it, for where cement and the Manifold Valley conflicted, cement has won at least a temporary victory. The Dove and the Manifold are as precious as the Crown jewels; in fact, I am not sure that they are not the finest of the Crown jewels themselves.

The next day was devoted to motoring. Within the area





“The hill scenery is fine just here”—near Blore.

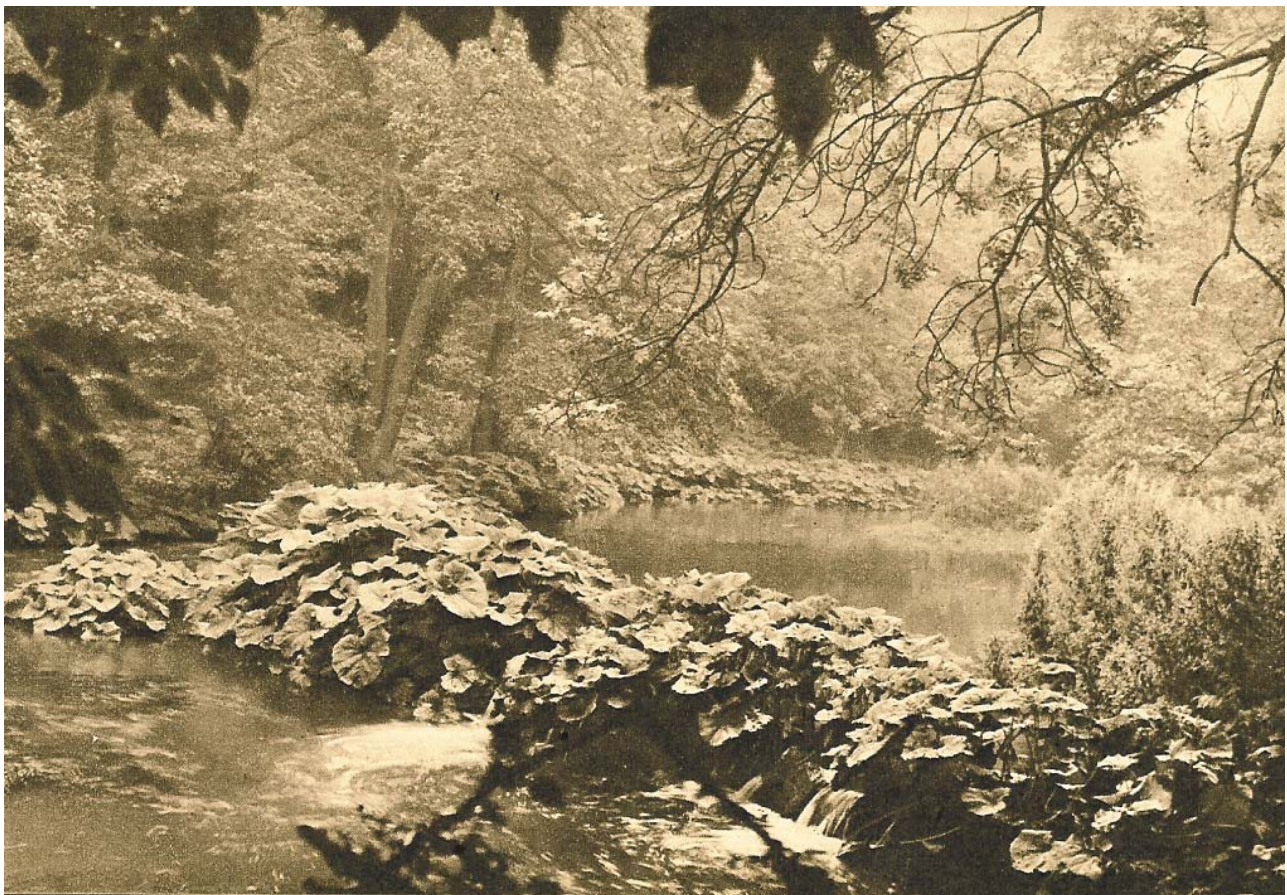
## DOVEDALE REVISITED : continued

bounded by Buxton, Leek, Ashbourne, Belper, Matlock and Bakewell there is scenery of great variety; individual treasures also abound. I suggest that you do as we did — pick roads that look “interesting” on the map, keeping a lively eye open for celebrated attractions. As a result, in a day of such motoring, we traversed the National Trust’s Alsop Moor, having climbed up from the miniature Cheddar of Milidale. The main road to Buxton (A515) switchbacks over the moors, and high-speed motoring through moorland is a fair imitation of the flight of the grouse and a means of obtaining a vivid impression of space and height. Where the road to Bakewell cascades off down the slope to

Monyash we turned right and enjoyed the easy descent into neat and pretty Bakewell; we then climbed up to Baslow beyond and doubled back through Edensor and the magnificent park of Chatsworth.

