



Explore Upper Wharfedale

History and archaeology of Upper Wharfedale

Upper Wharfedale is a classic u-shaped glacial valley. When the last glacier melted it briefly left behind a lake. Even today, the valley bottom is prone to flooding and in the past, the marshy ground meant that there were limited bridging points and that roads had to run along the valley sides. The settlement pattern today consists mostly of valley based villages situated at the foot of side valleys. There are few isolated farmsteads.

The earliest evidence for people in the dale are the numerous flint weapons and tools that have been collected over the years as chance finds. There is also a much-mutilated Neolithic round barrow. The valley sides and tops have been farmed extensively since at least the Bronze Age. The area is notable for the survival of vast prehistoric and Romano-British farming landscapes, from tiny square 'Celtic' fields for growing crops to huge co-axial field systems running in parallel lines up to the top of the valley sides, probably used for farming cattle and sheep. Bronze Age burial cairns are another feature of the landscape.

There are few clues about life in the dale just after the Roman period. A 7th century AD female burial near Kettlewell and the chance find of an Anglo-Saxon reliquary shows a continuing

spiritual life while Tor Dyke at the entrance to Coverdale above Kettlewell is evidence for the early establishment of territorial boundaries.

After the Norman Conquest, Langstrothdale became part of a hunting forest, administered from Buckden. Elsewhere, monastic houses were granted extensive estates and the land was farmed from granges such as the one belonging to Fountain's Abbey at Kilnsey. The movement of goods, particularly wool, and estate administrators led to monastic houses establishing important routeways, often marked with wayside crosses.

The valley sides were ploughed and producing crops until the late 14th century and the terracing or lynchets produced are another notable feature of the landscape of the upper dale. Scottish raids, worsening weather and the arrival of the Black Death all contributed to the abandonment of these higher fields and the valley gradually turned to cattle as its main source of income. Exploitation of the area's mineral resources has had less of an impact on the landscape than in other dales. Coal was mined above Threshfield, and Kettlewell was a centre of 18th and 19th century lead working. The 18th and 19th centuries saw improvements in farming techniques, with the widespread use of lime burned in field kilns, to sweeten acidic pastures and stone field barns to overwinter cattle.

The 20th century has seen the beautiful landscape of the upper dale become a popular place to visit and walk in. Tourism is now as important to the local economy as farming and many facilities have been built over the years to support it. They range from the grand Wilson Arms Hotel in Threshfield, built in the early years of the 20th century to accommodate railway travellers to the new [2003] National Park Authority toilets and bus shelter in Kettlewell National Park car park.

Things to see and do in Upper Wharfedale

- Hubberholme bridge
- The Craven Museum holds collections of flints from the Upper Wharfedale area. Some are usually on display. For opening times see [Craven Museum website](#)
- Giant's Graves - Neolithic round barrow
- Co-axial field boundaries, Wharfedale
- Old Pasture hut circle - remains of an Iron Age house and enclosures
- Cray barrow - Bronze Age barrow
- Yockenthwaite stone circle - more likely to be the remains of a Bronze Age burial cairn
- Anglo-Saxon reliquary, Littondale - on display at the Dales Countryside Museum, Hawes. For opening times see the [Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority website](#)
- Tor Dyke - Dark Age earthwork at the Wharfedale end of Coverdale

- Kilnsey monastic grange - the medieval gatehouse survives (not open to the public)
- Crook Gill packhorse bridge - medieval bridge
- Weets Cross - monastic wayside cross
- Shorn Cross - monastic wayside cross
- Medieval field systems - Conistone
- Threshfield colliery
- Kettlewell smelt mill
- Old Pasture lime kiln - a well-preserved field kiln
- Wilson Arms Hotel (Threshfield Court) - now a care home for the elderly

For more information visit www.outofoblivion.org.uk