

Transcript of Podcast 033: Kinder Scout

[Intro]

BECKY: errrr; but it was also ah just ignore that bit Ian that was shit. Erm, so, Kinder Scout was about my second hike in the ... nngg ... hang on, I'll start again, ignore that bit again, sorry, I fucked up.

[intro music – jaunty, bouncy]

[Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a weekly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.]

[Music fades. Podcast begins]

Hello :)

I hope you are all well. I'm doing okay, nothing to report. The two people I live with here in Sheffield have both had negative Covid tests done as a precaution due to recent contact with an infected person, so that's one good thing.

England's currently in another nebulous lockdown, although given how crowded Aldi Hillsborough was on Saturday I'm not sure exactly what benefit it's having. I'm not the best person to talk about Covid and the lockdown to be honest as I've done almost nothing sociable since the first one in March. About the only thing I'm not doing now that I would be doing in a normal world is going to the pub, but a couple of beer shops in Sheffield are sorting me out on that score anyway. It is, however, doing wonders for my finances.

I know I haven't spoken about this much because it all happened while I was having both mental health issues and then a subsequent laptop breakdown, but I do now have a job. A proper, normal, full-time, office-based job. Or at least it would be office-based if we weren't in lockdown. While I'm obviously not going to go into specific detail, my job is data-oriented (obviously), and I'm working for the Civil Service. There's a number of points around this, but two of them are: my registered office is based in Wales, some 5 hours away by public transport, and the feeling is when life returns to stability, they might expect me to work one or two days a week from the office. Which I'm obviously not going to do from here. So we'll have to see about how that plays out. The other is, one of the regulations in my workplace is because I'm handling sensitive data (and, to the extent, they may need to try to give me more security clearance, a sort of high level of security clearance, the idea of which causes me endless amusement), I'm not allowed to take my work laptops out of the country. So no, I'm not going to be able to flee to a small island in Kiribati and work from there.

With regards to travel, actually, I've started to look at group tours. I know, right? I was shocked myself. But there's a logic to it – ever since the start of the year (before lockdown) I've been rationalising my list of places I'm interested in, trying to determine which are places I'd genuinely get something out of visiting, and which I'd merely be going to because they 'sounded good' – bear in mind why I go to places and what I do when I get there. I've realised that many of the places I do genuinely want to see are ones where travelling solo and independently may prove to be an issue, for reasons of admin, cost, language, or safety (which is often a form of admin and cost, in a way –

it's a lot easier and cheaper to have other people arrange things like bodyguards for instance if there's a group of you. That I physically wrote that sentence suggests that I'm not going to be on the first post-lockdown flight to Marbella). Places I'm looking at for the next couple of years include Dagestan / South Ossetia, the Yenisei River, and out towards Magadan in Russia, Chad, remote Greenland, and Iraqi Iraq. I think it's just still too early yet for Syria. I noticed one tour company offering a tour to Afghanistan (Herat, Kabul, Balkh) with the message 'for security reasons, we don't advertise the dates of this tour, or the specific itinerary'. One of the problems though is often these tours are ridiculously expensive, even if they do take you to places that as a solo traveller would be almost impossible. One goes around the Central African Republic (and not just to the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve), then into Cameroon for a bit, which would be a fantastically unusual trip to a country rarely visited, except that it costs 6,000 Euro, excluding flights. I mean, the Central African Republic is a bit of a lawless warzone so going in a group on an organised trip is probably wiser, but still, little bit costly? Bear in mind if you were doing it on your own, it shouldn't be that much. But still, safety?!

Before then, however ... a friend of mine in France wants to explore Ireland with me in June, otherwise all my trips will be UK ones I suspect. Which is fine, as there's a lot here to explore. And one such place is the nearby Peak District, and one of the post popular places therein is known as Kinder Scout.

