



Explore Malhamdale

History and archaeology of Malhamdale

This part of the National Park is divided geologically by the Craven Fault. South of the fault, down to Gargrave, the result is deep, rich soils, now acidic pastureland but in the past used to grow corn. North of the fault, above Malham village, by contrast, there are dry limestone pastures, used for sheep grazing since at least Medieval times.

The land above Malham is dominated by the presence of Malham Tarn. This natural lake has provided a focus for people from as early as the Mesolithic. Travelling bands of hunter-gatherers camped on its shores in order to hunt the herds of deer and wild cattle that grazed on the relatively open pastures around it. They were followed by Bronze and Iron Age farmers whose simple stone settlements and field systems can still be seen all over the uplands. In the Bronze Age, the better soils and climate of the area to the south supported a wealthier population capable of building defensive enclosures such as Rough Haw and one of whom owned the beautiful bronze Flasby Rapier. The Roman conquest brought the ultimate symbol of wealth, a villa, to Gargrave. The owners clearly made a good living from the farmland around them. The upland area was less attractive and the only field evidence for a Roman presence is a marching camp on Malham Moor.

During the Medieval era, the northern part of the area was regarded as waste by its aristocratic owners and hundreds of acres were granted to various monastic house in and around the National Park. Places like Fountains Fell and Malham Moor turned out to be ideal for the grazing of sheep and a huge enterprise grew on these fells. Important routeways were established between the outlying farms and the mother houses. The wool produced was sold onto the continent and the wealth generated went to build the abbeys and priories that owned the land.

By the 17th and 18th century, the same land was being used to graze and sell cattle brought down by drovers from Scotland. The wealth generated by this trade in cattle allowed the descendants of the farmers and landowners who had taken over monastic property in the 16th century to improve their homes and land. New stone houses replaced timber framed ones, stone field barns were built and lime kilns produced lime to sweeten pastureland. The arrival of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Gargrave in 1777 brought further economic benefit to the area. A small colliery was opened on Fountains Fell in the 18th century along with a calamine mine near Malham, whose products were carried by packhorse down to the canal wharves at Gargrave.

The rich deep soils in the southern part of the area, continued to support wealthy families. By the 18th century, a landscape of extensive medieval and post medieval arable fields had been replaced by the parkland and estates of several large country houses. There was little industrial development in the area during the 19th century except for a few cotton mills. With no pressure from a larger industrial population as was felt in other dales, farms remained relatively large.

The 20th century saw a new economic force enter the area, tourism. The magnificent geology of the Craven Fault that produced Malham Cove and Gordale Scar, brought the first aristocratic tourists to the area in the 18th century. By the 20th century, first the train and then the car brought mass tourism to admire Malham's wonders. John Dower, one of the key founders of the National Park movement, lived in the dale and gave his name to the Youth Hostel in Malham. Here people from all walks of life are still assured a warm welcome.

Things to see and do in Malhamdale

- Flint artefacts from Malham Tarn - Malham National Park Centre has a small collection of Mesolithic flints along with displays about the history and archaeology of the area. For opening times see the National Park Centres section of the [Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority website](#) or e-mail them at malham@yorkshiredales.org.uk
- Malham Tarn Estate - the lake and surrounding farmland is owned by the National Trust. See the [National Trust website](#) for details
- Comb Scar hut circle, Malham Tarn - one of many prehistoric settlement sites in the Malham area
- Seaty Hill barrow - Bronze and Iron Age burial site near Malham Tarn

- Rough Haw - Neolithic or Bronze Age enclosure
- Gargrave (Water Sinks) Roman villa - there is nothing to see at the site, but the Craven Museum in Skipton has a collection of artefacts from the site along with a scale model. For opening times check out the [Craven Museum website](#)
- Mastiles Lane marching camp - the low banks of this Roman camp are visible where they are crossed by Mastiles Lane
- Mastiles Lane - monastic routeway from Street Gate near Malham Tarn to Kilnsey
- Medieval field systems, Malham Cove
- Town Head Barn, Malham - restored 18th century barn with National Trust exhibition on the history of farming in the area. For opening times, see the [National Trust website](#)
- Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Gargrave - there are pleasant walks along the canal side from Gargrave. Several of the original canal warehouses still survive in the village
- Eshton Hall - Georgian country house (not open to the public)
- John Dower Memorial Youth Hostel - for accommodation details see the [YHA website](#)

For more information visit www.outofoblivion.org.uk