

THE PREHISTORIC PEAK

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE NEOLITHIC & BRONZE AGE
MONUMENTS OF THE PEAK DISTRICT**

Andrew Johnstone



Andrew Johnstone Design

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PREFACE

Despite being born and raised in England, my interest in British prehistory began after moving to Canada in 1991 when I was inspired by singer/songwriter and author Julian Cope who had begun his own inquiry into the subject, culminating in his two ground-breaking and highly recommended tomes on the subject of European megalithic monuments, *The Modern Antiquarian* (1998) and *The Megalithic European* (2004).

I didn't return to live in England until 2007, so the only chance I had to visit these places was during infrequent trips back to Britain. What began as a casual curiosity very quickly grew into a keen interest and I started to realize, as Cope had himself, that a whole swathe of British history had been kept from my knowledge. At school we are taught that our history begins with the Roman invasion in the 1st Century Common Era (C.E.) and prior to that we were simply illiterate barbarians, but by visiting megalithic sites and reading as much as I could about them, it soon became apparent to me that this simply is not the truth.

Anyone who chooses to look into this aspect of our history will see that the builders of these monuments were far from backward or uncivilized. They had a complex understanding of the world in which they lived, based on millennia of living, studying and moving within it. Most of us will know of sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury, but what many don't realize is

that this land is inundated with the monuments of those ancient societies. I have long felt it a shame that we don't celebrate the truly amazing civilizations that walked on these islands long ago. It is time we stepped out of this denial and into a new era of full and complete recognition of all our past. Thankfully, I believe we are.

I am neither an historian nor archaeologist, so the intention of this book is not to try and explain what they are or what was happening in the Peak District millennia ago, there are people who are far better qualified than I am to do that, whose work you should refer to for that level of understanding. My intention is much simpler: it is to encourage people to go out there and see these places for what they are today, after all, they are often located in some of the most spectacular landscapes available to us in Britain today, which to me is reason enough. They make fascinating destinations for journeys that are about experiencing all the wonders of the world around us. Yes, the destination is certainly something to aim for, but sometimes, as the long process that has brought me to this point has shown me, it is often the journey that informs us the most.

Andrew Johnstone
May 2009

Opposite: Portrait of the author on the rocks above the ringcairn at Harland Edge.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is intended as a modern guide to the prehistoric Peak District. It is not an explanation of these sites, but is a useful guide that will help you to locate and explore these places for yourself. They are presented in roughly geographic order, moving clockwise from north to south, when using the town of Buxton as the centre. This is merely a way of presenting the sites for this book and is not a recommendation of the order in which you should visit them.

I have visited each of these sites in person at least once in order to find them and record them through photography, the drawing of a sketchplan of what you can expect to see today and the writing of clear and concise as possible directions in order that you can visit them yourselves and have a good idea of what to expect. Given that this is the 21st Century and not 2,000 B.C.E. I do make the presumption that you will be travelling by car and so the start of the directions to each site begins with where I think you should park your vehicle. In all cases this is very close to the start of any trail that leads towards the site, so even if you aren't travelling by car I still recommend you using these places as your starting point.

In all cases I include the relevant 8-figure Ordnance Survey (OS) Map grid reference as well as GPS coordinates and altitude, as well as my opinion on how hard the site is to find and access.

These readings were taken at the actual locations and are as accurate as the equipment I was using would allow. Please be aware though, that some inaccuracies may be present and I am not responsible for any difference between them and what you may gather for yourself.

All of the map references relate to the OS Explorer Maps, which use a 1:25,000 scale, where 4cm equals 1km. All of the maps that I have included in this book have been created and reproduced at that scale.

When starting your own enquiry into the Prehistoric Peak I strongly recommend you having the OS Explorer Map that relates to the sites you are visiting and also recommend having a hand-held GPS until. This incredibly useful piece of equipment may seem unnecessary, but at some of the locations the site is barely visible due to overgrowth of heather, bracken, bilberries and such, or are disappearing into the encroaching peat. There are some that you will be standing upon without even knowing it. At those sites GPS is essential.

A good majority of these sites are located on high moorland, so no matter what time of year you are visiting it pays to be prepared for anything. The weather is notoriously unpredictable, as I myself found out on several occasions when what started out as a gorgeous sunny summer's day quickly descended into blanket fog, or cold driving rain. In reality, you are never

that far from civilization, but that does not negate the fact that you can very quickly get into trouble on these moors. They are unforgiving and you are a fool if you venture out there inadequately prepared.