[jingle, but not my usual one]

Kinder Scout is in the central part of the Peak District, one of the UK's National Parks, covering an area about twice the size of Hong Kong. Kinder Scout itself is on the northern side of the centre of it, where the land goes from rolling green fields to more pronounced hills and moorlands. North of here the land reaches the Pennines and it gets very bleak – indeed the next hill to the North is called Bleaklow Hill, one of the most challenging areas of the Peak District to hike through, and the site of a plane crash of an American bomber plane in 1948.

Other notable features around the Kinder Scout area, and maybe one day I'll do a podcast episode on the Peak District as a whole, include the picturesque village of Castleton, home to the small ruined Peveril castle (hence the name) and a series of mines and caves which you can explore. One of these is the Blue John Cavern, famous for a mineral called, well, Blue John, a form of banded fluorite used for jewellery and table ornaments. I went here when I was about, well, I was able to sit on my uncle's shoulders, that's how young I was. And because it was so narrow and so dark down there, I got a bit scared, and ran out. Because in those days I was a bit of a scaredycat. Nothing changes.

Also nearby is the hill called 'Mam Tor'. It's one of the most famous hills in England, and one which, perhaps surprisingly, I've never walked up. The name is believed to mean 'mother hill' – 'Tor' being a common element in placenames indicating a hill, whilst the Celtic word 'mam' still being used today to mean mother in both modern Welsh and dialectal English, and presumably related by vowel shift to the more common 'mum'. The same root is seen in the original name of the nearby city of Manchester ('Mamucio'), and also in 'The Mumbles', a hilly area in Wales, near Swansea. By 'mother', incidentally, the generally accepted feeling is that these hills referenced are shaped like breasts. It's not something I've paid attention to, because firstly I'm not that interested in breasts, and secondly I'm not spatially aware enough to make that connection. They just look like hills to me.

Weirdly, despite being in a largely Celtic area, the French town of 'Brest' doesn't refer directly to a hill that looks like a breast. In fact the name of that town comes from another Celtic word, 'brig', that means, er 'hill', would you believe.

Another possible explanation of the 'mother hill' epithet for Mam Tor specifically is it's relatively unstable, and is the site of frequent landslides. These sometimes create new 'child peaks'. It's a weird etymology, to be fair.

These landslides occasionally cause problems. The best physical evidence of this is on the old road that used to pass over it. This was the A625 and was one of the main roads between Manchester and Sheffield. However, continued landslides over the course of the 20th Century caused it to be closed and rebuilt several times. A particularly bad one in 1977 made the authorities convert it a single-track road, but two years later they decided to give up and abandon it completely. It's still possible to walk along it, and it's quite eerie in parts - it shows definitely the power of nature even in a relatively benign country as the UK. There's bits of it that have fallen off down the hill, and there's bit holes in the way, and you try and imagine a car going up it, and ... they just can't, basically. A similar problem has occurred a few miles further south, in the vicinity of Eyam, where the road northeast out the village has been cut off for several years due to ... part of it being missing down a hill because of a rainstorm, and as far as I know, not been rebuilt. Our road management systems would be completely thrown to pot if we had volcanoes or (decent) earthquakes.

Kinder Scout itself is only a couple of miles from Mam Tor; it's basically the next hill along, just to the north of Edale. I say 'hill', but that's not quite true. If Mam Tor is Mount Everest, Kinder Scout is the Tibetan Plateau. I realise that's a very strange metaphor. Though obviously less vast and impressive. And with fewer prayer flags.

It's about 500 to 600m in elevation, and while the trek up there is quite steep and energetic, once you're there it's a large area of casual paths, rock formations, and good views allegedly as far as North Wales, although this is England and my experience of high points in England is generally one of low cloud and visibility measured in metres rather than miles. The worst I had on this score was Winter Hill, up in Lancashire (although interestingly part of the same topographic layout as Kinder Scout, as is Pendle Hill, even further North) where I climbed to the top next to a 300m TV transmitter and could just about see the bottom 3 metres of it ...

