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## **Cromford Wharf to Black Rocks Circular**

**Distance:** 6.2 miles.  
**Time:** 3 to 4 hours.  
**Difficulty:** Moderate – Includes some steep climbs and descents.  
**Maps:** OS Explorer OL24 – The Peak District: White Peak Area.  
**Toilets:** Cromford Wharf, High Peak Junction and Black Rocks.

This circular walk is actually more of a figure-8, and takes in two of the old transport routes that started in the Cromford area. It also visits one of the highest points in the area, and passes the most important historic site. As it includes some fairly steep climbs and descents, it is a more challenging walk for the slightly more experienced walker, but the route itself is fairly easy to follow.

Start from Cromford Canal Wharf and follow the canal towpath away from the Wharf buildings. This is a very popular walking and cycling route at weekends, so may be quite busy at times. At the start of this section of the walk, the raised embankment of the canal gives a good view to the left across Cromford Meadows. Before Richard Arkwright arrived in the area in 1771 to build his pioneering cotton mills, this was where the old medieval village of Cromford stood. In the 1780s, when the newly-knighted Sir Richard Arkwright began to build himself a grand stately home, Willersley Castle, he decided that the village spoiled the view, and so used his powers as the local landowner to move the entire village to a new location well out of sight.

After following the canal towpath for just over a mile, you will reach the buildings of High Peak Junction on the opposite side of the canal. This is the southern end of the famous Cromford and High Peak Railway (C&HPR), one of the earliest railways to be built back in the 1830s. It was intended to link the Cromford Canal with the Peak Forest Canal at Whaley Bridge, providing the Arkwrights and others with a significant short-cut to the important port and textile town of Manchester. The route was originally planned as a canal, but the need to cross the high 1,000ft-plus plateau of the High Peak made this too difficult, and so it was actually built as a railway with long flat sections linked by short rope-worked inclines. High Peak Junction was originally called Cromford Goods, and stands at the foot of the first of those steep inclines.

When you reach High Peak Junction, cross the footbridge over the canal. At this point, you may wish to spend a few minutes exploring the buildings, which include the world's second-oldest purpose-built railway workshop. You may also wish to use the facilities here, as there are no more until you reach Black Rocks towards the end of the walk. Having explored the area, walk around the corner of the buildings to pass between them and the old guard's vans.

Having passed the guard's vans, you now begin the climb up the incline, passing below the bridge carrying the A6 Derby Road. This is quite a steep climb so make sure to pace yourself, although you will not be going all the way to the top of the incline. Shortly after passing below the road, you will pass the catch pit that was installed to trap any runaway wagons before they reached the bottom of the incline with disastrous consequences.

After about half a mile of climbing the incline, look out on the left for a signed footpath through the trees to the village of Alderwasley, just on the far side of a bridge over a track. Take this footpath, which will almost immediately turn left to a T-junction with the track that you passed

over on the bridge a few moments ago. At this junction, turn right along the track, keeping the bridge carrying the incline behind you.

When the track reaches a junction on the edge of the wood at grid reference SK306560, turn right and continue to follow the track along the edge of the wood. After a short distance, go through the stile on the left to join Intake Lane.

Follow Intake Lane for around half a mile to grid reference SK311555. Here, go through the stile on the right. Follow the footpath across two fields, keeping close to the wall on your left. At the end of the second field, follow a short fenced path across the bottom of a third field.

At the end of this fenced path, take the short 25-yard path across a fourth field to a stile on the far side. Having passed through the stile, turn right and follow a grassy track directly across the field. Ignore the path heading to the left close to the wall, and instead head for the gate you can see in the far wall at grid reference SK307552.

Go through the gap by the gate and continue along the grassy track across the next field to a stile gate on the far side. On the far side of this, the track follows the wall across the next field. Keeping the wall close to your left, cross this field to a gate in the far corner.

Pass through this gate and follow the clearly defined path through the gorse bushes until you reach a farm track. Continue in the same direction along the farm track and past Wigwellnook Farm to join Sough Lane. At grid reference SK298550, the patch of uncultivated vegetation to your left is the site of an old lead-mining shaft. Before Arkwright's arrival to build his mills, lead mining was the main industry in the area, with a history going back at least as far as Roman times. Eventually out-competed by larger and more modern mines elsewhere, the last lead mines in Derbyshire finally closed in the 1950s, bringing to an end an industry that had existed in the area for around 2,000 years.

