

Langsett Valley

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Langsett Valley

The Langsett area lies on the northern edge of the Peak District National Park [PDNP Fact Sheet] in the county of South Yorkshire. Just to the north runs the A628 Barnsley to Manchester road, while the A616 runs south towards Stocksbridge and Sheffield, through the village of Langsett. The valley has three reservoirs

– Langsett, Midhope and Underbank.

The Langsett Reservoir provides a focus for visitors. Here, conservation [Conservation Fact Sheet] of the landscape and wildlife can be combined with quiet enjoyment of the countryside such as walking, picnicking or bird watching. Forms of recreation which may have significant environmental

impacts, such as off-road vehicles, are not allowed. Dogs must be kept on the lead to protect sheep and ground-nesting birds.

The area's name is derived from 'lang side' or long slope. In the past, livestock were moved up the 'long slope' to the high summer pastures after grazing on lower ground in the winter.

Land ownership and access

The Langsett Valley is privately owned. Yorkshire Water owns the three reservoirs, the woodland and a small area of moorland.

Following the coming into force of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 there is now

access to most of the open moorland surrounding the valley, while a network of bridleways, easy access (suitable for disabled visitors), concessionary and public footpaths gives access to the rest of the valley. The 103-mile Yorkshire Water Way, which starts from Kettlewell in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales, ends at Langsett.

There is a ranger centre at Langsett Barn. A car park with around 75 spaces, picnic site and toilets, including for the disabled, are provided for visitors. There are information panels in the car park. There are also car parks at Flouch and Underbank.

Geology

The area around Langsett is part of the Dark Peak [Rocks and Minerals Fact Sheet]. The underlying rocks are gritstone (also known as Millstone Grit as it was used to make millstones) and shale. These were deposited in the Carboniferous Period around 326-316 million years ago when the area

was covered by a huge river estuary flowing from what is now the highlands of Scotland and northern England. Over millions of years, sand and grit washed down by the river were compressed into gritstone while mud formed the shale.

In some places the hard gritstone rock has been eroded by wind and water to form features such as Swinden Rocher and How Rocher. These take their name from the French word for rock ('rocher').

Deep ravines called 'cloughs' cut through the sides of the valley, feeding into the reservoirs and Little Don River (also known as the Porter River).

Landscape features

RESERVOIRS

The Langsett Reservoir is around a mile long and covers an area of 51 hectares. Its catchment area (the surrounding land where the water is collected from) is 2,102 hectares and its maximum depth is 29 metres. It is fed by the Little Don/Porter River flowing in from the west.

There are a couple of smaller reservoirs – Midhope and Underbank – further down the valley.

WOODLAND

Langsett Bank Woods were planted in the 1960s by the Sheffield Corporation Waterworks to stabilise the steep bank of the Langsett Reservoir. The roots of the trees prevent the soil from being washed into the reservoir. The woods are now owned by Yorkshire Water. They are managed to preserve the water quality, as a natural habitat for wildlife and for timber, with the wood used for building, fences or biomass, and to allow public access where feasible.

MOORLAND

Over 100 square miles of moorland stretch away to the south and west. The moorland is a mosaic of blanket bog and dry heath, one of the world's rarest habitats.

History

Around 5,000 years ago the whole area was covered with trees. The forest was cleared by early Bronze Age settlers for hunting, livestock grazing and to grow crops. Evidence of the ancient woodland can be seen in the tree stumps preserved in the peat bordering some of the cloughs.

The hamlet of Langsett first appears in a charter of 1252 in which Walter de Houdham granted his whole manor at Langside to Elias de Midhope. Elias gradually acquired large

areas of the countryside, including the villages of Langsett and Midhope.

For many centuries sheep farming was the main occupation, but changes came at the end of the 19th century when the reservoirs were built. Before drinking water was chemically treated the water draining into the reservoir had to be as pure as possible. Farms in the reservoirs' water catchment area were seen as a source of contamination. The Sheffield Corporation Waterworks therefore pursued a policy of farm depopulation in the surrounding area and many farms were abandoned. Five farms were abandoned in the

Swinden area, the last occupied until the 1930s. Another deserted farm is North America Farm to the south of Langsett Reservoir. The name came from the habit of calling outlying farms after faraway parts of the world. During the Second World War, tanks used the farm for target practice.

Langsett, Midhope and Underbank reservoirs were constructed at the turn of the 20th century to supply water to Sheffield and Barnsley. Built by Sheffield Corporation Waterworks, Langsett Reservoir dammed the Little Don River. Work started in 1889 and finished in 1904.

Land use

LANGSETT

The village of Langsett is a Conservation Area [Conservation Fact Sheet]. It has an interesting mix of pseudo-Gothic water board buildings among the traditionally built farm buildings and cottages. There is no regular building pattern; the village alternates between close-knit groups of buildings and a series of spaces opening out from these constricted points. Throughout, local gritstone is the main building material, linking Langsett firmly to the surrounding hills.

FARMING

Although many farms were abandoned early in the 20th century, much of the land in the Langsett area is still used for sheep farming. The sheep are mainly Swaledale, a very hardy breed capable of spending most of its life on the moorland or on rough grazing land nearer to the farms. The sheep are 'hefted' to an area of moorland, which means they stay there by instinct and don't need to be fenced in.