In fact, the views from it are possibly what prompt its name. It's believed to be of Celtic origin (of course) and means "place that juts out and offers wide views". (sings, badly) "I'm in a wide open space, I'm standing // I'm all alone and staring in to space." Or so they say.

Becky, from Becky the Traveller, agrees, although possibly not with my singing.

BECKY: On a clear day from Kinder Scout you can have really beautiful views from the summit, kinda see for miles, obviously being the highest point in the area, but on bad weather days you can be blown all over the place; it can be really really windy at the top, and really cold. And I'm sure Ian will tell you more about windy days on Kinder Scout. I might be wrong, but I'm pretty sure he will.

Ha, I do mention a bit of wind later on, but while I'm thinking about it: just before The Hike across Great Britain last year, me and Becky did a couple of practice hikes, once of which was over Kinder Scout, with our friend and videographer Joe. In March. During a named storm (Storm Gareth). When it was snowing. One of us though this was a really fun and great idea and all jolly nice. Two of us did not agree. You can probably guess which who thought what. I still don't know how I survived the descent down Grindsbrook Clough. But we'll talk about that later – firstly I need to give a little overview of some background and history to Kinder Scout itself.

It's most notable in British history for the Mass Trespass event of 1932, without which this podcast episode may not have been possible, although as with many incidents and events, the truth is a

luxury and everyone has their own views on it.

It's often touted as a mass protest that pitted the public against the landowners, one of those David v Goliath battles that's very common throughout history. The basic framework is this: traditionally landowners had been very protective of the land they own, even where the land in question was vague moorland used for no real purpose other than, for instance, grouse-shooting. Ramblers, people who liked walking over the countryside for no purpose other than for its own enjoyment, were technically not permitted, but were generally tolerated, as long as you were of the right sort, of course. It probably shouldn't take much imagination to realise what 'sort' was meant in this case. In addition, rambler associations did liaise with local landowners (and, in later times, the water boards – this whole area of the Peak District is noted for its reservoirs) to create footpaths; one over the northern stretches of Kinder Scout to Snake Pass was opened in 1897 for instance.

So, some limited access was available (and, in truth, restrictions were often ignored anyway by many ramblers because That's Just What Humans Do), but, while rambler associations were created even amongst the working classes, taking advantage of new railway lines and cheap fares to go on organised trips (this was the age of the work holiday too, also seen in the rise in British Seaside Resorts at the same time), there was a feeling amongst many, especially in those working classes who couldn't afford to bribe landowners, or the costs associated with being arrested for trespass, that the whole concept of land ownership was unjust and the moors should be open for everyone.

It may come as no surprise at all to learn then that the leading light of the Kinder Scout Mass Trespass movement was a young communist, Benny Rothman, from nearby Glossop. He'd led a small group of fellow comrades on a camp in nearby Bleaklow in Easter 1932 but they'd been forced off by a group of landowners and gamekeepers. His thought was "if there'd been 40 or 50 of us, they wouldn't have been able to do it".

So he did. On 24 April 1932, he led a group of people from Hayfield, to the west of Kinder Scout, up onto the plateau. It's unclear how many people followed him; the establishment downplayed the event with suggestions of only 100 people, while Rothman claimed somewhere between 600 and 800. We'll ignore folk singer Ewan MacColl, for once, with an exaggerated-for-effect reporting of some 3,000. I'm not even sure if you could fit that many on the footpath.

Although the group were met with gamekeepers, and by accounts some police, Rothman was correct in his belief and the group made it to the top of Kinder Scout. There were some violent clashes along both ways, and several of the group were arrested, mainly for affray and riotous assembly, and later imprisoned on these counts for up to six months, but not, interestingly, for trespass, suggesting trespassing laws were unenforceable.

The ramblers associations distanced themselves from Rothman's acts, believing them to be too radical and too 'forceful', but the British public did not. The style of protest, and the authorities' reaction to it, stiffened the resolve in the minds of the people, and protests were held in support of both the concept of the 'right to roam' and Rothman's actions itself, including a march at nearby Winnatt's Pass that attracted some 10,000 people.

