



Kinder Scout

The People's Mountain

Ed Douglas and John Beatty

Written on its blank interior is our own story, a British story that extends far beyond the mountain's limit, paradoxically perhaps, given how empty the plateau appears to be. Kinder Scout holds a place in the popular imagination for the mass trespass held there in 1932, a near-mythological event in the fight for access to Britain's uplands, for many a critical moment, for others little more than a colourful distraction, even a stumbling block. But Kinder is undoubtedly the people's mountain, a focus for radicalism and liberty, rightly celebrated. It's the wild heart of Britain's first national park, that brave attempt to drag back the people's stake in its own natural heritage, another deliberate act of post-war social justice to set alongside the National Health Service.

But Kinder is even more than this. It tells a wider human story, about the very nature of our anxious, curious and acquisitive species. 'Literature is landscape on the desk,' the genial Chinese writer Lin Yutang suggested in *The Importance of Living*. 'Landscape is literature on the earth.' Many of the themes that compel us now, the collapse in biodiversity, our need for space, the balance between exploiting the Earth and conserving it, can be read first on the pages of Kinder Scout, downwind of the Industrial Revolution, half-poisoned, denuded and yet still-sacred ground, literally for some, a repository for all the messy contradictions that each of us brings, to add a sentence or two to the accumulated layers. My intention is to sift through these human stories, pick out some of the more significant landmarks in Kinder Scout's human history, and perhaps restore a few to public memory, like patching a drystone wall.

That's why I've walked up here, to try to understand, because Kinder is sometimes poorly understood, and even mocked or reviled. There have been many

visitors over the years baffled by Kinder's appeal, even hostile to it. Partly also as a paean, a song of praise to somewhere that has been both backdrop and touchstone for most of my life, a place to mark the seismic changes of the passing years, somewhere to leave myself behind, but also somewhere to appreciate the quotidian, the day-to-day joys of an outdoor life. In doing so, I know that I must tread gently, because Kinder Scout means a great deal to a great many, and for each individual that meaning is different, sometimes subtly, sometimes in great measure.

In making this journey, I can't begin to do justice to all those different individual experiences, or even the range of experiences that people have enjoyed, endured, suffered or celebrated in this strange, expansive, opaque ... what? How to define this landscape? Mountain? The term seems a little overblown for somewhere that barely scrapes over the 600-metre contour. Yet that hasn't prevented some of Kinder's admirers from drawing comparisons with other mountainous regions, in their enthusiasm over-promoting features as some kind of answer to the more dramatic appeal of more celebrated places. But Kinder Gates would barely serve a suburban bungalow let alone a grandiose house. The hill has marvellous rock climbs, although they're short; there's a bit of a summit, but it's not always easy to differentiate its location from the terrain surrounding it. There are parts of Aberdeenshire or the Berwyns where you can drive past similar hills and barely glance at them twice.

Then there is Kinder's curious topography, hardly mountain-like at all, if we take the child's view of a mountain being necessarily spiky and steep, a kind of Platonic Matterhorn, or in Samuel Johnson's dictionary, a 'vast protuberance of the earth'. Kinder is a tease: you climb steeply, from almost any angle,

and then ... nothing, just the sky above and a plateau ahead of you, and you're staggering on over a slimy plain where there should be some sort of climax. This clearly annoyed Alfred Wainwright, whose tastes in most things were meat and two veg: 'The terrain, everywhere difficult to traverse, rises very slightly to the insignificant summit of Kinder Scout, at 2,088ft. One wonders how this flat tableland came to earn its name as The Peak. Nothing less like a peak can be imagined.'

Given that he used local knowledge from Oldham ramblers Len Chadwick, Wainwright must have known that Kinder earned its name as The Peak thanks to mislabelling on the part of the Ordnance Survey, an error pointed out by all sorts of writers thereafter. But he was correct to call Kinder a tableland. The mountain is what Americans would call a mesa, from the Spanish for table, or in parts of Venezuela and Guyana what the local Pemon people call a *tepui*. And here is the magic of it. Stand still at the centre of this tabletop, with the moor curving away uniformly around you, and you can experience something almost unique in Britain, something you can't on a conventional mountain: an abstract sense of space – a big, embracing nothingness.

Scratch out the modern roads, roll up the railway that emerges from the Cowburn Tunnel into Edale, and you can see the mountain for what it is and not be channelled into blinkers by how you arrived. Looked at from above, through the satellite's omniscient eye or on the contours of a map, Kinder has a harmony of shape, a graphic energy lacking in its neighbours: Bleaklow, Howden, Margery Hill. They seem amorphous and indistinct in comparison. Kinder appears to me like the outline of a terrier, head cocked, its crown Kinder's northern edges, its snout the steep rocks above Ashop Head sniffing towards

Manchester, its slender neck, constantly narrowing thanks to the streams at either end, stretched between the steep cliffs of Kinder Downfall and the sharp angle of Fair Brook, ear cocked at Fairbrook Naze.

