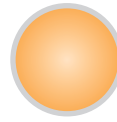


## Trail Guide:



**Extremely steep in parts. Allow 2 – 3 hours to complete the trip**  
**Grade: Moderate - Bank Road is 1 in 6, which is why the trams had to be pulled up and let down on cables! The path up to Rockside Hall is even steeper but can be omitted if necessary. There are 2 excellent stops where you can sit and rest to take in the superb views.**

### The 'Fancy That' Factor

The cable tramway was based on that of San Francisco

Special trains were laid on into Matlock to cater for the 1000's of Bank Holiday trippers in the 19th century

SPA is an abbreviation of the Latin – Sana Per Aqua – 'health through water'

Matlock Town, as we know it today, didn't really exist when Victoria became queen in 1837. It was then a straggling collection of buildings around the church and the green, with cottages on the bank linked by tracks across the valley. One man's interest in hydrotherapy (water cures) led to Matlock becoming a major Victorian tourist town. On his honeymoon John Smedley, a woollen underwear manufacturer, started using the warm Matlock mineral waters as a cure for various ailments he was suffering. He was so impressed by their healing powers that he opened his first establishment or "hydro" in 1853 on **Bank Road**, in what is now the **County Buildings or Smedley's Hydro**. The "cure" grew rapidly and by 1867 he was treating more than 2,000 people every

year. With the new railway line and station open, tourism grew and so did the number and size of the hydros - by 1898 there were more than 30. A cable tramway, based on the San Francisco model, was built to carry people up steep Bank Road to the hydrotherapy establishments. By the turn of the 20th century Matlock was one of the most fashionable resorts in England though the glory ended after WWI when many of the establishments closed and the very last, Lilybank, shut its doors in the 1960s. All of the hydrotherapy establishments have now changed use and many have changed name as well. Yet ironically modern spas and hotel spas are doing a roaring trade across the UK and new ones are being opened somewhere in England every year – mutatis mutandis.

### Trail Key:



Walking



Car



Bus



Cycling



Scenic



Historic



Time



Distance

### Difficulty Rating for walks:



Easy



Moderate



Strenuous

This trail is one of 44 exciting trails to explore in the Peak District & Derbyshire.

From the Tourist Information Centre walk up **Bank Road**, just after the Methodist Church the road widens, this was to enable the trams to pass, detour into the County Council car park return to **Bank Road** and then left along **Smedley Street West** and **right** into steep **Wellington Street** as far as Rockside Steps where you can sit and enjoy the views. Along this route you will see:

1. The **Town Hall** (Derbyshire Dales Council Offices). This was the Bridge Hall hydropathic establishment which was taken over by the town council in 1894.
2. Derbyshire County Council Offices. This was **Smedley's Hydro** of the 1850s; the most famous and largest hydro of all with its grand façade, formal gardens, orchestra and entertainment and enormous capacity. By the 1860s there were over 200 staff and 2,000 patients a year. In World War II when the buildings were used by the military, Dirk Bogarde was stationed here for a time as a trainee airman.

At the west end of the building are:

3. The **Winter Gardens**. This enormous glass structure was added in 1901 to allow patients to be in sunlight in the colder months. Many famous people came here to take the cure and drink tea in this wonderful building.
4. The **Hydro Extension**. Smedley's Hydro was extended to allow more patients to be treated and roofed walkways built to allow them access to the main building.
5. **Malvern House**. Formerly a hydro at bottom of Smith Road. Now a private home but in 1890 said to be able to cater for 20-30 guests and had a "great china bath" for the patients to take the waters. It was eventually purchased by Smedley's and used as staff accommodation.

Go up **Rockside Steps** to sit and rest on the bench half way up. The view is magnificent and you will realise just how far you have climbed! The roofs of **Smedley's Hydro** with the ornate tower can be seen and on the hillside to your left is **Riber Castle**, built by John Smedley in 1862 and his home until he died in 1874. The route up takes you up onto **Cavendish Road** (the highest part of the walk you will be

pleased to know!), turn **right** along the rear of **Rockside Hall** and then down a small alleyway with steps down, almost opposite **Farm Lane**. Turn **right** when you reach Wellington Street and walk down hill a short distance to get the best views of:

6. **Rockside Hall**, Built in 1863 it was considered second only to Smedley's and one of the best hotels in England! The building is certainly impressive with its twin pagoda-like towers and crag-like situation; the views must have been stunning and much enjoyed when it became a student residence before converting to flats.

Just below is the old tramway depot. Double Decker trams ran up and down **Bank Road** and **Rutland Street** from **Crown Square** to this point. The trams were hauled up and lowered down by a cable laid in the road. The two trams were connected and the cable ran around a great winding wheel at the depot. The more passengers going down the better as their weight counterbalanced the tram being pulled up and less power was needed in the winding house. Thus the fare was 2 old pennies up and 1 old penny down!

Retrace your steps to the bottom of the alleyway you descended from Cavendish Road and cross the road to another small alleyway opposite to:

7. **Wellfield House**. Not easy to see behind its high walls and now a private residence. This was one of the smaller hydros started up by ex-Smedley employees. The cottage opposite, dated 1667, is one of the earliest buildings in Matlock and a former 'lockup'.

Continue down the alleyway, with iron railings on your right.

8. As you descend the hill, to your right is a line of buildings set back from the road although not so easy to see due to new houses. This was the **Matlock House Hydro** opened in 1863 with 54 rooms.

