

# The Burbage Valley

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# The Burbage Valley

The Burbage Valley lies on the eastern side of the Peak District National Park [PDNPA Fact Sheet]. It is close to Fox House Inn on the A6187 road from Chapel-en-le-Frith to Sheffield, approximately three miles east of Hathersage and

just eight miles west of the centre of Sheffield. The valley forms a natural amphitheatre ringed by dramatic tors and gritstone edges.

As it is so near to Sheffield, the area is a very popular destination for walking, climbing

and picnicking, and for school field trips. There is parking at Upper Burbage Bridge and disabled parking at the southern end of the valley. There is further parking at the Surprise View car park by Millstone Edge, which is also accessible to buses and coaches.

## Land ownership and access

Since 1928 the Burbage Valley has been owned by Sheffield City Council. The Council bought it from the Duke of Rutland with the idea of flooding the valley to make a reservoir. Due to local opposition the project

was abandoned, but the council continued to own the land, which is now rented to a local sheep farmer.

Until 1936 the valley was used for grouse shooting and similar activities, which limited ordinary

people's access. After 1936 new paths were gradually opened up and public access was extended into the valley. With the coming into force of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the whole area is now open access land, which means that visitors can roam freely.

# Geology

The Burbage Valley is a basin partly surrounded by scarps or edges of gritstone [Rocks and Minerals Fact Sheet], with Burbage Rocks to the east and Higger Tor and Carl Wark to the west. The rocks were formed in a period geologists call the Carboniferous (around 360–300 million years ago). At this time the Peak

District was a shallow tropical sea near the equator. In the second half of the Carboniferous period, some 326 million years ago, a huge river delta deposited sediments of sand, fine silt and pebbles which, over millions of years, became the coarse-grained sandstone known as Millstone Grit. Interspersed with softer

shales, formed from delta mud, these gritstone deposits weathered to form the edges and rocky outcrops seen fringing the valley today.

The shale valley basin is partly filled with an overlying deposit known as 'head'. This is a mixture of sands and clay, thought to have been brought by ice sheets during the last Ice Age.

# Landscape features

## **BURBAGE BROOK**

The source of the Burbage Brook is at 427 metres above sea level in the moorland plateau north of the Burbage Valley. Entering the valley under the Upper Burbage Bridge the height of the stream quickly drops from just over 396 metres to 335 metres in less than a kilometre. The brook meanders down the valley, through the Longshaw

Estate and Padley Gorge, eventually joining the River Derwent north of Grindleford.

## **BURBAGE PLANTATION**

The 83 acre plantation was planted between 1968 and 1971. The trees are mainly Scots pine, Japanese larch and lodgepole pine. Some deciduous species have been planted around the

edges of the plantation to soften its outline.

## **HIGGER TOR AND CARL WARK**

These two prominent gritstone outcrops guard the western edge of the Burbage Valley. Carl Wark is topped with the remains of what is thought to be a Bronze or Iron Age hill fort.

## BURBAGE ROCKS

This gritstone edge runs for nearly two miles along the eastern side of the valley. It is one of the most popular rock climbing areas in the Peak District.

## BURBAGE MOOR

East of Burbage Rocks is Burbage Moor, an extensive plateau partly covered by peat. This consists of partially decomposed vegetation which accumulated in water-logged conditions during periods when the climate was cool and wet.

# Ecology

The Dark Peak moorland, such as that on Burbage Moor, is the nearest thing to wilderness in England. The moorland and blanket bog terrain found here are rare and valuable habitats which support diverse plant and animal species. The Burbage Valley is part of the Eastern Peak District Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest, and is also within the Peak District Moors Special Protection Area and South Pennine Moors Special Area

## of Conservation.

Lying at more than 400 metres above sea level, Burbage Moor is exposed and windy, with low temperatures and high rainfall. The high rainfall washes nutrients out of the soil. Because of the extreme climate and acid soils plants and animals need to be hardy and highly adapted to thrive in this environment.

Heather, cowberry, bilberry and moorland grasses are found on the gritstone areas. The shale and head deposits in the valley are more fertile, enabling more vigorous grasses and bracken to

grow.

Moorland birds like wheatears and meadow pipits can be seen during spring to autumn. Skylarks can also be heard in spring. The elusive mountain hare and the red grouse are able to survive all winter on the moors. Burbage Brook is home to dippers and grey wagtails throughout the year. The moorland is actively managed to support rare bird populations, such as the ring ouzel.

Jays, rooks and chaffinches are regularly seen in the Burbage plantation.

# History

**The first evidence of human activity comes from flints left behind by groups of hunter-gatherers who travelled through the area around 10,000 years ago.**

Much of the area was once covered with trees. Bronze and Iron Age farmers cleared these to grow crops, and centuries of sheep grazing have prevented their regrowth. So this apparently natural valley is in fact a human-made habitat.

