



Explore Ribblesdale

History and archaeology of Ribblesdale

The north-south running valley of Ribblesdale has long been an important routeway through the Dales. Neolithic polished stone axes from the Lake District have been discovered in the valley and during the 18th century it carried several well-used droving and packhorse routes. Settlement patterns in the main dale consist of small villages, while in the lesser dales, such as Kingsdale and Chapel-le-Dale, there are more dispersed farmsteads.

The dale is dominated by the highest peaks in the National Park. Ingleborough is particularly important since it appears to have been a focus for ritual activity in prehistoric times. Glaciation has left its mark in the form of drumlins along the valley floor. These are deposits of stone, gravel and clay gathered up under the ice sheets then left behind as hillocks as the glaciers melted. The underlying limestone geology is also an important factor, the action of glaciation and rainwater causes the formation of caves in this type of rock. The greatest concentration of such caves in the National Park is found in Ribblesdale. The contents of several have been excavated over the past 100 years and give us a glimpse of life in the area long before the first people arrived. 130,000 years ago, the climate was warm enough for there to be herds of rhinos and elephants roaming the area. 11,000 years ago, a Palaeolithic hunter lost a potential meal

along with an antler harpoon point, both of which were subsequently dragged into a cave by scavenging hyenas.

Other caves have revealed evidence for use throughout the prehistoric period and into the Roman. Some caves seem to have been used for ritual activities and others as burial sites. None seem to have been dwellings. Elsewhere, the relatively high rainfall of this part of the National Park has led to acidic, less fertile farmland than in other dales. Grazing sheep and cattle has been an important way of life for over a thousand years. Anglo-Scandinavian settlers settled near Ribblesdale and made their living in this way in the 9th century AD.

More cattle came in the 17th and 18th centuries as a long distance trade from Scotland was established, supplying meat on the hoof to the growing towns of Lancashire and West Yorkshire. Great cattle fairs were held at places like Gearstones. Other goods such as coal and salt were also moved along Ribblesdale's upland network of tracks on the backs of packhorses, often the only means of bulk transport when the valley bottom highways were impassable with mud.

The limestone geology of the area was exploited from the 18th century when first farmers and then entrepreneurs started to burn it to produce lime. The lime was used to sweeten acidic pastureland, but soon industrialists found other uses for it and more and more had to be produced. The coming of the Ingleton Branch line in 1861 and the Settle-Carlisle railway in 1876 boosted the industrial production of lime. Ribblesdale also has deposits of a slate type rock that could be sawn into thin slabs useful as paving and to make water cisterns amongst other things. Helwith slate boundary markers are a noticeable roadside feature in the dale. Today the hard, dark grey-green mudstone from Helwith is much in demand for making anti-skid road surfaces.

Access to fast flowing rivers and streams plus good road and later rail transport routes allowed several of Ribblesdale's southern villages and towns to become quite industrialised. As well as quarries and industrial lime burning sites, several large textile mills were built.

The railway also brought tourists to be enchanted by the caves and waterfalls of the area. Several money spinning visitor facilities were established in the 19th century including the famous Waterfalls Walk at Ingleton. Thousands flocked here on Bank Holiday weekends in the late 19th and early 20th century. In 1837 Ingleborough Cave was opened up by the Farrer family of Clapham, who also established an attractive walk through their estate up to it. The Youth Hostel Association took over Taitlands, one of the grander houses in the dale in 1942.

Today, quarrying is still a notable feature of the landscape of Ribblesdale although now the stone is often transported by lorry much to the irritation of those living in the towns and villages along the dale. Tourists are also still welcomed in ever increasing numbers and the rescue of the Settle-Carlisle line from closure in the 1980s means that a good proportion still come in by public transport.

Things to see and do in Ribblesdale

- Victoria Cave - now owned by the National Park Authority. There is an informative interpretation board near the entrance and the setting is spectacular. Please do not try to explore the cave interior as there is a danger of rock falling from the roof. Finds from the cave such as the antler harpoon point are mostly in a private collection and are not accessible to the public
- Ingleborough hillfort - now considered more likely to have been a ritual site rather than a hillfort. The climb up is hard work, but the views are magnificent and the archaeology interesting
- Craven Old Way - old packhorse and droving route from Dentdale around the flanks of Whernside to Ingleton. Mostly public rights of way now
- Colt Park lime kiln - fine example of a field kiln used by farmers to burn limestone
- Craven Lime Works, near Langcliffe - site of an industrial lime producing enterprise now managed by the National Park Authority. It includes a well-preserved Hoffmann kiln, a Spencer kiln and a battery of three vertical, masonry kilns. There is a trail laid out around the site with interpretation panels
- Settle-Carlisle Railway - for timetabling and other visitor information see the [partnership website](#). The Settle-Carlisle Railway Trust have restored Ribblehead Station and there is an informative Visitor Centre there. There are interpretation panels about the nearby railway worker's construction camps in car parking areas at Ribblehead. Public rights of way from here lead to some of the most famous features of the railway line including Ribblehead viaduct and Blea Moor tunnel
- Helwith slate has been used to make several interesting old clapper bridges in Austwick, including Flascoe Bridge and Pant Bridge. Examples of Helwith slate parish boundary stones can be seen on roads around Stainforth
- Ribblehead Quarry - is an old limestone quarry now owned by Natural England who are allowing it to regenerate naturally. See the [Natural England website](#) for visiting information. Nearby are the remains of the Ribblehead Viking farmstead
- Langcliffe High Mill - originally a large cotton mill, this now processes waste paper (not open to the public). The cotton weaving sheds belonging to the mill now house a large retail business called Watershed Mill. For opening times see the [Watershed Mill website](#)
- Castleberg - spectacular natural limestone outcrop above Settle. It was developed as a visitor facility in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is now owned by Settle Town Council who have restored the walks and installed an interpretation panel giving the history of the site
- Ingleton Waterfalls Walk - see the [Ingleton Waterfalls Walk website](#) for visitor information
- Ingleborough Cave - for opening times see the [Ingleborough Cave website](#)

- Ingleborough Estate Nature Trail - this attractive walk past an ornamental lake and through a wooded valley starts from the north end of Clapham village. Follow the signs for Ingleborough Cave. There is a small entrance charge

For more information visit www.outofoblivion.org.uk