There is a delightful little park on the corner where you meet **Smedley Street East** and where you can make your second resting stop. From here go **left** along **Smedley Street East** and then **right** onto the main **Chesterfield Road** where you will find:

9. **Lilybank House**. Set back from the road and now a nursing home, this impressive building was built in the 1890s and initially called Dalefield. It was less strict in its regime than other hydropathic establishments and prided itself on being a hotel as well as a sanatorium welcoming families on holiday. Barton, the man who owned the hydro, had his name emblazoned on a large metal frame on the roof and whilst the frame can still be seen the name is long gone. The name was changed to Lilybank and this was the very last hydro to close in the 1960s. Just after Lilybank where you turn down a road called **Steep Turnpike** there are two of the smaller hydros:

10. The "Hydropathic Establishment and Boarding Establishment **Bellevue**" was run by a Mr Stevenson on the same principles as Smedley's.

11. **The Mount**, now a set of apartments was again one of the many smaller hydros catering for only a handful of guests at any one time.

After **The Mount** walk down **Steep Turnpike** and to your right you will see a large flat-roofed building with many windows. This is now the County Records office and before that a grammar school. The buildings were originally two hydros, **Bank House** and the **Wyvern**. At the bottom turn **right** into **Causeway Lane**, go over the crossing into the delightful Halls Leys Park. Walk over to the riverside path turn **right** towards Matlock Bridge and finish the trail at the Tourist Information Centre.

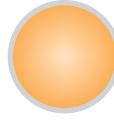
This short but steep walk has hopefully given you an insight into the foundation of Matlock as it is today and the magnificent buildings that were all founded on a little warm water!

# Matlock Trail No. 19

# Ills, Hills and Hydros

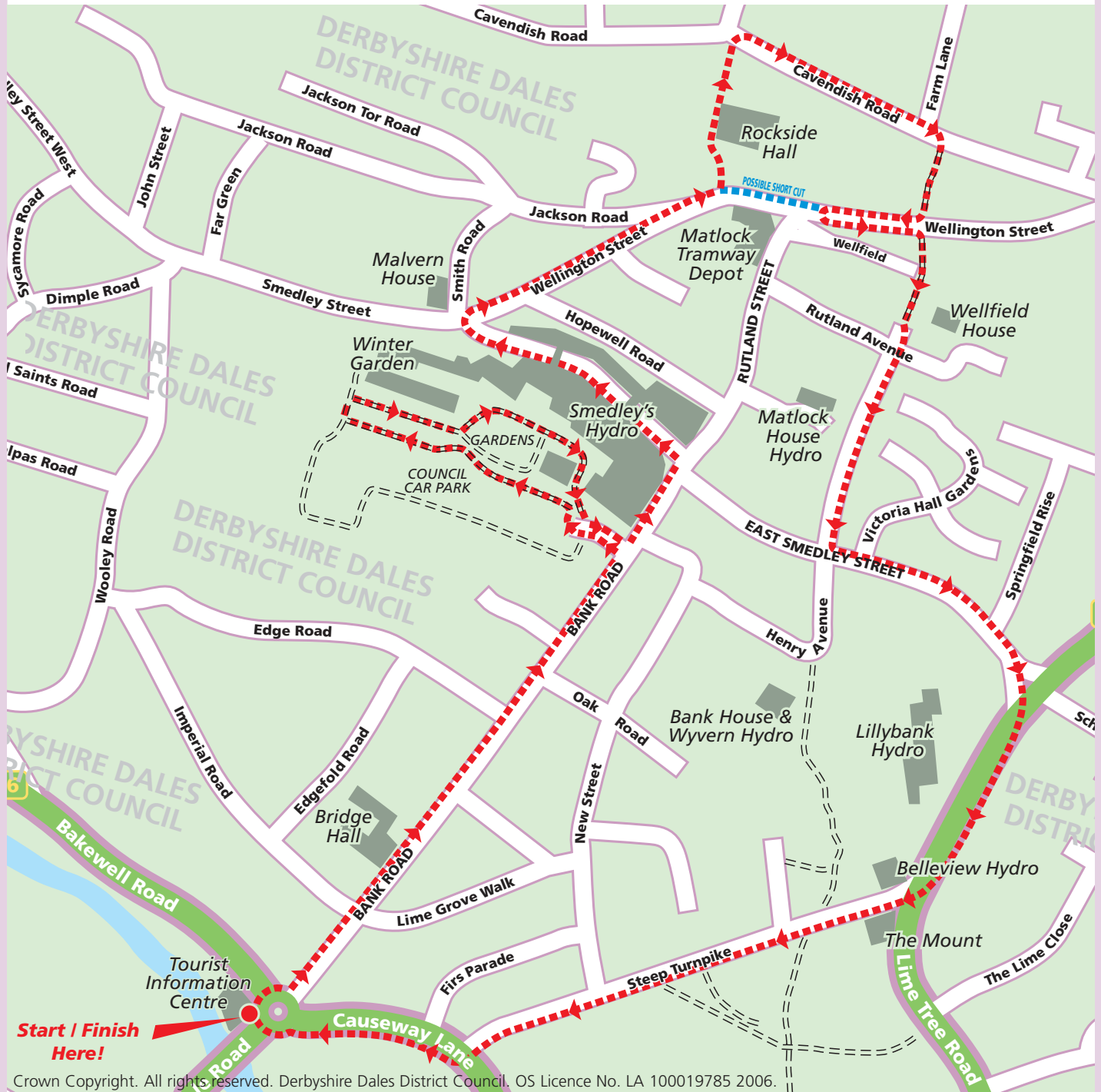


2.8 km  
1 miles



Key

Track / Trail



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This trail is one of 44 exciting trails to explore in the Peak District & Derbyshire.

