

Start something **big!**

COLLECT THEM ALL!

Start ticking off hilltops from a list and you won't want to stop. And it needn't be a monster undertaking – it can be an enlightening, enchanting voyage of discovery, like the Ethels...

WORDS: JENNY WALTERS PHOTOS: TOM BAILEY

STAMPS, SHELLS, COMICS, Beatles memorabilia, autographs: collecting things has long been one of the world's favourite hobbies. But richer than things are experiences, memories, moments, views – the kind you get from climbing hills.

Collecting summits kicked off in Britain back in 1891, when Sir Hugh Munro published his list of 283 Scottish mountains above 3000 feet. Ten years later, Reverend AE Robertson celebrated being the first to bag them all by kissing the cairn on his final peak, and *then* kissing his wife. Thousands of walkers are now collecting the Munros, and the peaks on the many tick-lists that followed: Corbetts, Grahams, Donalds, Marilyns (a pun on Munro, ha ha), Wainwrights, Hewitts, Humps and more.

And now we have the Ethels, a list created in 2021 featuring 95 hills across the Peak District National Park, plus a few near neighbours. It

includes all the summits over 400m and a smattering of characterful shorter ones like Thorpe Cloud. Like all good hill lists it will take you to places famed (Kinder Scout and Mam Tor) and places overlooked (Bole Hill and Dead Edge End), and I've just arrived in the south-west Peak to collect three Ethels in one spectacular walk.

Why the Ethels? List creator, Doug Colton, was keen 'to raise the public profile of the countryside access pioneer Ethel Haythornthwaite'. Born Ethel Mary Bassett Ward in Sheffield in 1894, she grew up on the edge of the Peak District and always loved this countryside. In 1916 she married Henry Burrows Gallimore, but a year later he was killed in action in World War One. Ethel became sick with grief. Her family, desperate to help, persuaded her back to the hills for 'restorative walks'. Here her broken heart began to heal. Here she found a new purpose in life, and she spent the next 60 years working to protect this landscape. ▶

 The Roaches



▲ **SPEAKING OUT**
Countryside campaigner, Peak District pioneer and inspiration for the Ethels hill list: Ethel Haythornthwaite.

ON TOP OF THE ROCKS

Heaping to a height of 1509 feet, Ramshaw Rocks is one of three spectacular Ethels on this walk.



'Shutlingsloe, aka the **Matterhorn of Cheshire** and also an Ethel, makes a **distinctive bump** on the far horizon...'



▲ SCULPTURE TRAIL

The British Mountaineering Council call Ramshaw Rocks 'The Roaches' ugly sister... a Gothic nightmare of prows, cracks and overhangs. A crag with teeth - you won't forget a visit here.'

The first Ethel on my walk is encouragingly easy to reach. The top of Ramshaw Rocks is less than half a mile and 300 feet of ascent from my start on a lane north of Upper Hulme. If you've been along the A53 from Leek to Buxton you might have seen the stones up here wink at you. A 10 foot tall face peers out, its forehead, nose, mouth and chin hewn by the elements, and when you travel north the giant blinks, as a pillar passes behind the hole that makes his eye. Perhaps the Winking Man watched Roman legions march north along the road to Aquae Arnemetiae (now Buxton), or Elizabeth Bennet (Jennifer Ehle) exclaim at the dramatic view up top in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.

And the view *is* dramatic. Ramshaw Rocks - and its near neighbours Hen Cloud and The Roaches - rip up from the heather of the Staffordshire moorlands like gritstone saws. This coarse sandstone was laid down in a vast river delta over 300 million years ago, folded and faulted, rapidly eroded by Arctic conditions at the edge of the ice-sheet during the last ice age, and honed since by wind, frost and rain (and by vandals who broke the Winking Man's nose in the 1970s). A bit like spotting shapes in clouds, you can see all kinds of things in the winnowed rocks: a frog, a needle, a flying saucer, a giant molar. Up close, the dark surface shows a delicate patina of colour - heather-purple, Sahara-orange, lichen-silver.

Stone turns to bouncy peat as I head down into the valley, springing and squelching across heather-tufted moorland. Shutlingsloe, aka the Matterhorn of Cheshire and also an Ethel, makes a distinctive bump on the far horizon while The Roaches crenellate the nearest ridge.