In the immediate post-war era, legislation was finally enacted that went some way to alleviating the concerns of people like Rothman. National Parks were created – these are designated areas of the country managed by specific Park Authorities rather than local councils, and where development is restricted (though unlike in most countries, National Parks in the UK aren't separate entities from the rest of the country, and often the only way you know you're in one is because there's a signpost by the road telling you – approximately 400,000 people live inside the boundaries of a National Park in the UK. I have no idea live in the boundaries of a National Park in the USA, but I have a

feeling it's in single figures), and the first to be designated was ... the Peak District, in April 1951.

The other thing that was created was the Pennine Way, the rugged 430km route that goes vaguely along the Pennine mountain range in Northern England. A suggestion for a long-distance footpath up the centre of England had been independently mooted for a while (it was mentioned as a idea by the leading rambler Tom Stephenson in 1935, although whether he was influenced or perturbed by the Mass Trespass is unclear. Given he later went on to be in charge of the Ramblers Association in the post-war environment, I'd suggest he wasn't overly fond of Rothman), and finally opened in 1965 as a through-trail linking together a number of existing paths into a coherent signposted route. Again, its unclear how much the Mass Trespass affected the provision of the Pennine Way itself, although it's certainly believed the reason it starts in Edale and goes directly over Kinder Scout within the first hour and a bit of hiking is to reinforce the memory of it; many people felt it should rather have started some 40km to the south, near Dovedale, as that's arguably where the Pennines themselves start (others suggest the Pennines don't really begin until the Peak District itself ends, somewhere around Saddleworth Moor and just to the south of Hebden Bridge, some 2½ days up).

However, it wasn't until as recently as 2000 that policy of the kind envisaged by the Mass Trespass was enshrined in law in England-and-Wales, and even then it doesn't go as far as it does in other countries – notably Scotland which has a specific 'right to roam' policy, and much looser regulations on wild camping which is, technically, illegal in the rest of the UK. Kinder Scout itself is designated 'Open Country' which means while the landowner has the right to restrict access for certain events, public safety, or simply conservation reasons, there are regulations in place guiding these closures; otherwise Kinder Scout itself is free to roam. And you did want to Wild Camp on it, while it would be remiss of me to advocate such a policy, there are certainly remote parts of it where you could certainly put up a tent without being noticed. And no-one's really going to care anyway, as long as you left no trace of your having done so.

Becky did just that.

BECKY: So, Kinder Scout was probably my second hike in the Peak District, and the first was Mam Tor, but it was the first place that I ever Wild Camped. Back in September 2015, my sister and I decided to try out wild camping and see what it was all about. I think it all went quite well; I remember it being pretty cold, and I think a sheep made us jump, but apart from that I think it was a thumbs-up.

My first wild camp experience, incidentally, was on Bleaklow, and I've ranted about that cold, weird, experience many times before.

But what's so special about Kinder Scout, and why have so many people wanted to explore it? Given that it's a remote land made mainly of gritstone, peat, and mud. Here's Jeni, who is "A Peak District Mum" on Instagram, with her overview on what and why she likes it up there.

JENI: Kinder's such an incredible place for so many different reasons, just the sheer expanse and size of it – it's the highest place in the Peak District which in itself makes it an amazing place, but just the variety of the landscape, the fact you could be up there on the moors, so rugged, and you just feel like you're in the absolute middle of nowhere, when realistically you're only a few miles from Edale or Hayfield. But you can be in other areas where it is busier and there are more people about, and obviously it's a more popular place. There's obviously different areas to discover, depending on what you want, there's so much you can get out from a walk up there. There's obviously places like, you've got Kinder Downfall, where, if you're lucky enough to see it when the wind is blowing it up and you've got the waterfall going backwards, up and over, it's an incredible sight. And when it's cold and wintry and icy, and it's all frozen up, it's an incredible sight, amazing,

and like something you wouldn't imagine seeing in this country at all. You've got all the different areas as well, you've got the trig points up there, you've got places like Grindsbrook Clough, and Crowden Clough, which are just great scrambles and walks in themselves So whatever you're wanting from a day out, you've got it up there, combined with nice little pubs in Edale when you've finished as well. For me it holds a lot of great memories from being back at Uni and doing research projects up there and going walking up there just to improve our navigation and basically just to explore and have fun, to now just going for walks up there with friends and even taking my little girl up there in her backpack when she was a little bit younger, so whatever your reason to go and explore it, just go for it, there's so many great places, and it is somewhere I need to explore more myself.