Patrick Monkhouse was one of several *Manchester Guardian* writers who appropriated the peak as their wild backyard. He quartered Kinder Scout's rambling bulk in his 1932 book *On Foot in the Peak*, published at the height of the post-war boom in outdoor activities and in the same year as the Kinder trespass: 'The Scout is perhaps four miles long, not as the crow flies but if you follow its major ins and outs. But it looks as long as eternity. That is the mark of greatness in mountains – not mere size, but the power to upset, to transcend, the normal measures of size. The highest point of Kinder Scout is barely above two thousand feet above sea level. But if you tell yourself that at the Ley Gate Head, it becomes either incredible or irrelevant. Two thousand feet is no great matter. It is less than the height of Wherside or Moel Hebog or Seat Sandal and many another summit, which falls far short of distinction, on which one looks unamazed. But here, face to face with the Scout, you feel the measuring-rod stretching and growing in your hands.'

Kinder has three distinct sides, like Everest, each with its own contrasting character and particular history: to the west, above the village of Hayfield, facing Manchester, and all that implies, the famous Downfall, where the Kinder plunges over tall crags in the crook of an angle in the edge, or on days when a strong westerly roars across the Cheshire plain, flying upwards in a drenching plume of spray visible for miles; to the north, colder, sterner, more sparsely inhabited, separated from the west by Ashop Head, a ruler-straight rampart of cliffs running east to where The Edge, as it is known, overlooking Ashop Clough,

ducks sharply back south-west at Fairbrook Naze before turning east again, meandering a little past Seal Edge and into Blackden Brook. From Ashop Head eastwards Kinder has an apron of moors before the ground drops away: this is where most of the peak's grouse shooting now happens. East of Blackden the plateau slopes down and rather dissipates. 'This far eastern end of Kinder Scout,' Monkhouse wrote, 'is a calm, smooth greensward, compared to the north and west faces.' Kinder's southern flank, which, like the north, tapers to Kinder's east end above Hope Cross, rises above Edale and is wholly different again, a valley like a cupped hand, benign, half-secret, sheltering ancient farms on three sides, to the south by Mam Tor and Lose Hill, and in the lee of Brown Knoll and Edale Cross to the west, which, as the southern limit of Kinder's western end, closes the circle.

Where to see this sprawl to best advantage? Martin Doughty, one of the great recent champions of conservation in Britain, thought the ideal vantage point was his native New Mills, west of Kinder, facing the Downfall, the hill's defining landmark, tuned in perhaps to some of Kinder's ancient energy, when the geomancy of the Downfall, a cleft set deep between walls that seem to embrace you, to wrap around your back, was obvious to minds still open to such notions. My friend John Beatty, going to school on his motorbike, would crane his neck for this view of Kinder from the crest of Ravenoak Bridge in Cheadle Hulme, west again of New Mills, scanning the horizon for a brief glimpse of Kinder's ramparts of paradise. Until one day he glanced too long, clipped the back of a Jaguar and watched from the ground as a bus ran over his gauntlet, thrown down and off his fingers. Thus he escaped narrowly a more metaphysical visit to paradise to continue his lifetime's exploration of the mountain.

The way Kinder Scout opens so dramatically to the west contributes to the notion that it is somehow Manchester's mountain. Even so, there is a great passion for it on the other side of the Pennines. In 1900, Bert Ward, having at least attempted to advertise the formation of a new rambling club in Robert Blatchford's socialist *Clarion* newspaper, left Sheffield's Midland station with a group of fourteen men, women and children, the 'first workers' Sunday Rambling Club' in England. It was a beautiful autumn day, and where else would Bert Ward go than Kinder Scout, to walk what he termed the 'usual round'. But there was in 1900 little usual about it at all, for several reasons, not least that the railway through the Hope Valley was only completed in 1894, whereas lines stretching east from Manchester had been operating for decades. (Ward and his friends alighted at Edale station, where the platform sign now reads *Edale For Kinder*, as though the community there was offering its support.)

The other limitation was access, which had in Ward's day been a contentious issue for several decades. A bitter legal dispute aimed at restoring the public's right of way over William Clough and down Ashop Clough, a key section in Ward's circumambulation, had only concluded in 1897, after a campaign lasting two decades.

One of Ward's ramblers was Jack Jordan, who recalled this momentous day in the 1950s, remembering in particular the view from the top of Jacob's Ladder, the steep, twisting packhorse track that leads from Upper Booth to Edale Cross: 'From the top of it we looked across to Edale Rocks, Pym's Chair and Crowden Towers, and all of us knew that a new life was opening for us – and we hoped, for those to come after us.' It is quite something when a spectacular view contains the future. It was an act

of imagination and faith on the parts of those who looked across Kinder's southern rim in 1900, since in those days Kinder's plateau was denied them, a prohibition enforced by gamekeepers patrolling the moor. Jordan, in his account, quoted, slightly inaccurately, Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, written in the springtime of Victoria's reign. ('For I dipped into the future far as human eye could see, / And saw the glory of the world and the wonder that might be.') True, Jordan wrote, Kinder Scout 'was not the world, but it was a new world to us, traversed for the first time – even now, after fifty-seven years I still remember the thrill and the joy it gave me'. Tennyson wrote a sequel to *Locksley Hall*, more than forty years later, rueing the failed promise of the Industrial Revolution; the spirits of Kinder must have sympathised. In the years between, the population of Sheffield had tripled.