Early evidence of occupation occurs south of the hill fort of Carl Wark and dates from the Bronze or Iron Age (around 1,500 to 500 BCE). It is marked by small cairns formed out of stones cleared from the area by the early farmers in order to grow crops. These cairns are now covered by vegetation which makes them difficult to find.

## **CARL WARK**

The defended hilltop fort of Carl Wark, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, is undated but may date from the Bronze or Iron Ages. It may have been used as a refuge when the local inhabitants were under threat rather than as a permanent settlement. The earthen rampart and stone wall, built to defend the one acre site, can still be seen on the western side of the fort.

Quarrying [Quarrying Fact Sheet] in the Burbage area probably started over 2,000 years ago when Millstone Grit was used to make rotary querns. These were the hand-held equivalents of the later millstones.

During the 18th and 19th centuries Wild Moorstones Edge Quarry manufactured millstones, grindstones (for the Sheffield edge-tool industry)

and other stone products such as gateposts. The sizes and shapes of the millstones varied over time. The earliest were dome-shaped on top whilst the later ones were flat on both sides. The average size was approximately five feet in diameter and over a tonne in weight.

The millstones were made at the quarry site before being transported all over Britain and even abroad. Discarded millstones can still be seen at old quarry sites in the Burbage valley, and also at other sites in the Peak District. The millstone is the symbol of the Peak District National Park.

# Land use

## FARMING

The area is classed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as grade 5 which means it is very poor farming [Farming Fact Sheet] land. Grants are available from the government to help the farming community. The Burbage Valley is one of Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) target areas [[www.natureonthemap.org.uk](http://www.natureonthemap.org.uk)]. Only a small number of sheep can be kept as overgrazing has a serious effect on the vegetation which cannot regrow quickly due to the poor conditions. Overgrazing also encourages invasive species such as bracken.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

It is estimated that Peak District peat bogs store between 16 and 20 million tonnes of carbon. More carbon is stored in UK peat than in all the forests of the UK and France put together. When damaged, by erosion, fire or pollution, peat bogs release their stored carbon. Protecting peatland areas can help to retain and capture carbon thereby helping to reduce the impacts of climate change.

# Routeways and transport

## PACKHORSE ROUTES

Routeways through the Burbage area have been in existence for thousands of years. However, the hollow-ways (sunken lanes) and the packhorse bridge which can be seen below Carl Wark are mostly from medieval and later times.

The packhorse trains could consist of up to 50 horses, driven by a 'jagger', carrying goods such as salt and lead.

## TURNPIKE ROADS

Some of the roads which now surround Burbage Moor were first built as turnpike roads, though many of the routes may have followed existing trackways. The owners of these roads were able to charge a toll to people using them. This extra income enabled the roads to be maintained to a higher standard than the normal roads and so movement of goods and people along them was quicker.

The Houndkirk Road, built in 1758, has never been surfaced with modern materials and is therefore an excellent example of an original turnpike road. Another road built at around the same time crosses over the Upper Burbage Bridge and continues into Ringinglow where there is a fine toll house. Part of what is now the modern A6187 road, which crosses the bottom of the valley area, was built in 1781.

# Mangement and conservation

When used for shooting, the moors were managed to support grouse populations. This involved the burning of small patches of heather in rotation during the winter to encourage new growth. Recently, controlled burning has taken place to encourage

regrowth of heather, creating habitats for wildlife and food for sheep. Uncontrolled summer fires can cause a lot of damage to vegetation and to wildlife. For example, an area devastated by fire in 1976 took 15 years to recover.

Further management problems come from the erosion of footpaths by walkers and mountain bikes, while illegal access by 4x4s and wild camping are causing increasing problems. Footpaths around Higger Tor are being repaired and re-surfaced to keep erosion to a minimum.

# Recreation and tourism

The closeness of the Burbage Valley to major cities such as Sheffield has made it popular with a wide range of visitors. The many tracks and paths through the valley encourage walkers and mountain bikers into the area, while Burbage Edge is one of the UK's

most popular climbing and bouldering spots.

Other more sedentary activities include bird-watching, picnicking and painting. The valley is also popular with school and youth groups.

The sheer numbers of people using the valley causes problems such as erosion, litter and fires. A full-time Peak District National Park Ranger provides help and information for visitors, and maintains footpaths, gates, styles and fences, supported by a team of conservation volunteers.

## Further information

- Moorland Discovery Centre, Longshaw Estate, Sheffield, Derbyshire S11 7TZ, tel: 01433 637907
- **Moors for the Future**
- **Peak Experience**
- Sheffield's Golden Frame, Bill Bevan, published by Sigma Press, £8.95.
- The Peak District: Landscapes Through Time, John Barnatt and Ken Smith, published by Windgather Press, June 2004, £17.