As Jeni says, there are a number of interesting sites on and around Kinder Scout. One of the most notable of these is what's known as Kinder Downfall – a long and rocky waterfall of some 30m in drop, treacherous in winter when it all ices up, scary after a rainstorm when the normal trickle becomes a raging torrent, that the path crosses by a series of stepping stones – on my last visit the problem was the wind making it hard to stand without being blown down it – when rain and wind combine, the spray can be seen for quite some distance, and I guess must make the place seem quite eerie and sinister.

The waterfall is where the River Kinder, which rises on the plateau, begins its descent to Kinder Reservoir to the west. There's a lot of Kinders here, which I guess is no surprise. Oh come on, did you really think I'd do a whole pod on Kinder Scout without coming up with that pun at some point? I know, it was dreadful; enough to get me banned from the USA I suppose.

Anyway.

Kinder Downfall is on the north edge of Kinder Scout. Beyond this, the path (the Pennine Way, in fact) heads downwards towards Mill Hill and then along a very boring flat bit of barefoot-friendly concrete slabs for a couple of miles, punctuated only by the frightened eerie sound of flustered grouse flying away (I've said before that I don't know much about birds, but I can tell you the sound of a grouse is like nothing else on Earth; it's designed for horror movie soundtracks), before hitting Snake Pass – the most direct route between Manchester and Sheffield but despite its designation in the low numbers (the A57), is not the signposted route. Partly, I guess, because of its tendency to close in Winter because of snow. But mainly because it is one of the best driving roads in England. It's a road of two parts – the eastern half is a winding but fairly fast single-carriageway road through the woodland of the Derwent Valley, gradually rising, while the western half is a spectacular but bleak very winding road over the open moorland of the Peak District where pretty much nothing grows and it feels like you're driving through the end of the world. Incidentally it's not called Snake Pass because the road snakes around – rather it's because of the Snake Pass Inn (previously known as the Snake Inn) halfway along, which itself is named after William Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire and notable landowner in the area, whose family crest had a serpent on it. Specifically the 6th Duke of Devonshire, as opposed to the previous five, and, prior to that, the three Earls of Devonshire, who were also called William Cavendish. These are not to be confused with the several William Cavendish-Bentincks, the Dukes of Portland, also notable landowners in the area, who descended from the 4th Duke of Devonshire.

Good god, it's like the Wars of the Roses all over again, but with even fewer names.

Near Kinder Downfall is Mermaid's Pool, which, perhaps unsurprisingly, is a pool wherein you'll find a mermaid. Or a water-nymph; the legendarium is quite vague on the subject. She's believed to grant the curse of immortality if you meet with her on Easter Saturday, which seems a remarkably Christian day for something that feels quite, well, pagan. It's quite a small unassuming pool, and one imagines the tales sprung up from people lost in the moorlands, and probably hallucinating.

Along the southern edge of the Kinder Scout plateau there is another path that weaves over the slightly undulating and rocky ground, and provides huge vistas across to Mam Tor and the nearby Hope Valley – this is the valley that runs eastwards from Castleton towards Sheffield; despite its name, the river here is the river Noe. The valley is named after the village of Hope, which appears to be an old English word for, uhm, 'valley'. It also leads to the joke in Sheffield – 'why is Manchester such a depressing place? Because it's beyond Hope'. I mean ...