Bert Ward had deep Sheffield roots, inasmuch as anyone did in that mushrooming world of smoke and flame. His grandfather William had been born in the Derbyshire village of Ridgeway in 1814, when Sheffield's population was around 50,000. Ridgeway had long since harnessed its busy little streams to become a local centre for making scythes and sickles, but the scale was discrete, artisan; in August and September the smiths were back in the fields, using scythes they'd made to reap the harvest. What was happening in Sheffield was of a different order, and the booming city drew William in. He joined the ranks of Sheffield's enterprising 'little mesters', with works on Kelham Island on the River Don. Bert, like his father, was an Anglican Sunday school teacher, but, unlike his father, he was also part of the nascent labour movement and was, quite literally, thrown out of the church for his socialist activities.

For someone who spends a lot of time walking on the fringes of Sheffield, as I do, Bert Ward's

presence is inescapable. He started his working life as an engineer fitter for a company making stays for corsets. He ended it as a civil servant with thirty-four years' service, turning down an honour on principle when he retired. Unusually, for a young fitter who'd left school at thirteen, he developed a passion for Spain, travelling there, learning the language and becoming involved in Spanish politics. But it's his rambling life that Ward is now known for, and when the Clarion Ramblers club was underway, he produced an annual handbook of upcoming walks that contained much else besides: lore, folk tales, quotations from favourite writers, like Emerson, Thoreau and Ruskin, history and, crucially, accurate information about boundaries and paths, grist to the mill of the access campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s of which Bert Ward was an integral part, as he was in the preservation of the landscape. The handbook managed to be local without being parochial, partly because Ward himself had strong roots and an internationalist outlook, thanks to his experience of Spain. His mantra, that a Rambler made is a man improved, might seem hackneyed in the twenty-first century, but his kind of Rambler was self-reliant, socially responsible, curious and determined.

Several times a week I pass his old house at Owlbar, on the border of the Peak District National Park, an idea that must have seemed a distant dream when he was a boy, but which he lived to see realised. The moors around Owlbar – Totley Moss, Blacka, Big Moor – were his daily bread, and are mine as well. They feature most often in his writings. Their high points are perhaps 200 metres lower than Kinder Scout, whose bulk dominates the horizon, a big dome muscling behind Lose Hill, but the interest is in the foreground, with the long, elegant sweeps of the Eastern Edges, culminating in Stanage.

In winter, though, Kinder is often shrouded in snow when the eastern moors are clear, and your eye is drawn and held fast to the dazzling horizon. Then you believe that it's not Glossop behind those hills, but the endless wastes of Hyperborea.

Another fine perspective is from Hollins Cross, where a track much older than recorded history crosses the ridgeline between Mam Tor and Lose Hill, between Edale and the Hope Valley. Stand facing north, and the southern mass of Kinder is spread before you, seamed with the watercourses that are slowly eroding it away, the deep, curving arc of Grindsbrook Clough straight ahead, Ollerbrook to the right of the fractured rocks of Ringing Roger, Crowden Clough, which Patrick Monkhouse thought 'sweetest of all the waters of Kinder', and beyond that, west again, the River Noe, whose name lends itself to one the earliest published references to Kinder, Michael Drayton's colossal tour of England's rivers, *Poly-Olbion*.

Drayton had been widely admired at the court of Elizabeth but was rudely expelled on the accession of James. His response was this epic portrait of a nation gathering a new sense of itself. Published in two volumes of thirty songs, the Noe appears in 'The Sixthe and Twentieth Song', published as part of the second batch in 1622. It also offers the name Nowstoll, or Noe Stool, for the hill that is its source – 'her great Sire' in Drayton's phrase. Drayton goes on to chastise, gently, Kinder – 'Faire Hill bee not so proud of thy so pleasant Scite' – as the Derwent quickly scoops up the Noe on its way to the Trent. There is a large rock perched on the rim of the plateau overlooking the Noe known as Noe Stool, but it doesn't seem remarkable enough to name a mountain of Kinder's scale.

That Drayton knew of Noe, tucked away in Edale, is testament to the sources he and his sometime

co-author, the brilliant seventeenth-century scholar and jurist John Selden, could draw on, many of them heavily annotated and now in Oxford's Bodleian Library. The poem reveals what was well known of this corner of Derbyshire; there is a great deal, for example, on the quality and scale of sheep farming in the Derwent Valley, which in the Tudor period was booming. What Drayton certainly did not do was put on a waterproof ruff and gaiters and splash around the plateau.

Had he done so, his *Poly-Olbion* would have been a little more complete. No mention is made of the river that rises on Kinder's western fringe. The Eleventh Song in this epic survey covers Cheshire but the most remote tributary of the Mersey mentioned is the Goyt – 'downe from her Peakish spring' – that rises on Axe Edge Moor, a watershed to rival Kinder's. The Goyt meets the Sett, which rises under Edale Cross, at New Mills. The Sett meets the Kinder at Bowden Bridge above Hayfield, the Kinder's three-mile run now interrupted just upstream by the reservoir built in 1911 by the Stockport Corporation. Drayton's poem was illustrated with thirty maps, the work of engraver William Hole, based on the mapmaking of Christopher Saxton, who drew the first county maps of England. Saxton's atlas was widely admired when it was published in 1579, but while Hole's illustration for Cheshire and the fringes of Derbyshire shows the Goyt, only vague, suggestive wiggles fill the space where the Kinder and Sett might be.

