

## The Genesis of the Pennine Way

The [Pennine Way](#) is Britain's first long distance path. A [National Trail](#) which crosses three National Parks as it runs from Edale to Kirk Yetholm, it is 268 miles long (431 km) and involves around 12,000m of ascent peaking at Cross Fell (893m above sea level). Around 3,500 people complete the National Trail from start to finish per year, typically taking 16-19 days to do so.

The Pennine Way was the idea of [Tom Stephenson \(1893-1987\)](#), a rambler, journalist and conscientious objector. Following the [Kinder Scout Mass Trespass](#) (24 April 1932), which brought the issue of the 'right to roam' into public debate, he published a seminal article in the *Daily Herald* on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1935, entitled: "[Wanted - a Long Green Trail](#)". In the piece, Stephenson, inspired by the American Appalachian Trail, would put the case for "a Pennine Way from the Peak to the Cheviots".



Figure 1: The Pennine Way near Airton.  
Image by Colin Speakman.



Figure 2: Walkers traverse above Malham Cove. Image by Colin Speakman.

The passing of the [National Park and Access to the Countryside Act \(1949\)](#) enabled, amongst other matters, the establishment of long-distance paths. Subsequently, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951, the route of the Pennine Way was formally approved by Hugh Dalton, the Minister for Local Government and Planning. Stephenson's original route involved the creation of 70 miles of new rights of way, half being in the Kinder-Bleaklow section. He wanted to clear up long standing problems of access on the moors of the Dark Peak.

The Pennine Way was officially opened at Malham on 24 April 1965. Its significance is that it paved the way for public access to some of England's wildest landscapes in the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales and North Pennines. It played a pivotal role in the wider struggle for public access in upland areas.

The irony is that Stephenson, an inveterate trespasser himself, did not approve of the illegal Mass Trespass of 1932. He simply sought "a meandering way deviating as needs be to include the best of that long range of moor and



Figure 3: Tom Stephenson opening the Pennine Way, 24 April 1965. Image by *The Yorkshire Post*.

fell [...] a faint line on the Ordinance maps.” Perhaps he would have been dismayed at the popularity of the route and the degradation of the landscape.

**Philip Mander, July 2024**