

The backbone of England

The Pennine Way is 50 years old in April. To mark the occasion, the BBC has made a four part documentary, to be presented by Arctic explorer Paul Rose. He spoke to **Stephen Lewis**

He's skied across Greenland, climbed Antarctica's most active volcano, run a research station at the south pole, and dived in sub-zero waters to study the marine life that thrives there. But there was one challenge closer to home the polar explorer Paul Rose had never tackled: the Pennine Way. Last summer, while filming a documentary series for the BBC, he put that right.

"I'd done bits of the Pennine Way here and there," says the 60-something-year-old, "and I always thought that one day I would do the whole thing."

He began with the steep climb up Kinder Scout from Edale in the Peak District, and then headed north, striding along the backbone of England through some of the most glorious upland scenery these isles can boast.

Hardened explorer though he is, Paul admits the footpath didn't disappoint. "As soon as I started, I thought, that scenery is... blimey!" he says, reduced almost to speechlessness at the memory of it. "I travel all around the world, and visit the most remote places: but I had one of the best summers of my life here on the Pennine Way. It was a wonderful experience: a real adventure just 30 miles from your own front door."

Anyone who has walked all or part of our oldest, longest footpath will know what exactly Paul is talking about. When the late, great Tom Stephenson first proposed a national long-distance footpath through the Pennines in a famous article in the Daily Herald in 1935, he envisaged it as "a faint line on the Ordnance Maps which the feet of grateful pilgrims would, with the passing years, engrave on the face of the land." And that is exactly what it has come to be.

The route, which was officially declared open 50 years ago this April, runs for 268 miles, winding its way northwards from Derbyshire through the south Yorkshire moors, the Yorkshire Dales, the northern Pennines and the Northumberland fells all the way to Kirk Yetholm on the Scottish border. Or, of course, depending on which end you start at, winding its way southwards from the Scottish borders for the same distance.

The route takes in some truly breathtaking scenery along the way: the almost lunar landscape of the top of Kinder Scout; the breathtaking butter-gold sweeps of the Yorkshire Dales, with their drystone walls, stone shepherds' huts, and glorious limestone rock formations; stunning drops to far valleys such as at High Cup Nick; beautiful rivers; the remote bleakness of the Northumberland fells in which you feel as close to the clouds as you'll ever get.

At times, the going is tough. When the weather closes in on the high moors, when the rains lash and the wind blows, it can feel as though you're in the most exposed, friendless place in the world.

But when the skies open up, the sun burns down on soft Dales landscapes, and the path takes you to the crest of Pen-y-ghent or the lip of Malham Cove, the views, the scenery, the sheer joy of walking, are unforgettable.

Often, in good weather up on the high peat moors, the path is springy underfoot, seeming to propel you forward from day to day, the landscape of Britain unrolling before you as you go.

That sense of going on a journey was one of the things that Paul Rose loved most when he took to the Way last summer. "We're travellers by history and nature," he says. "That DNA is within us. We're always looking to tackle the next challenge out there."

His aim in setting out on the walk - accompanied by a TV camera crew - was to tell the story of the Pennine Way for a four-part BBC documentary that begins on BBC One Yorkshire on April 10. It is a story that's well worth telling.

It all began with that article by Tom Stephenson in the Daily Herald in 1935. A keen rambler and camper who had coined the phrase 'the right to roam', Stephenson - the Herald's 'rambling and open-air correspondent', had been asked to write an article for the next day's newspaper by his features editor.

"Tom had a letter from two American girls on his desk, and they mentioned the Appalachian Trail (a long-distance footpath in the eastern USA) and asked if there was anything similar in England," writes Chris Sainty, chairman of the Pennine Way Association, in his book *The Pennine Way: A Walker's Guide*. Tom sat down and penned that now-famous Herald article, which was printed with the headline: 'Wanted - A Long Green Trail'. It was to be 30 years, however, before that initial idea was to become reality.

In pre-War Britain, wealthy landowners aggressively guarded their grouse moors with gamekeepers. They didn't want the great unwashed roaming all over their precious uplands. If anything, writes Chris Sainty, Britain's hills and fells and moors were more inaccessible to the great majority than they had been for decades. "Many footpaths had been lost to walkers during the previous centuries."

But Tom Stephenson's article had struck a chord. In 1948, with the Second World War over and the wartime generation feeling a new sense of restlessness and entitlement, he and a group of the great and the good staged a three day walk from Middleton-in-Teesdale up to

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Paul Rose at Jacob's Ladder, near the start of the Pennine Way
Photography: BBC/Ant Clausen



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Walkers in Yorkshire's South Pennines
Photography: Welcome To Yorkshire



Paul Rose in Edale
Photography: BBC/Ant Clausen



Hadrian's Wall. Those with him on that three-day walk included several prominent MPs, among them Hugh Dalton, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer turned President of the Ramblers' Association; the Labour MP Barbara Castle; and Arthur Blenkinsop, the parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Pensions.

Three years later, in June 1951, Hugh Dalton, by then Minister of Local Government and Planning, approved the creation of the Pennine Way. It officially opened almost 14 years later, on April 24, 1965.

The route has changed little over the last 50 years. It is better signposted; and in places the path is worn or eroded by the tramping effect of countless feet. But if anything, says Paul Rose, the beer along the route is better and the people you meet friendlier than they were in 1965.

It still provides one of the great challenges for those who love getting outdoors with a map and compass, however. Don't underestimate the navigation skills you'll need, warns Paul - especially at the start of each day, as you set out from the village where you spent the night. Up on the tops, the route is usually clear and well marked. "But I spent a lot of time finding my way out of the villages to start the day's walk!" says Paul.

That's another thing anyone who's walked the route will recognise...

The Pennine Way, presented by Paul Rose, airs on BBC One Yorkshire in four weekly parts, starting on Friday April 10

Many of the photographs on these pages have been supplied by landscape photographer Mark Denton. Mark, who grew up close to the North Sea in Sunderland, specialises in photographing the landscapes and scenery of the north of England. He has produced several books of photographs, each focusing on a different area, including The Yorkshire Dales; The Yorkshire Moors and Wolds; and The Yorkshire Coast. He also produces prints and cards. He has a gallery in Richmond Market Place. To find out more about Mark's work, visit markdentonphotographic.co.uk/index.htm



Cloudscape at Malham Cove
Photography: Mark Denton



Swaledale shadows
Photography: Mark Denton