Cartography and surveying advanced rapidly in the Elizabethan era, under royal patronage, redrawing minds too, anatomising the world in practically useful ways – especially to lawyers. But Michael Drayton's poem sprang from another Elizabethan compulsion, that of antiquarianism,

most famously William Camden's hugely popular *Britannia*, a topographical and historical survey of immense scope and depth, which also captured the imagination of Elizabethan England. Drayton's work drew deep inspiration from Camden, the subtitle of *Poly-Olbion* being *A Chorographicall Description of Tracts, Rivers, Mountaines, Forests, and other Parts of this renowned Isle of Great Britaine, with intermixture of the most Remarkable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarities, Pleasures, and Commodities of the same*. Chorography is writing about place, and rarely out of fashion since, but while Camden and Selden were serious scholars, Drayton was trying to entertain, capturing England's emerging sense of itself and its place in the world with creative wit. He casts the Peak as some kind of Greek rustic spirit, describing the district's 'wonders'. (Drayton has seven; Camden suggests nine.) The Enlightenment philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who toured the Peak District in 1626, recast these wonders in his Latin poem *De Mirabilibus Pecci*. The angler and Royalist Charles Cotton then reworked Hobbes back into English for his *Wonders of the Peake*, first published in 1681.

In the way of these things, there was a backlash: a 'Peak-lash'. Daniel Defoe, that elusive literary chancer, turned on Derbyshire's 'wonders', in his own 'chorographic' work, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*. It made sense to him, a man who knew how to write a headline, to shake things up, subvert the established view. The country west of the Derwent, of which Kinder is the summit, was, in his words, a 'houling wilderness'. He had a talent for such phrases, and liked this one so much he used it twice. 'I must say,' he wrote, after admiring the home of the Duke of Devonshire, where Hobbes had lived and worked as William Cavendish's tutor, 'if there is any

wonder in Chatsworth, it is, that any man who had a genius suitable to so magnificent a design, who could lay out the plan for such a house, and had a fund to support the charge, would build it in such a place where the mountains insult the clouds, intercept the sun, and would threaten, were earthquakes frequent here, to bury the very towns, much more the house, in their ruins.' To Defoe, the High Peak, meaning Kinder Scout and Bleaklow, 'is the most desolate, wild, and abandoned country in all England'. Then, having dismissed the region as wastes, he adds a more intimate insult, one heard often since: 'The mountains of the Peak, of which I have been speaking, seem to be but the beginning of wonders to this part of the country, and but the beginning, or, if you will, as the lower rounds of a ladder.' Ouch. For Defoe, size mattered.

Given how much money he made, and that he was buried in a pauper's grave, it's safe to say Defoe had a taste for luxury. If he couldn't find a decent inn in the place he was visiting, he was generally prejudiced against it. He admires Doncaster largely for the quality of its hostelries and its manufacturing. Chatsworth is impressive and comfortable, but why would you bother with such wildernesses as the High Peak? Defoe liked to adopt a contrary line; it allowed him to pose. As a political journalist and spy, for both Whigs and Tories, he could happily defend more or less any position without much moral qualm. He never let the truth, or complexity, stand in the way of a good story. Disparaging a literary tradition, which is what he does in his denunciation of Hobbes and Cotton, and also Celia Fiennes, who made a similar journey in the 1690s, doing everything Defoe did but earlier and side-saddle, came naturally to him. Defoe's own style is robust and direct, and consequently antithetical to the poets

he derides, just as they derided him, although Defoe had the sense to pilfer their material. In Drayton's poem the Peak's barren landscape is elegant: 'Like it in all this Isle, for sternness there is none, / Where Nature may be said to show you groves of stone.' Defoe's 'houling wilderness' gets straight to the point, like the man. Defoe likes stuff and material wealth, admires commerce, and hates pretension. Yet it's also true that he spends much more time and effort exciting his readers with tales of terrible places like Kinder Scout than he does with bourgeois accounts of market towns.

Larkin said: 'Man hands on misery to man.' The same is true for our view of landscapes. The quotations of famous writers are passed from book to book like viruses, infecting the present. Defoe's dismissal of the High Peak as both useless and charmless is often taken as an illustration of changing fashions in the appreciation of landscape, as though the word of one man could settle it. But it's fair to say there has always long been something divisive about the High Peak's true value as a landscape, irrespective of Romanticism or the alienating influence of the Industrial Revolution.

In the modern era, the division over Kinder Scout is most commonly the difference between those who pass through, often only once, and those who grow familiar with the moors over time. In Patrick Monkhouse's frame of reference, Kinder seems an old acquaintance, even a friend, a bit dog-eared, heavy going sometimes, far from perfect, but familiar. Another writer, John Hillaby, once a *Guardian* man himself, came this way only once at the end of the 1960s, walking the length of Britain to take the mood, and was dismayed by what he saw. 'Up there you blink. A silent and utterly sodden world. This, surely, is not the summit of

the High Peak. Mounds of bare peat rise in all directions, like waves, or rather a field furrowed by a gigantic plough. On the top there are no signposts, no markers. Only the choice of channels between the chocolate-coloured peat.' Hillaby preferred to wear light boots, soft and comfortable, so he walked barefoot to preserve them while following a compass bearing. 'The peat extended for miles. It rose, gradually, in the direction of a mound of rocks. And it steamed, like manure. Manure is the analogy that comes most readily to mind. The top of Kinder Scout looks as if it's entirely covered in the droppings of dinosaurs.' Hillaby also felt oppressed by the surrounding cities creeping out towards him, impinging on his sense of space, somehow accentuating the barrenness he discovered there. 'There are people, I know, who speak highly of these south Pennine moors. They like the atmosphere of the wilderness. I am not among them. I found them extraordinarily depressing.'