Ethel's work to preserve the beauty of the Peak District started small, with a letter to a Sheffield bus company asking for ticket bins to reduce litter. But soon her ambition grew. In 1924, dismayed by the march of advertising hoardings, petrol stations and ugly houses (or 'cuckoo's eggs' as she called them), she set up the Sheffield Association for the Protection of Rural Scenery. She asked GHB Ward, founder of the pioneering Sheffield Clarion Ramblers Club, footpath campaigner and trespasser, if he would be its Honorary Secretary. He replied - "Nay lass. Thee." Two years later, the association joined the fledgling Council for the Preservation of Rural England, now known as CPRE, The Countryside Charity.

I can see a few paths climbing to different points along the Roaches ridgeline, but I keep beside the Black Brook then curve past Gradbach Wood and up towards Roach End: this way I get to tread the entire mile and a half of crest from tip to toe. If you've time, a mile's detour north-west will plunge you into Lud's Church, a secretive gorge formed by a landslip - or perhaps the scrape of the Devil's fingernail. In the 15th century, Lollards persecuted for their faith held secret meetings here; its name may come from one called Walter de Lud-Auk, who was caught and jailed. Myths cling like moss to its shadowy walls: Robin Hood and Friar Tuck hid here; Sir Gawain faced the Green Knight (whose head he'd chopped off a year earlier) in this Green Chapel.

Soon, up at a white-washed triangulation point I tick off my second Ethel: 1657 feet above sea-level at the summit of The Roaches. The name comes from the French *les roches* meaning 'the rocks' and it's like surfing a vast gritstone wave, where the land

swells gently from the east before crashing in a foam of boulders and cliffs to the west. As I walk south I can hear the wind whistling through the abstract shapes, as if keen to vocalise its work on the stones.

In the 1980s, 975 acres of the Roaches Estate were bought by the National Park authority, to protect the landscape and to open it to walkers and climbers. In 1927, Ethel used a similar tactic in the eastern Peak District. The Duke of Rutland had put his Longshaw Estate up for sale, suggesting the land could be used for a golf course, hotel or large detached houses. That was bad enough, but in an era before planning laws a new owner would be able to build whatever they wanted. Ethel was determined to save it and she led a public appeal to buy the estate for £27,000 - about £1.3 million today - and then gifted all 747 acres to the care of the National Trust.

When nearby Blacka Moor came under threat, she invited Alderman JG Graves - a friend of her wealthy and well connected family - to walk there with her, to share her love for this wild place on the edge of Sheffield. Next day he bought it, gifting the

deeds to the city council in 1933 for the recreation of its citizens in perpetuity. Ethel wrote in her diary of the ceremony, where Graves said: "Now we have done all this for you, will you promise never to trouble us again?" I took a deep breath, thought I had better be truthful and said "Whenever the countryside around Sheffield is in danger, I shall appeal to you." He looked at me severely but not unkindly, and said, "Well, now we know."

Up on the Roaches, I reach the bank of Doxey Pool. It's said to be bottomless and home to a fearsome hag called Jenny Greenteeth. Wandering the ridge one foggy day she fell in the water, and now she lures others down to their doom. In 1949, a woman called Florence Pettitt told of how she arrived for a dip and "a great thing rose up from the middle of the lake... until it was 25 to 30 feet tall... It pointed its long boney fingers at me so there was no mistaking its hostility."

You're more likely to meet friendly chatter, echoing up from the cliffs to your right. Climbers flock to The Roaches, and Rockhall - a Gothic gamekeeper's ▶

▲ ROYAL CREST

The Roaches ridge stretches 1½ miles from Roach End (above) to Rockhall, where a plaque marks the visit of the Prince and Princess of Teck in 1872.

▼ POINT OF VIEW

A white-washed trig point marks the summit of The Roaches; on crystal days you can see as far as Snowdon, 87 miles away.



*'Its 1345 foot high summit delivers a final **panorama** across the Peak District, where Ethel's work is now gaining the **recognition** it deserves.'*

lodge burrowed into the foot of the scarp ahead – is now known as the Don Whillans Hut, after 'the 'ard little man in the flat 'at' who used to forge up the overhanging gritstone in plimsolls, using his mother's old washing line to tackle routes known as the Crack of Gloom and The Mincer.

Ethel kept to her word about protecting Sheffield's countryside from danger. In 1938 her lobbying saw the first greenbelt in Britain established around the city. She was now helped in her work by Gerald Haythornthwaite, a newly-qualified architect who'd replied to Ethel's advert for an assistant. Despite being told his drawings were 'not quite up to our previous standard', and almost getting straight back on the train when he arrived in a dismally damp and sooty Sheffield, he took the job. Two years later, in 1937, they married.

