



CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

Unable to fly off abroad, keen climber Peter Watson decided to summit all 41 mountains in the Yorkshire Dales National Park instead, a challenge that enabled him to explore new territory close to his Richmond home

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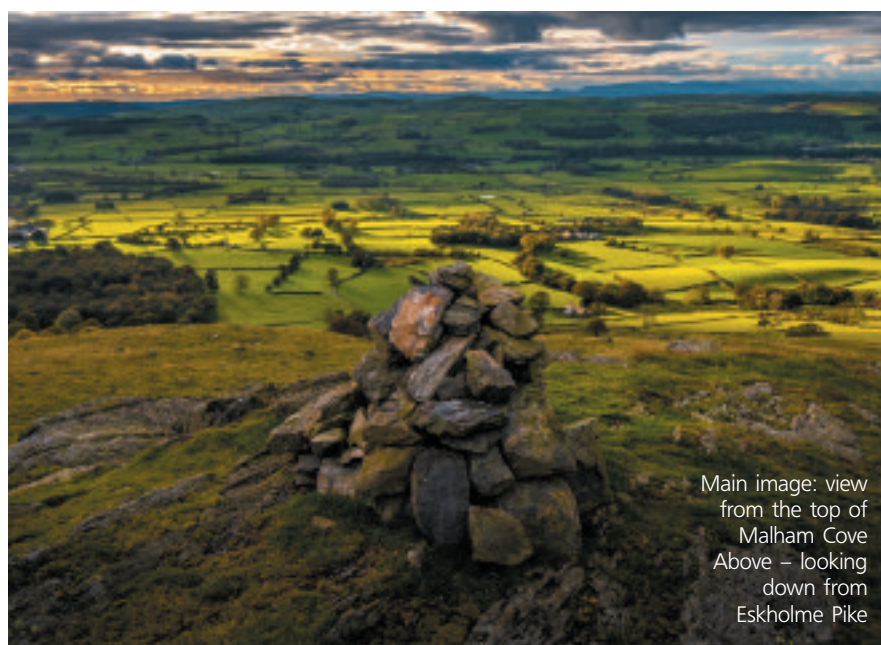
Peter Watson loves climbing mountains. He's scaled peaks all over the world. But the Richmond-based writer and photographer has the current health crisis to thank for his latest feat – hiking to the top of all 41 mountains in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

A keen trekker and climber, he has visited more than 80 countries and has been featured by BBC Travel and Lonely Planet, among others. His original aim had been to climb the Seven Summits – the highest mountain on every continent – but he was forced to adapt his plans when the pandemic hit. With international travel on hold, Peter transferred his attention to tackling the micro-mountains of the Yorkshire Dales National Park instead.

“The mountains of the Yorkshire Dales are an ideal challenge for life under coronavirus,” he says. “I would encourage others to make use of their local outdoor spaces during these



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Main image: view from the top of Malham Cove
Above – looking down from Eskholme Pike

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After growing tired of living in London, the keen outdoorsman moved to the North Yorkshire market town of Richmond, on the edge of the National Park, a couple of years ago. “When I first moved to the Dales, I attended an evening at the Richmond Walking & Book Festival where a local hiking guide gave a presentation about the highest mountains in the area. I thought, what better way to get to know my new neighbourhood than climbing all its mountains? Next, I created a personalised Google Map of all the mountains, so I could plan the order in which to climb them.”

Initially, Peter used the odd weekend here and there to tick off a couple of peaks at a time, squeezed in between a hectic schedule of international travel for his job as a travel writer and photographer. But when the pandemic arrived, severely impacting his ability to work and travel, he accelerated his hiking programme in the Yorkshire Dales.

His first ascent was a hike up Great Shunner Fell, located in the Northern Dales between Wensleydale and Swaledale. At 716m (2,340ft), it is the third highest peak in the national park. “Despite its height, the peak is a reasonably gentle ascent along a well-trodden trail with little opportunity for error. It was a great place to start,” says Peter. His final peak, the 41st, was the park’s – and England’s – newest mountain, Calf Top. In the UK, 2,000ft is widely accepted as the benchmark height for when a hill is promoted to the lofty ranks of a mountain. Until recently, the Yorkshire Dales were home to 40 such landforms. However, in 2016, Calf Top was re-categorised as a mountain after Ordnance Survey recalculated its height to 2000.02ft (609.606m), slightly above the threshold.

“I thought about leaving Wharfedale – which at 736m (2,415ft) is the park’s highest peak – until last,” says Peter. “But early in the challenge, I found myself in the Western Dales and just couldn’t resist ticking it off.



Calf Top seemed like an appropriate place to wrap the challenge up.”

From start to finish, it has taken him just over two years, although he didn’t start out with a time-frame in mind. “I just wanted an excuse to go hiking regularly. I travel a lot for work, which often means I am out of the country for long periods of time. However, when the pandemic hit, I couldn’t travel, ➔



so it proved the perfect opportunity to complete the challenge.”

Over the past few months, he started bagging peaks much more quickly, getting into the Dales as often as he could and crossing off a few at a time. “The most I managed to climb in one day was seven, when I spent a long day hiking in the Howgill Fells, near Sedbergh.”

Highlights of the challenge included Ingleborough, the second-highest mountain in the Yorkshire Dales and one of the Yorkshire Three Peaks. “I went up there in February during some unusually warm weather for that time of year,” says Peter. “It’s a proper little mountain with some fun scrambles, a wonderful summit plateau and some of the best views in the Dales. I combined the peak with Simon’s Fell, a nearby summit which few others seem to make the extra effort to visit.”

Asked where he’d recommend the most, Peter says any of the peaks in the Howgills, “a much quieter corner of the Dales with some fine scenery, including deep ravines, craggy cliffs and dramatic waterfalls.”

He also has a soft spot for Calf Top. “It has some of the best views in the whole national park. You can see all the way out to the sea on England’s west coast.”

A former teacher, Peter quit his job in 2014 and spent a year travelling around the South Pacific and South America. En route, he launched outdoor travel blog Atlas & Boots with his partner, author Kia Abdullah. Both are keen advocates of engaging with nature and exploring the great outdoors.

“There are proven mental and physical health benefits and this is particularly important under lockdown,” says Peter. “I would urge anyone who is finding life difficult in these times to have a look at their local area and pick a micro-adventure or create a micro-challenge to complete. It could be ‘ten local trails’ or ‘20 hills over 500m’ – it doesn’t really matter what it is or how long it takes. With normal life so restricted at the moment, it’s more important than ever to get outside, get into nature and disconnect.”

Although it’s on hold for the moment, he is determined, when the current crisis abates,



Main image: Nine Standards Rigg
Left – Peter on Yarlside summit
Below – Reeth and map of the YDNP mountains

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to finish his Seven Summits challenge. “So far, I’ve climbed four: Kilimanjaro in Africa, Elbrus in Europe, Kosciuszko in Oceania and, most recently, Aconcagua in South America. My plans have been put on hold due to the pandemic so I’m not sure when I’ll get the chance to have a crack at the next one. I still have Denali in North America, Vinson in Antarctica and Everest in Asia.” He also aims to summit Puncak Jaya in Indonesia to complete the two separate versions of the Seven Summits lists, the first of which restricts Oceania to Australia, while the second includes the islands of the Indian and Pacific oceans.

“Closer to home, there are 180 mountains over 2,000ft in England. I’ve climbed around 60 of them, so perhaps I’ll get started on the rest. And with around 95 per cent of them in the north of England, most are within relatively easy reach.”

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