Continue along Sough Lane until you reach the junction with Oakerthorpe Road. Turn right here, and follow the road along to the village of Bolehill. The name of the village reflects the area's lead mining past, when lead would have been smelted in open hearths known as boles.

A short distance past the Bolehill sign, just before the sharp left-hand bend, go through the stile to the right and follow the marked path up the steps towards the woods on Barrel Edge. This is another steepish climb, so again make sure to pace yourself as you go. The woods on Barrel Edge and the adjacent Big Plantation belong to the Forestry Commission and are open access land, but it is easiest for this walk if you stick to the defined paths. However, if you are feeling a little more adventurous, feel free to go exploring – just don't get side-tracked too much!

Entering the woods, bear left along the main path, which remains close to the edge of the wood. Follow this path along to the Triangulation Point at SK293553, from where you can enjoy some outstanding views across the surrounding area, although these can be dependant upon how many of the surrounding trees have been harvested recently by the Forestry Commission. With a height above sea level of 1,056ft, this is one of the highest points in the area, and can (trees permitting) provide views across to a number of other prominent local landmarks.

From the Triangulation Point, continue along the main path towards Black Rocks, passing through a gate and skirting the disused workings of Barreledge Quarry. Black Rocks is a distinctive gritstone outcrop that is also a popular climbing location offering fine views from the top, at times better than those from the nearby trig point. However, you don't need to be a climber to enjoy them, as the top can be accessed via a clearly defined path up the rear of the outcrop, although this is a bit of a scramble up between boulders, so maybe not for everyone.

Follow the path to the left of Black Rocks as it descends to an information board at the side of the High Peak Trail close to the car park. The scree slope leading up to the outcrop is actually spoil from the old Cromfordmoor lead mine close to the site, and is now home to a number of

interesting lead-tolerant plants. If you need to use the toilets here, they are located between the Trail and the car park.

When you reach the High Peak Trail, turn right to follow it along past Black Rocks. After a short distance, an extended break in the trees to the left gives another view out across the valley below. From here, you can look across the massive workings of Dean Quarry, and also down to the village of Cromford.

Very soon, the High Peak Trail will begin to descend the incline that takes it back down to High Peak Junction. At the top of the incline, to the right of the trail, stand the derelict remains of Sheep Pasture Engine House. This used to house the powerful steam-driven winding engine used to haul the wagons up the incline from the valley below. Once at the top of the incline, the wagons would be taken on along the flat section of line to the base of the next incline. Initially, horses would have done this haulage, but for most of the history of the railway, it was done by a variety of different steam or diesel locomotives.

As you descend the incline, to the right, you will soon see the signed footpath for Alderwasley that you followed at the start of the walk. Follow this path once again to the T-junction with the track. When you reach this junction, do not turn right as you did previously, but turn left to pass beneath the bridge carrying the High Peak Trail.

Follow the track along until you join Intake Lane by the modern housing estate on the edge of Cromford. Follow Intake Lane down to the A6 Derby Road, and turn left along the road to the traffic lights. If you want to spend some time exploring Cromford village, turn left here, and then return to the traffic lights once you have done this.

At the traffic lights, cross the A6 and walk down Mill Road opposite, following it round past the historic buildings of Sir Richard Arkwright's Cromford Mill. If you haven't already done so, the mill site is well worth a visit, and you can even take a guided tour of the site to learn all about the important part it played in the birth of the Industrial Revolution.

A short way past Cromford Mill, you will see the entrance to Cromford Canal Wharf on the opposite side of the road. Before crossing over to the Wharf to complete your walk, you may wish to continue down the road a little way to visit St Mary's Church, where Sir Richard Arkwright and many of his descendants are buried.

### **Useful Information:**

Pay-and-display car parking is available at Cromford Canal Wharf, next door on Cromford Meadows, and across the road at Cromford Mill. The postcode for finding all three via sat-nav is DE4 3RQ.

Cromford is very easy to reach via public transport, with hourly trains from Derby and Matlock (every two hours on Sundays), and regular bus services from Derby, Belper, Ripley, Matlock, Buxton and Manchester. Most buses drop off in the village, about five minutes walk from the Canal Wharf. Cromford Station is also about five minutes walk away in the opposite direction. Information on public transport can be found online at [www.travelineeastmidlands.co.uk/](http://www.travelineeastmidlands.co.uk/).

There are no banks or free cashpoints in Cromford. The closest cashpoint to Cromford is at Matlock Bath Pavilion.

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