This is scenery in the best travel film tradition (one can almost hear that deep purple voice saying, “And so for the present we leave them, while the golden sun sets in a lake of emerald . . .” and so on). But it is none the worse for that, and I always enjoy my travelogue. The point about this scenery is that its beauty is faintly artificial, an impression that is heightened by the deer posing under the oaks and by the splendid symmetry of Chatsworth House, one of the most famous homes of England. There is no need to dilate on Chatsworth, only to stress that this part of the Derwent Valley should be seen; the road in question runs from Baslow to Rowsley.

“At intervals the river tumbles over tiny waterfalls “—Dovedale,





For a time we continued down Darley Dale, heading for Matlock. But this road, by contrast, should be avoided. At the first opportunity we climbed to the west out of the valley, up to Winster and away from the tangle of railway sidings, the clank of shunting engines and the rows of depressingly suburban houses. The little loop through Winster was a find. After a spell amongst the clouds we plunged back towards Matlock down a wooded ravine as delightful as any. The road swings to and fro in neat curves; at intervals there is space to park, and when it finally joins the massive A6, pressing resolutely through the Derwent Valley from London to Manchester, it does so at the better end of the celebrated Matlock Gorge.

Again, I think that words descriptive of Matlock would be superfluous; the heights are higher than one would expect, and the depths are lower. The best comment is that if you have never seen Matlock (we had not), go and see it.

After lunch in the town we retraced our steps and left A6 to the south for Wirksworth. The minor road runs down a pleasant valley until it turns, appropriately, at Turnditch, into A517, which joins Belper and Ashbourne. Here the right turn takes your car along the watershed of a Peaky finger, with the result that you are confronted by a grand panorama over to the other side of the valley down which you have come from Wirksworth.

The need for petrol took us back into Ashbourne, and reluctance to leave the Dove sent us on beyond it in that direction, this time to climb by a very minor road through Mappleton and Blore. The hill scenery is fine just here, and a magnificent distant view of the gateway to Dovedale is to be had. Ultimately this little road joined the main road to Leek (A523), which we promptly left, climbing into the hills to the village of Grindon; time was getting on, and at this point, my map, my navigation, and a signpost imposed a minor crisis. Faced by Grindon church, we thought that by turning sharp right we could descend into the Manifold Valley, cross it and climb out again through Calton—an attractive prospect, for the Manifold is elusive



“Into a farmyard went our route, over a wooden bridge”

on four wheels. Sure enough, the signpost said “Manifold Valley,” and a tarred road heading left looked full of promise. As the last cottage was passed the road abruptly deteriorated, though obviously frequently traversed by motor traffic. We went on.

The gradient steepened and to turn became impossible. A really sharp hairpin intervened, at which point was a gate. We stopped, reconnoitred on foot, and decided that our “road” joined another and better one far below. We went on again, more steeply still now, with an occasional rock in the fairway, although not big enough to strike the chassis. After another gate we were at the bottom by the stone bridge. Here the map made no sense at all. The road on which we were crossed another and continued, signposted to Wetton and climbing very steeply indeed; grass grew in the middle of the track. No, I decided, for we were four up and luggage. The crossing road was unsigned but better in character, and ran parallel to another road, with merely a yard of turf and a fence to separate. On the separation strip was one of those wordy notices saying that the road was closed to all wheeled traffic except prams, or except when crossing from one “occupation road” to another. What on earth was an “occupation road” within the meaning of the Road Traffic Act (1930)? None of us knew. Again we went forward on foot, into the Manifold Valley, along a road which my map did not acknowledge (it did not recognize the road to Wetton either) in order to find a railway which the map *did*. But we could not trace the railway.

Yet the road was still obviously used by wheeled vehicles.

### Eureka

Once more the car was driven on. There was a gentle curve to the left, along the stream-bed line—and into a farmyard went our route, over a wooden bridge, at last losing all semblance of a road in the mud and muck of farm animals. On the bridge was the first indication of the railway—the letters L.M.S.

The scene was still, gorgeous, and silent as the grave; not even a cluck came from the scratching hens. As we looked at our watches their ticking could be heard. It was half past five, and we had 150 miles home to cover after tea. And tea was, of course, some distance off. Could we go on? Reluctantly, we decided that the rest must await another visit, and turned round on the grass.

But even now a decision remained. Should we escape up the steep track to Wetton? Should we try the fourth and remaining leg of ‘the crossing along the floor of the valley, which we had not yet explored? Distant prohibition signs made us forsake the unknown, for the track down which we had come was at least the devil that was known. It was quite a malevolent little devil, necessitating a drop into first gear at one point, and the restart after the hairpin was not kind to the clutch. But soon we were back on the tarmac, faintly disappointed, and still puzzled by the serene and silent mystery that we had left down below. But not regretful. Dovedale is so beautiful that some of the mystery of the appeal of great beauty is its natural right; and it was only fair that a little of that mystery should be taken away as a souvenir.