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THE SCOTSMAN

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

West Highland Way completed? Try hiking the new Northern Walk, from Peak District to Ben Nevis



This 560 mile route was devised by Ken Heptonstall

Finished the West Highland Way and got the midgie bites and blisters to prove it?

Once they've healed, if you're up for a new challenge, there's always new walking route, The Northern Trek. It stretches from the Peak District, to the summit of Ben Nevis, and takes in four National Parks and three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Edinburgh.

This 560 mile hike, which starts at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, can be completed in one 40-day spurt, or in different sections over time.



Northern Trek creator - Ken Heptonstall

We asked its creator, Ken Heptonstall, 67, who is based in the English village of Epperstone, to tell us more about the epic walk.

What's your background?

My background is in design and multimedia. I worked for ITV for ten years promoting British TV to a worldwide audience. I then set up and ran my own business, Headland Multimedia, for 32 years before

retiring two years ago. Away from work, long distance walking and the great outdoors has always been my main passion.

How do you go about designing a walk and what makes it official?



My son and I walked the West Highland Way together, which was a fabulous trek; and a few years later I walked the Pennine Way with a friend from my schooldays. The simple way of describing the inspiration for creating the Northern Trek was that I wanted to join these two magnificent walks together to create the latest, greatest British walking challenge.

The idea was easy, but piecing it together proved much more difficult than I had imagined. I started with two identical RAC road maps, cut the pages out, pasted them together, laid them on the floor and started work with a magic marker. I then bought 23 OS maps and started to fill in the very large gaps. Of course, I then had to walk the whole route again and photograph it end to end. Which I did over the course of the two years I spent creating the route.

All of the walk is on official footpaths (rights of way) which are on OS mapping. I incorporated the Pennine Way (England's first official

longdistance footpath) with Scotland's equivalent - The West Highland Way. I then added a section of the John Muir Way to cross the Union and The Forth and Clyde Canal systems in Scotland. That does make it sound simple, but it wasn't. And I did keep on changing the route – particularly around Edinburgh and the Pentlands.

My plan now is to get the Northern Trek approved by the government as a long distance walk in its own right. My campaign has already started and I will put as much effort into achieving that as I did in creating the walk.



Northern Trek - Ken Heptonstall on top of the Pentlands' ridge route

How did you get into walking, and what are your favourite Scottish routes?

I have been walking since I was 18. As a student I spent my summers walking extensively in Scandinavia, The Alps, and then The Dolomites in Italy. However, I do love walking in Scotland – it's got everything. My favourite places to head to are Skye, Glencoe and the Outer Hebrides. They are all truly spectacular places with some wonderfully challenging walks.

How long did it take you to design the route?

Two years.

Any changes of plan along the way?

Yes. I had many dilemmas on crossing the Pentland Hills and my route through Edinburgh.

What's your feedback been like so far?

Excellent. It's only been live for three weeks and I've been pleasantly surprised by the quick take off. I've had comments and feedback from lots of walkers in the UK, but also from Australia, Holland and the USA. I mapped it in miles and km with this international appeal in mind.

How many people have done the route in its entirety?

One! Me. I have a friend who is about to complete it. I can't wait for someone to email me to say it's done. When I launched the site - I said to my wife "Well, it's at least 40 days before anyone will complete it".

Any favourite Scottish pit-stops, for re-fuelling?

Absolutely.

1. Southern Cross Cafe in Edinburgh - it's buzzing every time I go in. Great coffee, breakfast and cake.
2. Brew Culture in Queensferry run by a father and daughter. The best coffee and croissants anywhere and a delightful place.
3. The MacDonald Hotel in Kinlochleven, which has the best arrangement of whiskies.

If you're going to do just one section, which is the best?

Tricky. But I'm going for Section 4. The route over the Pentlands is breathtaking (and I suspect a new route for many walkers) and to then climb Arthur's Seat and look down into Edinburgh. Wow.

What are your top walking tips?

Have a massive breakfast – porridge and coffee.

Always carry wet weather clothing and choose your walking gear for the season.

Carry a mobile and always take a paper map in a waterproof cover.

Carry a small first aid kit and have a whistle with you.

Look at the weather forecast in great detail - and be prepared for all weathers.

Study the route on the map - and imagine walking it the night before

The Northern Trek 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)

Find out more at www.northerntrek.co.uk