Anyway. The path passes several interesting rock formations, which look very out-of-place in the otherwise even moorland. One set of these rocks is called 'the woolpack', presumably because it looks a bit like a series of sacks of wool piled on top of each other. I can't see it myself; it just looks like a pile of haphazardly stacked large boulders, but then I don't have much of a vision for these things, and to be honest this particular set looks like any of the other sets of rocks that are present at the edge of the Kinder Scout plateau on both this side and the western side. People use them for Instagram poses; on my last visit up there in September, I heard from a chap who said one influencer was posing half-naked on the rocks halfway to Kinder Downfall for about an hour – due to that set of rocks' prominence, they're visible from quite a way away from several footpaths, so they'd have been hard to miss.

At the bottom of Kinder Scout, in the Hope Valley, lies the small village of Edale. Although not the only access point for the plateau, it's by far the most used one. This is partly because its easy to access (it has a direct rail link to both Sheffield and Manchester), but also because it has a youth hostel, a couple of campsites, and two pubs. One of these pubs, The Old Nags Head, a 16th century stone building that's often described as 'quaint', is notable as being the designated end point of the aforementioned Pennine Way (the other end being just over the border in Scotland at Kirk Yetholm at another pub, called, oddly enough, "The Border". You get a free half pint at the Border pub if you hike the whole route – I've no idea if the same applies to the Old Nags Head if you're going South, but much fewer people do the route in that direction, mainly because the sun would be in your eyes all the time if you did). Maybe one day I'll do an entire pod on the Pennine Way; it was the main feature of the hike I did with Becky The Traveller last year across Great Britain, and it's certainly worth talking about more.

For this pod though, I'll mention two things about the Pennine Way. Firstly, its current route goes directly up the western side of Kinder Scout, climbing its way via a not-entirely even but quite gradual stone staircase called Jacob's Ladder. It's a wide but quite steep path with shallow and deep 'steps', and one of the reviews of it on Tripadvisor says "wear suitable footwear". I can confirm this would be advisable – they're not flat or smooth, and indeed have the feel in some places of narrow slats; my trip around Kinder took me up Grindsbrook Clough, over the plateau to Kinder Downfall, then down the Pennine Way mostly back to Edale railway station, entirely barefoot, and Jacob's Ladder was the only place I had issues with the underfoot texture. It wasn't the only place I had issues, but we'll come onto that in a short while.

Here's Becky again, talking about her preferences on physically going to to Kinder Scout.

BECKY: So for years I had zero map-reading skills. I used to go to the Peak District with my brother and sister, and we always used to catch the train to Edale, then we'd go up via Grindsbrook to the top, which was brilliant and I loved it, and there were many different memories because the weather was always different – you'd go from seeing absolutely nothing to seeing views for miles, so it was still pretty cool. I used to love the scramble bit up Grindsbrook. But I guess a few years on, since trying to teach myself to map-read, and exploring a lot more on my own, I now have been experimenting with all the different routes up Kinder Scout, and there's probably about 20+ different routes. And you've got the really popular ones, like the Mass Trespass route from Hayfield,

and Jacob's Ladder which goes from Edale via the Pennine Way National Trail, so I guess they're kind of the common ones that everyone knows about. But then you've got quite a few quieter paths and more challenging routes that include kind of scrambles and fun bits that I like to do. So you've got like Redbrook and Blackden Brook where there's pretty much no official path, but there is a route up and you can kind of scramble your way to the top. It's quite adventurous if you like that kind of thing.

Both me and Becky have now mentioned Grindsbrook Clough. This is ... it's the route the Pennine Way used to take before it was rerouted up Jacob's Ladder. It's a brook, a small river, that rises on the eastern side of Kinder Scout and descends pretty much to the Old Nags Head in Edale. I'm not going to call it a path. I refuse to call it a path. I don't care what Becky says. It's a waterfall. Or I guess would be if the Clough itself was anything more than a simple stream. Although it's a designated walkway on the map, it's a long, rough, rock scramble that never seems to end. It is, however, in my experience, much easier going up than down. Or maybe that's just me and my dyspraxia. The top of it is an excellent viewpoint again across the south of the Peak District, and is where several paths meet, including one heading east towards Win Hill and the Ladybower and Derwent Reservoirs; another very picturesque spot. It's lovely the way all these paths link up so you could spend days wandering aimlessly around this part of the Peak District, each path bringing new vistas and experiences.