The Haythornthwaites pressed on for National Parks. Ethel was appointed – the only woman – to the Hobhouse Committee which helped pass the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949. On 17th April 1951 the UK got its first. Much to Ethel's delight, and thanks to her hard work, which included surveying the entire boundary on horseback, it was the Peak District.

Maybe she rode past marsupials here in The Roaches. During World War Two, five Bennett's wallabies escaped from a private zoo at Roaches Hall. They thrived on the slopes of bilberry and bracken and by the 1960s, 50 were hopping about. Cold winters then saw the numbers dwindle, although occasional reports of sightings suggest one or two may still survive.

Also sighted in recent years are peregrines; the fastest creatures on Earth, diving at speeds up to 200mph, and nesting successfully in the gritstone cliffs. Today's third and final Ethel takes the name of a slower bird: Hen Cloud. This pile of crag is separated by a col from the main Roaches ridgeline, like the dot on an exclamation mark. Some suggest it looks like a roosting hen; others that its name derives from the Anglo-Saxon *henge clud* meaning steep cliff.

Its 1345 foot high summit delivers a final panorama across the Peak District, where Ethel's work is now gaining the recognition it deserves. Last year a blue plaque to 'Countryside campaigner and Peak District pioneer' was unveiled at the site of her home in Sheffield. And collecting the Ethels must be the finest way to honour her legacy, walking through the landscape she loved and fought for: "Outside the city – there one began to live. The escape into clean air, the gradual return to nature – with this came satisfaction, peace, freedom, solitude, excitement." **CW**



TICK THE LIST
Check off Hen Cloud and 94 more hills across the Peak District on the Ethel Ready app (available on Apple and Android).



▲ STONE HOME
Rockhall began as a cave where a woman called Bess Bowyers lived; then a gamekeeper's cottage; now a climbers' hut.



◀ LIQUID LEGEND
Doxey Pool never dries up, and a monstrous mermaid lives in its depths...

Plan your trip

WALK HERE
Download a free route guide at walk1000miles.co.uk/bonus/routes and discover more about The Ethels at cprepsy.org.uk

GETTING THERE
The Roaches are just west of the A53 between Leek and Buxton; lay-by parking near Ramshaw Rocks, Hen Cloud and southern end of main Roaches ridge. Buxton has a rail station and bus 108 runs along A53 stopping near Upper Hulme (2-3 a day, Mon-Sat, dgbus.co.uk).



WHERE TO STAY
Country Walking stayed at **Byre Cottage**, in a great location near Taddington, halfway between

Bakewell and Buxton. Once a derelict barn, it's now a cosy, comfy two-bedroom (one double, one twin) home, with an airy, open plan kitchen and living room upstairs to make the most of the gorgeous countryside views. From £338 for two nights/£568 for a week in March. See peakdistrictholidaycottages.com/peak-district-cottages-byre/ or call 01298 808280.

WHERE TO EAT
Tuck into home-made cakes, big breakfasts and lunches including local Staffordshire oatcakes at the **Roaches Tea Rooms** at Paddock Farm at the foot of Hen Cloud (01538 300345, roachestearooms.co.uk). Holiday cottages available too. Or head to Upper Hulme's **Ye Olde Rock Inn** (01538 300324, yeolderockinn.com) for beef and stilton pie or vegan garden burgers.

MORE INFORMATION
See visitpeakdistrict.com or call Leek TIC on 01538 395530.

Get started! BAG MORE ETHELS



KINDER SCOUT
The highest Ethel (and highest land in the Peaks) is one of the hardest to get to. It's not only altitude, it's finding the thing: the top of Kinder is a plateau not a peak, and locating the loftiest bit at 2088 feet in a maze of peat hags is tough. Purists will seek it out at SK085875, but the trig at Kinder Low, half a mile south-west and just 11 feet lower (pictured) makes a cracking, and more easily ticked, goal.



THORPE CLOUD
This is a little hill with Alpine ambition, as if someone lopped the top 942 feet off the Matterhorn and dropped it in the southern Peak District. And they put the turf-clad, mini-mountain in a top location, wedged into Dove Dale with the famous stepping stones at its foot and the gorge curving away through the limestone. And if that's not enough, the sun sometimes sets on this hill not once, but twice.



HIGGER TOR
The Longshaw Estate is key to Haythornthwaite's story and this tor is the nearest Ethel (1424ft), just a mile and a half up onto the moors. Keep going and you can bag White Path Moss (1499ft), Stanedge Pole (1437ft) and High Neb (1503ft) too, as you trace the gritstone scarp of Stanage Edge. You can then bus back from Hathersage, return on lower paths or retrace your steps to tick the tops twice.

Three more hill lists for you to tick off over the page...