Contemporary writers share Hillaby's gloom. William Atkins, an admired book editor from North London, described his journey across Britain's 'most forbidding and most mysterious terrain' in his book *The Moor*. When it comes to Kinder Scout, the same black dog trots in his footsteps. The naked hags suck him down, 'whose flat tops alone bore a cap of crowberry and heather, sometimes mere Mohicans of vegetation. It was as if these tables of peat had been excavated and dumped up here on the moor-top, fly-tipped.' He becomes disconnected from the landscape, adrift, until the main road rudely wakens him. 'The Snake Pass was a drugs route, a guns route; police pursuit drivers trained on it. "Think Bike" said the signs. Like most moorland passes, with their unbroken prospects and long straights, the accident rate is high, and the accidents are terrible.'

It's hard to read these things about somewhere I've known and loved intimately for almost forty years. The Snake Road has never been alien to me, never been a place of death. Crossing the summit on the way home from Manchester you are faced with a high, even sweep of moors into which the road sinks from view, the moorland seamed with black, like the roots of a tree, where the water has washed channels in the decaying bog. With no view of the road ahead, it feels like you are poised to go underground, that the moors will draw you in, swallow you up – take you to heart. And I like the intersection with the Pennine Way, the notion that I could just stop, get out of the car and start walking to the Borders.

Alfred Wainwright, in writing his *Pennine Way Companion*, made little secret of his dislike of Britain's oldest official long-distance footpath, which starts on Kinder, in those days up a badly scarred Grindsbrook Clough, these days skirting the mountain's base before climbing to Edale Cross and then along the plateau's western rim. He did his research a year or two before Hillaby and reached similar conclusions, describing the plateau as 'an open and uninviting landscape' and dismissing the River Kinder, judging the name 'an ambitious one for a sluggish trickle'. The surroundings are 'drab' and it's only on reaching the edge of the plateau that the walking becomes 'palatable', thanks only to 'extensive views to the west'. Whether Wainwright actually crossed Kinder in its entirety is open to question. On his first attempt in April 1966, as he wrote to his friend, the author Molly Lefebure, he turned back from the plateau in foul weather: 'a drizzle had set in, mist was falling, the path was a quagmire. I thought of Borrowdale, I thought ye gods what have I done, what am I doing in this

godforsaken spot. Two hundred and fifty miles of this! I must be mad. Well I got up to the plateau, two miles, and into a wilderness of wet fog and snowdrifts and slimy peat hags, and my heart was in my boots. I turned back.' He still hadn't completed this section when he wrote to Len Chadwick about it more than a year later. So jaded did Wainwright become on his piecemeal walk up the Pennines, wondering why he had bothered, that he developed his own walk, not south to north but east to west, from the Cumbrian coast at St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay, a route that, in his own words, 'puts the Pennine Way to shame'. Despite his lukewarm impressions, the *Pennine Way Companion* sold briskly, like all his other books.

Wainwright's view of landscape seems wholly conventional to me. He adored Lakeland, had his formative experience there and left his perspective unchallenged thereafter, becoming a professional curmudgeon as the decades passed. (His choice of 'The Happy Wanderer' for the Radio 4 programme *Desert Island Discs* was presumably ironic.) The art critic and social reformer John Ruskin, dying at Coniston seven years almost to the day before Wainwright was born in Blackburn, also saw mountain scenery in definite terms: 'Mountains are to the rest of the body of the earth, what violent muscular action is to the body of man. The muscles and tendons of its anatomy are, in the mountain, brought out with force and convulsive energy, full of expression, passion, and strength; the plains and the lower hills are the repose and the effortless motion of the frame, when its muscles lie dormant and concealed beneath the lines of its beauty, yet ruling those lines in their every undulation. This, then, is the first grand principle of the truth of the earth. The spirit of the hills is action, that of the lowlands, repose ...'

Ruskin was writing about the Alps, not the Lake District. He judged Britain's mountains 'too barren to be perfectly beautiful, and always too low to be perfectly sublime' but did allow that 'many deep sources of delight are gathered into the compass of their glens and vales'. The Victorian equivalent of, 'Yeah, not bad'. He was even less interested in the kind of high flat country that Kinder Scout epitomises. 'Inferior hills ordinarily interrupt, in some degree, the richness of the valleys at their feet; the grey downs of southern England and treeless *côteaux* of central France, and grey swells of Scottish moor, whatever peculiar charm they may possess in themselves, are at least destitute of those which belong to the woods and fields of the lowlands.' In other words, they provide an interesting contrast but that's about it. As for Defoe, for Ruskin: size mattered. But for different reasons, I think. Defoe, ever the journalist, wanted the remarkable – something novel, or useful. Ruskin had his towering, trembling aesthetic sense.

I sometimes wonder what Ruskin thought of Kinder Scout. He must have seen it, because he was a regular visitor to Derbyshire and valued its landscapes. His opposition in the 1860s to the railway through Chee Dale is well known, thanks to his remark that all the ruination would achieve would be that 'every fool in Buxton can be in Bakewell in half an hour and every fool at Bakewell in Buxton'. But he also opposed the railway between Totley and Chinley, the line that runs through Edale, judging it 'the invasion of virgin country', which, given his psychosexual reputation, is perhaps an unfortunate turn of phrase.