Wandering aimlessly, however, is also what happens in the centre of Kinder Scout. There is an area, roughly triangular, bordered on one side by the Pennine Way from Jacob's Ladder to Kinder Downfall, another by the path past the Woolsacks from Jacob's Ladder to Grindsbrook Clough, and the third by an arbitrary line from Grindsbrook back to Kinder Downfall. I've called this area 'The Kinder Triangle'.

There are paths marked on the map that traverse this. And they look really simple, fairly straight lines.

I have not yet met anyone who has successfully walked them.

Regardless of your maps, your GPS, your compass, as soon as you step away from either the path to the Woolpack, or the path along the River Kinder, you are in a wilderness where left is right, east is south, the well-trodden trails on the ground bear no resemblance to the routes drawn on the map, and then end without any warning, where you walk along what you think is a path, then look at your GPS and see the route you want is some 200 metres to the east and you've no idea how. It's no use following the people in front as they're on the wrong trail too, and woe betide the people behind you, following you, assuming you know where you're going. Getting back onto the right trail involves making your way through identikit areas of green thorny shrubland and moss, descending slippery grassy banks, and stepping through streams of mud which you've no idea how deep they are, but you just have to wade through them and hope. Then ahead of you you see a hiker, with a map and compass and you think 'oh, I'm on the right path after all, finally', until they come up to you and ask 'do you know where the path is? Which way is Grindsbrook Clough?', and all you can do is give a vague wave of the hand and go 'well that's where I started, and it's somewhere over there. Just keep going until the land runs out, and then turn left; that's the best I can do'. You reach a small stream that you know feeds into the River Kinder and you decide to follow it, but the sides become steeper and sheerer, while the water gets deeper and deeper. Will you ever see Edale again?

Someone else who agrees with me on this point is Nat, from Natpacker Travel.

NAT: Kinder Scout's definitely one of my favourite walks in the UK. I'm actually pretty local to it, about an hour away by car. I've done it a few times and it's definitely one I'll want to do again at

some point. The reason it's one of my favourites is because it's different every time. You will get lost. End of. No matter how prepared you are. Up at the top of the peak there are moors and no-one gets through there perfectly, no matter how prepared you are. You can go in a group, with maps, compass, GPS, everything, and the only way you'll get through on the proper path is if the path had guide-ropes. You've just got no chance, especially once the mist descends. Last time I did it I had a nice clear day so I managed to keep mostly to the path. Ended up a bit off the path at some points but overall I did quite well I thought. But the first time I did it it had snowed the night before, so I had no chance of finding the path. I thought right, there's footprints, let's follow the footprints. Thing was, the footprints stopped. I followed them for probably about 15 minutes and they stopped. They didn't even turn round or anything; I don't know what happened to this person, just disappeared into thin air, I have no idea. But it's all part of the fun of Kinder Scout really, there's just no way you can't get lost – if you manage to not get lost you must have some kind of superpower if I'm honest up there. But yeh, it's definitely good fun and one to try.

I'm not aware of Kinder Scout being the scene of any mysterious events, UFO sightings, or the like, but you can bet your life I wouldn't be at all surprised if there were other, similar, tales of footprints in the snow suddenly disappearing, or strange ethereal glow lights, or eerie noises that sound like they're from a ghastly unearthly creature (that aren't grouse). I've only (fortunately) ever got lost up there in daylight – at night, with the only lights being the distant glare of Manchester to disorient you, I'd imagine it'd be quite scary.

Although I was barefoot up there anyway, because, well, me, the frequent muddy brooks and cloughs I had to wade through to get back on track were a great excuse when I passed people later on and they queried by lack of footwear.