Things To Take With You

After being forced back to my camp on a very wet day in July, the weather having taken such a downturn as to make any more site visits impossible that day, I decided to make a list of the things that I deemed essential to successful investigations into the prehistoric Peak.

The following is that list, plus other items that I took with me that, although they aren't essential, certainly added to the success and enjoyment of my experience.

- **OS Explorer Maps** for the areas to be covered, plus ways of keeping them dry (the large zip-lock style bags mentioned below are excellent for this).
- **Hand-held GPS unit.**
- **A good, working compass.**
- **Waterproof clothing.** Water resistant is not enough.
- **Waterproof footwear:** hard-wearing hiking boots in all seasons!.
- **Waterproof back-pack.**

- **Waterproof zip-lock style bags:** available at most large supermarkets and great for keep things organized and dry.
- **Food.** Think energy. Chocolate bars are always good to have, or high-energy bars. Plan to have enough food to keep you going for several hours at a time.
- **Bottled water:** an absolute essential in any weather. Keep yourself hydrated at all times.
- **Lightweight layers of clothing.** Modern, breathable fabrics such as fleece and gortex are excellent. It is easy to remove layers if too hot, but impossible to put on if you don't have them when cold.
- **Hat and gloves:** even in summer, the wind that blows across the moors can be a chilly one.
- **Whistle:** emergency item for attracting attention if in trouble.
- **Notepad, pens and paper:** Poetry or prose; record your experiences on site as it's always easier than trying to remember afterwards.
- **Camera:** These places are in spectacular locations, what better than to take some pictures to share with others, or simply to recall your own experiences.
- **Waterproof matches or a lighter.** Just in case.

- I. Although I recommend you wearing a good pair hiking boots, I do have to say that one of the best investments I made was an £8.99 pair of wellies. I wore them to the first site I visited when I began the major part of my investigations and after that they were on my feet almost every time. This was mostly because the hiking boots I had were not waterproof. Although not ideal as they didn't always give me the grip I really needed, they did at least, keep my feet dry!

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- **Mobile phone:** Essential for emergencies, plus you can get great reception at these higher levels.
- **Swiss Army Knife:** the most useful piece of kit I have. Don't leave home without it.
- **Sunglasses and sun-block:** You never know, the sun may just shine on you!

During the major part of my research I chose to tent camp. For this I highly recommend the Peak District's National Park Authority campsite at North Lees, just outside Hathersage. It has excellent facilities (including hot showers and a dryer) and friendly, helpful staff, as well as it being a very convenient location from which to base yourself. If you are camping this way then I also recommend having:

- **A good watertight tent:** it will need to withstand heavy downpours of rain.
- **A high-quality sleeping bag:** rated for colder temperatures than you expect to encounter.
- **An air or foam mattress:** while the ground is soft, anything that enables a good night's sleep is essential. Your day's will be filled with somewhat strenuous exercise, so rest easy!
- **Torch:** it gets dark out there at night!
- **Any other camping equipment that you deem necessary,** such as stove, pots, cutlery, extra clothing etc. in order to make your experience comfortable.

Some of the items mentioned, such as maps, compass and GPS, do come with the inherent understanding that you know how to use them correctly. Please do not head out onto the moors unless you do, and if you don't then please seek the advice of someone who does. Quite often you will find short courses in orienteering on offer locally that are not only useful, but could save your life.

Finally, I don't recommend visiting these places alone. Not only is it safer, but like most things in life, it's more fun when there are two. If you do choose to go it alone, then please take the precaution of telling someone before you leave exactly the area you will be going to and when they can expect your return. It's common sense really, so please use it at all times.

Opposite: A selection of some of things I took with me to make my visits a success. Your selection will obviously vary, but certain elements, such as the OS maps, compass, GPS unit, waterproof boots and clothing I consider to be essential.

NOTES TO MAPS & SKETCHPLANS

As stated earlier, all the maps featured in this book use approximately the same scale as the Ordnance Survey (OS) Explorer Maps, 1:25,000.

They have been created to include the features that I believe best describe the route to each site, but they should not be used alone. Please use them in conjunction with the OS Explorer Map in order to orient yourself in the landscape.

Each section in this book begins with an overview, which includes a general map of that specific area showing the sites covered and the route to each one.