Totley was where, in the mid 1870s, Ruskin funded one of his idealistic social experiments, an attempt at communitarian living at what is now known as St George's Farm, but was known to Ruskin

as Abbeydale. Living just round the corner, I often cycle past it. 'We will try to take some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful and fruitful,' Ruskin announced. 'We will have no steam engines upon it and no railroads.' Except there was already a station at Totley, and his dream of a productive market garden and workshops full of happy artisans quickly foundered in the sort of finger-pointing and drift that too often plagues cooperative enterprises. Among the farm's more profitable activities was selling cups of tea to curious visitors. Ruskin knew he should be paying more attention to the commune's development, but was too busy working up some notes on St George's Church in Venice, whose stained-glass window is a better memorial to Ruskin than the failed experiment of St George's Farm. By the time the project was finally wound up, Ruskin had retreated to Brantwood, haunted by his failures, in a state of nervous collapse, unable to write and alienated from a newly industrialised world that had nature and beauty in full retreat. But Ruskin's idea did set people thinking. William Morris visited Abbeydale and the young Edward Carpenter also became involved, finding a new tenant for the farm.

Carpenter is a compelling figure, the sort of man who makes you wholly rethink the Victorian era, but not quite famous enough to escape the doom of being endlessly rediscovered. Born into a wealthy family, one of ten children, he was educated at Brighton College, living at home among six sisters, and then went up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. An outstanding scholar, he took up Leslie Stephen's recently vacated fellowship at Trinity and consequently took holy orders. He was then offered the job of tutoring the future George V. But Carpenter was spectacularly ill-suited to serve the establishment. He is remembered now as a socialist with a strong

dash of Indian mysticism, someone both Fabians and Marxists found annoying. But he was also a courageous advocate for gay rights, living if not quite openly, then with no shame for forty years with his partner George Merrill, born in the slums of Sheffield. Their relationship was the inspiration for Carpenter's friend E.M. Forster to write his novel *Maurice*.

Like Bert Ward, Carpenter was an admirer of Walt Whitman – though, unlike Ward, Carpenter reportedly slept with the poet, at least according to Allen Ginsberg – and under the influence of Whitman's collection *Leaves of Grass*, found a way to link his social conscience and his sexual preferences, a kind of 'manly comradeship' in his biographer Sheila Rowbotham's phrase. He quit the church and began an entirely new life more suited to his new ideals. 'I would and must somehow go and make my life with the mass of the people and the manual workers.' As Rowbotham described it, 'the north was a shock' for Edward Carpenter. He came first to Leeds as a lecturer for the University Extension programme, dreaming he would bring education to the masses, but discovering instead that audiences for his lectures were mostly middle class. If Leeds had been bad, then Sheffield was worse. The city was at that time, according to John Murray's *Hand-book for travellers in Yorkshire*, 'beyond all question the blackest, dirtiest, and least agreeable'. Carpenter was lecturing on astronomy, which he judged ironic since for three days the sky was barely visible through the smog and pollution. But he loved the open, wild country above the city, loved being outdoors tramping the footpaths, and resolved to live in the country, taking Thoreau as a more abiding influence than Marx. When Carpenter's father died and he inherited his share of the family fortune, he bought a large market garden at Millthorpe, a small village

on the other side of the hill from Totley in north-east Derbyshire, and built a house.

Ruskin's social experiment at Totley had been for Carpenter 'the dim dawn or beginning of a new life for me'. He became absorbed in Sheffield's embryonic socialist community, but Carpenter was also prescient as an environmentalist, railing against the pollution – the filth, poisoned water and grim housing – ordinary people in Sheffield had to endure as the price of industrialisation. Younger socialist intellectuals, like George Bernard Shaw, mocked Carpenter; George Orwell was excoriating, judging Carpenter's type as an 'outer-suburban creeping Jesus'. (He was a great enthusiast for the wearing of sandals.) But his social liberalism, his ideas about sexuality and democracy, even his environmentalism, quietly endured to re-emerge at the end of the twentieth century. Some of those who participated in the trespasses of the 1930s, including on Kinder Scout, took direct inspiration from him. It says a great deal that Bert Ward helped organise an album signed by all the members of the Labour Cabinet when Carpenter turned eighty in 1924. Another well-known access campaigner, the philosopher C.E.M. Joad, called him the harbinger of modernity. 'What he wanted,' E.M. Forster wrote after Carpenter's death, 'was *News from Nowhere* and the place that is still nowhere, wildness, the rapture of unpolluted streams, sunrise and sunset over the moors, and in the midst of these the working people whom he loved passionately in touch with one another and with the natural glories around them.'

