

21st April 2024
[View Original Article](#)



2024 NEWSPAPER
OF THE YEAR

Why I created the UK's newest epic walking route, the Northern Trek

The 560-mile route takes hikers along the spine of England and Scotland, finishing at the country's highest point



Ken Heptonstall on top of Pentland Ridge

A new walking route that stretches from the Peak District to the summit of Ben Nevis has been created with the aim of encouraging walkers to explore the spine of England and Scotland – whether in one 40-day burst or in sections.

The Northern Trek starts at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and concludes 560 miles north at the 1,345m summit of Ben Nevis. In its

entirety, this is an epic challenge divided into six sections that vary between 68 miles and 111 miles.

After many years on the fells and photographing wild places, former web developer Ken Heptonstall had the urge to design a new long-distance route that would join and greatly extend the first two official long-distance footpaths in England and Scotland – the Pennine Way and the West Highland Way. The Northern Trek joins this National Trail in England, with the Scottish long-distance route via GPS and map references mapped out by Heptonstall.



Ken Heptonstall at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, the starting point of the new 560-mile route (Photo: Supplied)

“Having walked several long-distance footpaths in Europe, I believed there was an opportunity to create a big route in the UK,” he told **i**. “There just didn’t seem to be anything in the 300 to 600-mile range that satisfied my desires. I also had an idea to take the walk right through the centre of my favourite city – Edinburgh.

“So, a couple of years ago I set to work with around 30 OS maps, several guidebooks, a UK road map atlas and the biggest bit of floor I could find.

It didn't take long to realise that planning the route was going to be a lot more difficult than I'd first imagined, but then something kicked in – maybe the Viking warrior instinct – as the urge to walk North wasn't going anywhere.”

The route of The Northern Trek took Ken more than two years to design. However, it isn't just a hike; it's an epic adventure that promises to test those who take it on.

Spanning England and Scotland equally, it traverses four National Parks and three Unesco sites, and offers breathtaking views of diverse landscapes and natural wonders – from the rugged foothills of the Pennines to the tranquil shores of Loch Lomond.



The route passes Hadrian's Wall

Heptonstall has long been drawn to big challenges that push boundaries, and [The Northern Trek](#) is a testament to this adventurous spirit. Now, he's on a mission to inspire others to embark on their own journeys of self-discovery and exploration.

“By walking consecutively day after day, the landscape changes remarkably quickly. This had a very strong appeal,” he says. “I wanted to design the route and share my own experiences with others. To put something back. The mental and physical process of a big walk is so good. It allows quality down time to think and reflect.

“Many hikers don’t have the luxury of having 40 days to do it in one go. It really doesn’t matter whether it takes four weeks or four years to complete – I just want people to enjoy the route at their own pace” says Heptonstall.

Those keen to tackle the route can customise their journey – whether they prefer to hike, run, camp or bivouac. There are good transport, parking and accommodation options along the route and it has been mapped for GPS and with full OS map references and route descriptions, to help with logistics.

Heptonstall adds: “I like to think of The Northern Trek as more than just a physical challenge. It’s an opportunity to make new friends, share stories, and create memories that will last a lifetime.”



The finishing point – the summit of Ben Nevis)

The route

The Northern Trek is made up of these six sections:

The Tail: Chatsworth House, Derbyshire to Gargrave, North Yorkshire – 98 miles – 16,315 feet

The Rump: Gargrave to Alston, Cumbria – 111 miles – 16,360 feet

The Back: Alston to Kirk Yetholm, Scottish Borders – 81 miles – 12,150 feet

The Neck: Kirk Yetholm to Edinburgh – 97 miles – 15,671 feet

The Head: Edinburgh to Milngavie, Glasgow – 68 miles – 4,592 feet

The Crown/The Glory: Milngavie to Fort William and up Ben Nevis – 95 miles (plus 10 up) – 13,707 feet (plus 4,650 feet up)

Route highlights

“**The Six Edges in Derbyshire** was a revelation and came about after a chance chat with a fell runner,” says Heptonstall. “A stunning high-level ridge route of approximately 20 miles starting just north of Chatsworth House. The section includes Baslow Edge, Curbar Edge, Froggat’s Edge, Burbar Edge, Stanage Edge and Derwent Edge. I have re-visited this section several times and photographed it in all seasons.”

“The route over **The Pentland Hills into Edinburgh and onwards to The Forth Bridge**. The sheer joy of discovering a new range of fells for the first time and in the distance Edinburgh; the joy of being in a city, with its great cafes and bars for a few days; and then onwards to the sea.”

“**The John Muir Way to The Falkirk Wheel**. Hiking along the towpaths of the Union Canal and The Forth and Clyde Canal. The engineering of The Wheel simply took my breath away and I watched with awe as it cranked and groaned into business.”