Hiking barefoot has its advantages. I'm not going to recommend it to everyone – indeed last Sunday I appeared once again on BBC Radio Sheffield to talk about this very subject and the presenter was left feeling that I hadn't convinced him to try it – but, for example, it felt much easier to do the rock-scrambling up the Grindsbrook Clough waterfall barefoot as I was much more able to get purchase on the stones, plus, with bare feet taking up a smaller area than booted feet, I could place my foot in better positions to climb. I actually really enjoy the feeling of rock scrambling when barefoot – I feel like some kind of mountain goat, and for some reason I have much more confidence than I would normally do with that level of height and possibility to slip and freefall. And indeed I always have – I remember climbing a hill in Cambodia (Kbal Spean, part of the wider Angkor temple complex) many years ago barefoot because the path was a similar rocky scrambling affair and finding it was easier without sandals. Note this only applies going uphill – regardless of footwear I have real trouble going downhill, as I've mentioned before to more amusing affect, due to a lack of balance and a fear of falling over.

The only problem with my hiking barefoot is my dyspraxia. I mean, I have enough trouble with shopping trolleys – many times, as I've said before, have I banged my right foot (and it is always my right foot, I don't know why) against the wheel of the trolley as I've been pushing it, which hurts like ... well I would say buggery, as that's the stock phrase, but I've never been bugged (and have no intention of doing so), so I can't prove or disprove it, so let's just say it hurt a lot. Now imagine some wild countryside with random scattered rocks at ankle height and paths that constantly veer in direction. I'm impressed I managed to get as far as Kinder Downfall (up Grindsbrook and over the Kinder Triangle) with only a couple of scrapes.

Everything was going okay until, embarrassingly, the flat, wide, relatively smooth and simple farm road from the bottom of Jacob's Ladder to the farm at Upper Booth. Simple, easy, nothing could go wrong here, surely, right? Well, and this goes to show just how little spacial awareness I have, I ended up walking too close to the verge on the right hand side of the path, and banged my little toe

against it.

I say 'banged'. What actually seems to have happened is I caught it at precisely the wrong angle, and bent it. I mean it wasn't hanging off at a strange angle, but it easily could well have been – it was definitely noticeably in slightly the wrong place. You may be surprised, and slightly concerned, to know that it didn't hurt terribly much at all, it was more just, well, awkward. Looked weird. Make me psychologically go 'oh, have I broken it?'.

Needless to say, I sent some questioning messages to a couple of friends who all replied 'you complete doofus, you've broken at least three toes (because apparently one of the toes on my left foot also looked broken following a collision with a stone in the Kinder Triangle), go and see the doctor'. When I got home I patched it up a bit, taping my toes together and making me walk awkwardly for a couple of days. Obviously I didn't go to the doctor; for one thing my GP is 25 miles away back in Kirkby-in-Ashfield, and yes I could have gone to an NHS Walk-in-Centre or direct to the accident & emergency centre at the hospital which is, literally, 5 minutes walk from where I'm currently living, but I know they've got other people to see who are more in need than I am, especially in these times of pandemics and weird follow-up illnesses.

You may be pleased to know that my toe is still attached, it still doesn't hurt, and it doesn't seem to have suffered any lasting damage. Though I've not gone on any subsequent hikes, I've done quite a few jogs or runs (what's the difference between a jog and a run anyway) barefoot around my local neighbourhood with no problems. I have however become very careful about where I'm stepping at times, and my mind keeps imagining doing it again and it makes me squick quite a bit.

I am aware there's an easy solution. But that's not who I am, damnit! I don't like shoes!!

[standard section separation jingle]

Well that seems like an apt place to, well, also wrap up. The next episode will be on British Seaside Resorts. I know this because I've partly written it already. Until then, don't break any toes, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

[Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it]

[Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice. I'm pretty bad at that sort of thing myself, so I'll understand perfectly if you don't.

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Until next week, have safe journeys. Bye for now.]