By contrast, when John Ruskin tried to marry his strong aesthetic judgement to his political ideals, the former overwhelmed the latter. He adored Alpine scenery, and consequently demanded that everyone else do so as well. His sense of self rested

on his acute appreciation of art and nature, and the two were inextricably linked. Ruskin's judgement about mountain landscapes is one shared by many of my mountain-loving friends. There was something deeply architectural in his appreciation of its scenery, as though he were standing in a square in Venice admiring a palazzo. '[Mountains] seem to have been built for the human race,' he wrote in *Modern Painters*, 'as at once their schools and cathedrals; full of treasures of illuminated manuscript for the scholar, kindly in simple lessons to the worker, quiet in pale cloisters for the thinker, glorious in holiness for the worshipper.' They are, in Ruskin's estimation, the 'great cathedrals of the earth, with their gates of rock, pavements of cloud, choirs of stream and stone, altars of snow, and vaults of purple traversed by the continual stars'. Architects, and in Ruskin's mind, when it came to the natural world, that meant God, or some kind of divine progenitor, make reality. There's something virile about it, something unnegotiated, imposing a narrative. That's why a railway across a landscape Ruskin valued was a kind of personal insult; it violated his own ideas about what that space should be. That's why he raged against mountaineers treating the perfect peaks as 'greasy poles' for their narrow ambition. He reminds me of the more proprietorial kind of landowner, who resents being told his estate is more than his possession. As an aesthetic, it sounds authoritarian, even tyrannical, as though the working classes needed to be told what was and what was not beautiful because they had no chance of deciding for themselves.

Moorland seems to me a very different kind of space to mountains, less architectural and more abstract, more sculptural too. It is long curves and inflected lines, changing light and vast skies. (The name Heathcliff always struck me as a good

piece of observation.) There is nothing to trap the eye, no place to reach, like the tops of hills. Moorland is less distinct, more equivocal than mountains and consequently, in a strange kind of way, more democratic, more accommodating. Barbara Hepworth, driving around West Yorkshire in the early 1920s with her father, newly appointed county surveyor, not only saw the hills as sculptures, she became absorbed into them, and they into her. 'I, the sculptor, *am* the landscape. I am the form and I am the hollow, the thrust and the contour.' The word 'moor', from the Anglo-Saxon 'mor', meaning bog or fen, was broadened, co-opted to translate the Latin word 'mons' and extended to cover heath. It was also largely synonymous with 'common', with all that implies. The Alps, ironically for Ruskin, were scenery for the age of steam; moorland seems more modern, more muted and less strenuous, less insistent.

Standing in front of Kinder Gates, I crouch down and scoop up a handful of pebbles, raking through them with my finger. They're white, of quartz, like small jewels, eroded out of the gritstone that caps the plateau of Kinder Scout. I've stood in the same spot in winter and seen similar stones locked in ice, as though in a cabinet, on display. It always pleases me when others notice the way Kinder's paths and channels are littered with these little bright shards. Mrs Humphry Ward's novel *The History of David Grieve* opens on Kinder Scout, where her hero grows up, and young David, out at night on the plateau, finds his way home by following these pebbles, 'gleaming white in the moonlight,' which, as she explains, 'wind and weather are forever teasing out of the grit, and which drift into open spaces'.

All mountains are entropic. They are quite literally falling to bits, washed away, blown to pieces,

sucked down by gravity and always on the move. Stick around long enough and Kinder Scout will melt before your eyes. I'm squatting on top of a mountain dismantled by wind and rain, grains of sand washed away, and me with them, pretty soon. I've often thought that if we had time-lapse photography extending over tens of millions of years, if we could see, as geologists imagine, our planet shifting and wriggling, we'd have a radically different perspective on our overheating little spaceship, and also of its truculent crew.

Beneath my feet, under the gravel of the riverbed, successive layers of gritstone, shale, sandstone and more shale reach down for 600 metres to a final layer of limestone 3,000 metres thick. It's tempting to think of this sequence of layers like a cake, or an onion, but those are static comparisons and the formation of the rocks that make Kinder Scout was anything but static. Neither was the weathering and erosion that have produced its distinctive shape: the near-constant, restless wind driving rain across the plateau and, in the clear blue days of winter, the shattering frost.

The pebbles in my hand have already been on quite a journey, eroded out of a range of mountains that stretched from the Highlands to Scandinavia. Fragments like these, older than some of the stars in the sky, have been matched to parent rocks in Scotland. They were washed into a tributary of a vast river that drained those mountains, as the Ganges does the Himalaya, its delta located where the Pennines are now. When it was formed more than 300 million years ago, this vast, sprawling delta was at the equator, and has since drifted north by fifty degrees of latitude and is still going, pushed along on a tide of time, heading for the Arctic.

Sediment from this ancient range spewed out of the mouth of the river, losing momentum as it met

the standing water of the sea. The heaviest fragments fell to the bottom of the ocean first. Lighter material washed out further to settle on the sea floor. It accumulated, thickened, the resting place for billions of sea creatures, squashed flat in this bottom 300-metre layer, called the Edale Shales. The delta grew, heavier material piled up, huge unstable banks of sand that would shift, squirting out a sluggish sandy broth that settled again, the process repeating itself over millennia, building up a fan of material over the shales that you can see in the landslip scars of Mam Tor: the Mam Tor Sandstones. These are 135 metres thick.

All the while, like the Ganges, our river kept shifting course as its channels choked with debris, thickening like a glutton. Slacker water, unable to support heavier material, left finer-grained deposits. You can see these, the Grindslow Shales, at the top of Grindsbrook, thin layers of biscuit-rock you can snap with your fingers. Then the swampy line of coast spread and expanded, and the delta was filled in with coarse-grained sand and pebbles, like the clutch I have in my hand; that too thickened, pressure built and with it heat, to create a cap of coarse-grained sandstone called Kinderscout Gritstone, the rocks now exposed on the plateau. Dour to some, for the rock climber it was alchemy, making stony gold from fragments.