Following this initial overview, each site is featured in greater detail, including a step-by-step text description of what I consider the best route to each site. This is done by using landmarks to create a series of points to move towards and away from e.g. Continue on until you reach a small stream at point **D**.

Each site also includes a sketchplan of what the visitor can expect to see at the site today. All these plans were drawn on site by hand, with no exacting degree of accuracy regarding measurements and then later digitized and coloured using a vector-based drawing programme. All sketchplans are positioned with north towards the top of the page.

Please note that these plans are for reference only and should not be used for archaeological purposes as they only show what was visible to me above ground at the time of my visit. Visitors at different times and seasons may have a slightly different experience due to changing vegetation or other influencing factors as I found out at Gardom's Edge Ringcairn, when a subsequent visit after the bracken had died down revealed much more of the site than when I had previously visited in the height of summer.

Opposite is the key to both the maps and sketchplans. The sketchplan notation system, representing the features I saw, was developed solely for the purposes of this book to convey the general existing layout. The notation system used in the maps is compatible with that used in the OS series of maps (except for the symbols used to define the type of site) in the hope of continuity and familiarity generating a greater ease of use.

Key to Maps

-  A Road
-  B Road
-  Other Road (less than 4m wide)
-  Road, or track, generally unpaved
-  Described route to site
-  Alternative route to site
-  Bridleway
-  Drystone Wall
-  River, or stream
-  Peak District park boundary
-  Railway line, with station
-  Non-coniferous trees
-  Coniferous trees
-  Dense Bracken
-  Marshland

-  Key point in route description
-  Stone Circle
-  Ringcairn
-  Tumulus / Barrow
-  Cairn
-  Henge
-  Hut Circle / Enclosure
-  Chambered Tomb
-  Boulders
-  Vertical face / cliff
-  Triangulation Pillar
-  Mast

Key to Sketchplans

-  Upright stone
-  Possible upright stone
-  Other stones (rubble)
-  Extent of embankment, generally overgrown
-  Pit dug into embankment
-  Cliff edge, or escarpment
-  Track, or pathway



A photograph of a stone circle in a grassy field under a clear blue sky. The stones are large and dark, some covered in moss or lichen. The foreground is dominated by tall, dry grass. The sky is a uniform light blue.

Barbrook I

Barbrook I

Embanked Stone Circle

Visiting the Barbrooks on a beautiful July day, such as it was on my first visit, is simply a delight. The sun is warm, big white clouds rolling by overhead and it seems like I have the whole moor to myself as I sit and enjoy the broad sweeping views towards Curbar Edge and beyond.

Barbrook I is an easy site to locate and, if there is such a thing, it is one of the showcase sites of the Peak District, along with the likes of The Nine Ladies of Stanton Moor and Hordron Edge. This circle consists of at least 20 stones, of which about 13 can be considered true uprights.

Park at the start of the track on the west side of the A621 (SK281752). Look for the white gate at point **A**. There is a small lay-by here that allows for the parking of a limited number of cars. Approximately 100m north there is a larger lay-by on the opposite side of the road.

From here walk approximately 500m along the track and just before it starts to bend to the left you should be able to see a track branching off the right side at point **B**. The stone circle lies about 25m ahead of you.

Also, look out for the magnificent reconstructed barrow just to the north of Barbrook I which should be clearly visible.

Location: Big Moor

Nearest Town: Baslow, 5km SW

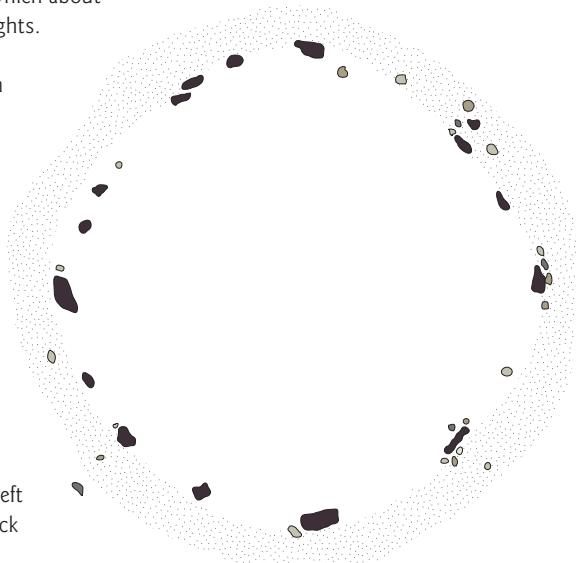
Explorer Map: OL24

OS Grid: SK27857558

GPS: 53° 16' 35.4" N • 01° 35' 01.3" W

Altitude: 295m

Difficulty: Easy





Barbrook II

Embanked Stone Circle

Following the same initial directions as for Barbrook I, this site is fairly easy to find, although this whole moor is littered with cairns, hinting at what a hive of activity it must have been during the Bronze Age.