The ewes have their lambs in April and May. They are brought down from the moors in June to be sheared and in October for tugging.

GROUSE SHOOTING

The moors have been used for shooting for over 100 years. Shooting was very popular in the Victorian era when there were many 'gentlemen of leisure' to spend time and money on such country pursuits. At that time a day's shooting would cost £13. Now it costs around £3,000. In terms of bringing income into the area, shooting is more important than farming.

CLIMATE CHANGE

As well as their important role as a resource for water gathering, wildlife habitat, farming and game shooting, peat bogs store large amounts of carbon. 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.

WATER SUPPLY

After the reservoirs were completed in the early 1900s, many villagers from Langsett and Midhope were employed in the water industry. In 1974 the Yorkshire Water Authority took over ownership of the reservoirs. In 1989 the water industry was privatised and ownership passed to the present owner Yorkshire Water Services Ltd.

The Langsett Water Treatment Works was built to replace two older water treatment works at Langsett and Midhope. The Yorkshire Water Authority started work on the new treatment works in 1983. Water started to be supplied from the works in 1985 to the south-west side of Barnsley and the north-west side of Sheffield.

Routeways and transport

Cut Gate is an ancient right of way which was used by farmers to get from the Hope, Derwent and Woodlands valleys to Penistone market. Originally it ran down the centre of what is now the Langsett Reservoir and had to be

re-routed over Brookhouse Bridge when the reservoir was built.

Thickwoods Lane, leading to North America Farm, was used by tanks practising for the 1944 Normandy landings during the Second World War. It was strengthened by using rubble

from houses bombed during the Sheffield blitz.

Yorkshire Water has created footpaths and bridleways through the woodland and beside the Langsett Reservoir. The routes are suitable for wheelchair users as well as pushchairs, cyclists and horse riders.

Management and conservation

The overall aim of the Peak District National Park Authority is to conserve the special qualities which make the Peak District National Park unique. In doing this, the Authority has to consider the needs of the people who live in the Park and ensure the quiet enjoyment of the beautiful landscape by those who visit.

Management of the landscape is necessary to preserve the beauty, wildness, openness and sense of history that visitors enjoy. The land around Langsett is nearly all privately owned, and therefore management is by agreement between the landowner and the National Park Authority.

Heather moorland is a semi-natural habitat. Without careful management, overgrazing by sheep would lead to the destruction of heather and its eventual replacement by scrub and birch woodland.

Moors to the west of Langsett Reservoir are grazed by sheep but are also managed by gamekeepers for grouse shooting. The heather is burnt in small patches at five-year intervals to encourage the growth of new shoots for the grouse to feed on. Predators are controlled so that the grouse will thrive.

The income from grouse shooting helps to pay for the management and conservation measures. Combined with sheep farming, managing the moorland to increase the numbers of grouse available for shooting

maintains habitats for other wildlife, such as the golden plover.

One consequence of the popularity of the moorland with walkers is the gradual wearing away of the peat by millions of pairs of feet. The acid soil of the peat moors is particularly sensitive to erosion as the vegetation is very slow to regrow and, in some cases, will never do so without some help. Consequently, certain areas have been fenced to control the erosion.

In 2007 a pond was created near Brookhouse Bridge to help dragonflies, frogs, newts and toads establish new colonies. The conifer woodland has been thinned to let in more sunlight and encourage different plant and animal species.

Recreation and tourism

The Langsett area is ideally placed for visitors from Stocksbridge and Penistone, and the area is easily accessible from the large cities of Sheffield, Huddersfield and Manchester. It is therefore an easy drive to Langsett for millions of people who wish to spend a day in the countryside. According to a survey carried out by Yorkshire Water, the main reasons why people visit the Langsett Reservoir are good walking (37%), to appreciate

the beautiful scenery (27%) and for peace and tranquillity (9%).

Following the coming into force of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 there is access to most of the open moorland surrounding the valley, along with a network of bridleways, easy access (suitable for disabled visitors), concessionary and public footpaths.

Underbank Reservoir has a sailing club and a fishing club, as well as the **Thornbridge Outdoor Education Centre** run by Sheffield City Council. Recreation is not promoted at

the Midhope Reservoir.

To provide facilities for the many visitors to the area, Langsett Barn – a listed 15th century barn – was restored in the late 1980s. Working through the Peak Park Trust (a charity which works to conserve the local heritage), the project was jointly undertaken by the National Park Authority, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Yorkshire Water, Langsett Parish Council and the Countryside Commission (now Natural England). Langsett Barn is set in woodland next to Langsett Reservoir. The restored barn provides a village hall for Langsett and a ranger centre. A car park, picnic site and toilets, including for disabled visitors, are also provided for visitors.

Further information

- Langsett Barn can be booked by school groups by contacting Nikki Waite at the Peak District National Park Office, Bakewell, tel: 01629 816200.
- Moorland Discovery Centre, Longshaw Estate, Sheffield, Derbyshire S11 7TZ, tel: 01433 637907
- **Moors for the Future**
- Yorkshire Water Way: Ilkley to Langsett, Mark Reid, published by Inn Way Publications, 2008, £3.99
- **Yorkshire Water**