Kinder's estuarine start in life is strangely appropriate. There's something littoral about the plateau, especially walking along the northern rim, as though you're pacing out time's shore. But it's not easy to visualise this constant, relentless movement of material – of braiding streams and sudden floods, and banks of shifting sand – when you're surrounded by rock. The spot where I'm standing, on top of the Kinderscout Gritstone, was buried in turn by a new delta. This one grew to a depth of 2,000 metres and

was topped with the lush vegetation that became coal. Continents collided and the Pennines lifted a mile into the air. Time and wind and rain got to work. Standing here on the flat roof of Kinder, those layers are gone already, stripped away, as this one will be eventually.

Human history, human culture, is the same, an estuary thick with sediment, shifting course, settling here and then elsewhere, the steady accumulation of material, pressure, heat, amalgamation, change, and then erosion, exposing fragmentary clues to its origin, but without the movement, without the energy or noise that drove the pattern. Take Kinder Scout's name, a fossil itself, pored over by antiquarians and toponymists for clues as to its origin and pinned on to different cultures spread over centuries. The English professor Kenneth Cameron, who spent most of his career at the University of Nottingham and wrote the standard work on Derbyshire's place names, judged Kinder to be pre-Celtic. Other scholars have speculated that it's Brittonic, the Celtic language that fractured into Welsh, Cumbric and others. Some believe the name is derived from words connected to the mountain's topography; others that is a 'habitative' name, its meaning found in the hamlet of Kinder, most likely a named political entity long before the first written reference to Kinder – 'Chendre' – in *Domesday*. The name, still slippery and shifting, appears thereafter in a variety of spellings: Kender in 1275; Kendyr in 1285; Kunder in 1299; Kyndre in 1315.

The Downfall, the rocky precipice that defines Kinder's western aspect, is a captivating feature, especially for those of a more animist persuasion, and a boundary too, a watershed where east meets west, which adds weight to the idea that the name is a Celtic one for a boundary settlement. More recently,

the linguist Jon Fyne, focusing on the dialects of north-west Derbyshire for his doctorate, made a potent argument for the Old English *cyne*, meaning fissure, or ravine. Given that the name Kinder has, historically, referred very much to the plateau's western end, this makes sense. The second part of the name, Scout, and in the late nineteenth century the mountain was usually called 'the Scout', comes most probably from the Old Norse *skúti*, meaning overhanging rock. This may upset those with a romantic leaning towards the Celts, but then history is often as much fashion as fact, especially when facts are thin on the ground. We usually project on to the past the concerns of today.

The same is true for individuals too. There are fragments here of my own past, a teenage boy looking for space to breathe and rocks to climb. Martin Kocsis, the author of the guidebook to Kinder Scout's rock climbs, felt the same: 'I remember the moment when I first realised what these moors meant to me. I was seventeen and was running across Featherbed Moss with some friends, yelling, screaming and laughing – the release was like nothing I'd ever known. I felt like something had changed irrevocably for the better.' Martin and I are just two among thousands of northern climbers who felt their universe expanding on the plateau of Kinder Scout. Doug Scott, the first Englishman to climb Everest, was another, the young explorer escaping the post-war gloom of Nottingham to cross Kinder Scout, discovering an imaginary Hindu Kush in Derbyshire.

Climbing was less romantic by the 1980s. The first time Andy Cave was up on these moors, he arrived at Edale station with a gang of mates from his mining village in South Yorkshire. The lads quickly set about making their mark. Having scrawled 'Royston Skins Rule OK' in large letters

across the railway timetable, they headed to the pub for a few pints before taking the path up Kinder. Cave recalled two of them, twin brothers, dressed in matching Wrangler denim jackets and Dealer boots, buzzing rocks at the sheep to mitigate the boredom of going for a walk. 'The cloud dropped suddenly,' Cave wrote in his climbing memoir *Thin White Line*. 'I got out my map, but the twins called me a gay boy, so I put it away again and we trudged over the moor for hours disorientated, trying to find the northern edge by the Snake Pass Road. We peered down at a village at the end of the day, but it was Edale again; we had walked in a complete circle.'

Growing up in my own small world, where Kinder Scout was a sort of adventure kindergarten, there were such a rich variety of responses to Kinder's quiet appeal. Fell runners will tell you the same, stories from the mountain's famous races. So will those who track down the aircraft wrecks and other curiosities that pepper the mountain. There has been a cavalcade of artists drawing inspiration from its quiet lines: musicians, sculptors and painters, novelists and poets. There are the religious cranks and devoted rambblers, the half-interested picnickers and the dedicated conservationists. All comers. Kinder really is a mountain for the people. Over a lifetime looking in the mountain's face, my knowledge and appreciation of other human responses to this wild place has broadened and deepened and that has changed my own relationship with it. It's a place of constancy, a place to see the patterns of the universe. It's a place of change, and a place to see change: in ourselves and in the world around the mountain.



The mist-shrouded mire of Featherbed Moss.



Above: Crowden Brook gathers water from the Kinder plateau and carries it steeply down to the River Noe and eventually the Derwent, the Trent and the North Sea.
Opposite: The wind-sculpted rocks of the Pagoda, the Wool Packs and Pym Chair rear above the southern slopes of Kinder Scout, emphasising its plateau-like structure.