Return to point **B** on the main track and continue northward for 300m. At this point you should have passed a row of large stones on your left and have reached a lone birch tree at point **C**. Stop here, turn right and head uphill onto the moor. As you crest the hill and enter the flatter area, you will see Barbrook II.

Alternatively, you can cross the moor direct from the impressive barrow that is near to Barbrook I. A hike of approximately 250m in a northwest direction across the moor should bring you to the vicinity of Barbrook II. There is a faint path where others have made this trip.

This site was reconstructed after it was excavated in the 1960s and 70s creating a debate about whether it was right to do so. My opinion is positive as it aids me in picturing what these places were like when originally constructed.

Personally, I do not think it hurts to have at least one prehistoric site brought back to as close as possible original condition.

Location: Big Moor

Nearest Town: Baslow, 5km SW

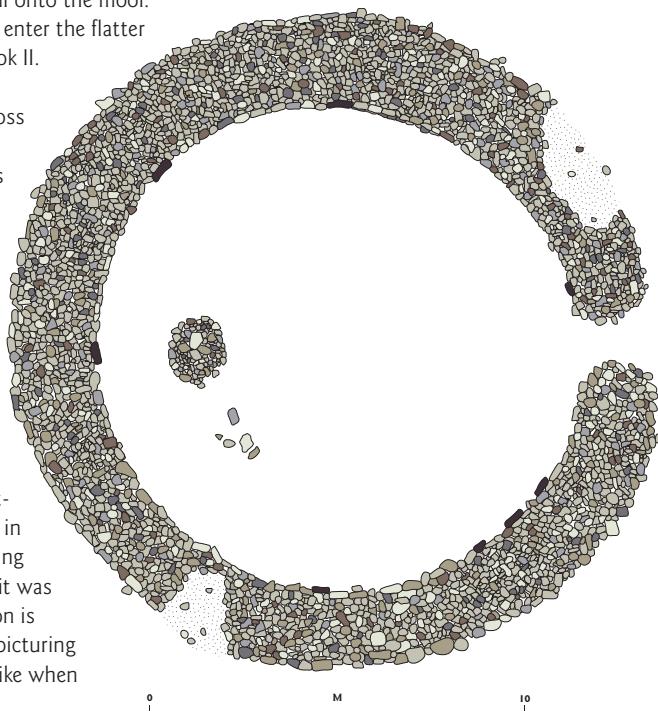
OS Explorer Map: OL24

OS Grid: SK27757582

GPS: 53° 16' 43.1" N • 01° 35' 07.1" W

Altitude: 307m

Difficulty: Easy





OTHER SITES

The following is a list of other sites within the Peak District not featured in this book:

Cairns & Round Barrows

Abney Moor	SK18807920	Dennis Knoll	SK22828405
Aleck Low	SK17495947	Dirt Low	SK15558229
Bamford Edge	SK21348436	Dun Low	SK11944940
Bamford Moor	SK21608587	Ecton Hill	SK09675736
Bamford Moor Cairn I	SK21538441	Eldon Hill	SK11548114
Bamford Moor Cairn II	SK21318489	End Low	SK15606056
Bamford Moor Cairn III	SK20848486	Eyam Edge	SK20477769
Bank Top	SK12846145	Eyam Moor	SK22237856
Bee Low	SK19166473	Fallinge Edge	SK27746591
Beeley Moor	SK28576719	Fin Cop	SK17447093
Big Moor	SK27557550	Gib Hill	SK15826332
Big Moor	SK27137543	Gibbett Moor	SK28147075
Birchen Edge	SK28277357	Glutton Hill	SK08076723
Birchen Edge Cairn	SK28457227	Gratton Hill	SK13195715
Birchen Edge Tumulus	SK28727259	Grin Low	SK05397174
Blackrock Farm	SJ95857662	Grindlow	SK20066734
Booth Low	SK08786314	Grindon Moor	SK07075518
Borther Low	SK19716086	Grub Low	SK08045254
Brown Edge	SK06896787	Haddon Fields	SK21726617
Brown Low	SJ98829092	Hanging Bank	SK09985800
Brund Low	SK10256182	Harland Edge Southeast	SK30076823
Bull Ring	SK07807817	Hawks Low	SK17025674
Calling Low	SK17486487	Higgars Lodge	SK25208148
Calton Moor	SK11114867	High Low	SK08297148
Calton Pasture	SK23386854	High Rake	SK20887342
Calwich	SK13174389	Highlow Bank	SK21128025
Chelmorton Lows	SK11407062	Hognaston	SK24445151
Chelmorton Thorn	SK11866955	Hurst Low	SK07055529
Cliff's Low	SK15315766	Ilam Moor	SK13595213
Coates town	SK06276631	Ilam Tops Low	SK13585269
Coombe Edge	SK02049189	Hay Dale	SK18267276
Cop Low	SK18697725	Hay Top	SK17707310
Cow Low	SK10277297	Kenslow Knoll	SK18426171
Cow Low	SK06537869	Kinder Low	SK07328666
Cronkstone Low	SK11706631	Lady Low	SK13934983
Crow Chin	SK22468562	Lark's Low	SK20086260
Curbar Edge	SK25497560	Lean Low	SK14966223
		Longstone Moor	SK18887328
		Longstone Moor	SK19007365
		Longstone Moor	SK19797476
		Ludworth intake	SJ98989131
		Lyme Park	SJ96468175
		Mam Tor	SK12688356

Mare Hill	SK10535259	Winyards Nick	SK25328127
Middleton Moor	SK15296384	Withery Low	SK10177650
Moneystones	SK15086163	Wolfscote Hill	SK13705832
Moneystones	SK15176152		
Mouse Low	SK08735335		
Musden Low	SK11835008	Chambered Tombs	
Nether Low	SK10886917	Green Low	SK23165805
Nettles	SK13384915	Harborough Rocks	SK23895490
North Lees	SK23668366	Long Low	SK12165399
One Ash	SK16626437	Pea Low	SK13075646
Ows Low	SK23805267	Ringham Low	SK16956642
Pike Low	SK18048976	Smerill Moor	SK18666080
Pilsbury	SK12086395	Stoney Low	SK21855783
Rod Knoll	SK30186986	Tideslow	SK15007795
Round Low	SK23895490	Wind Low	SK11457517
Roystone Grange	SK20355710		
Roystone Grange	SK20355650	Hillforts & Enclosures	
Rushlcy	SK11985147	Ball Cross	SK227691
Sharp Low	SK16135286	Burr Tor	SK108783
Sheepwash Bank	SK23008418	Carl Wark	SK259815
Sheldon	SK16836925	Castle Ring	SK221628
Slipper Low	SK22075699	Combs Moss	SK055783
Slipper Low	SK14107065	Cratcliffe Rocks	SK228623
Snels Low	SK11897942	Fin Cop	SK175710
Sponds Hill	SJ97008024	Gardom's Edge	SK278733
Stand Low	SK21325086	Mam Tor	SK128836
Stanshope Pasture	SK13855369	Markland Grips	SK519752
Stanton Moor	SK25136331		
Stanton Moor	SK24686278	Long Barrows	
Stoke Flat Tumulus	SK24927665	Gospel Hillocks	SK08637148
The Lord's Seat	SK11238346	Harrod Low	SK09848058
The Lowe	SK15965560	Longstone Moor	SK13797476
The Roaches	SK00116388	Perryfoot	SK10928119
Thorncliff Low	SK11344951	Rockhurst	SK21415736
Three Lows	SK07524634	The Tong	SK11697698
Three Men	SK27147279		
Toads Mouth	SK25788058	Stone Circles & Ringcairns	
Top Low	SK12964914	Bamford Moor Central	SK21468476
Tup Low	SK18717699	Bamford Moor North	SK20898526
Weaver Hills	SK09424655	Birchen Edge North	SK28457347
Wetton Hill	SK10495623	Birchen Edge South	SK28157240
Wigber Low	SK20425143	Chee Tor	SK12627315
Wind Low	SK11457517	Gibbet Moor South	SK28127028
		Lawrence Field	SK25247972