

Upper Longdendale Valley

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Upper Longdendale Valley

Running eight miles from east to west across the Pennines, Longdendale (which means 'long wooded valley') is a spectacular V-shaped valley in the Peak District National Park [PDNP Fact Sheet]. A chain of five reservoirs nestle in the valley bottom, fed by the River Etherow – a tributary of the Mersey.

Three miles from the town of Glossop, Longdendale lies on the A628 – one of the main trans-Pennine routes linking Manchester with Sheffield.

The Longdendale Trail is now an important central section of the coast-to-coast **Trans Pennine Trail** which runs through the valley. It is very popular with walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and is also accessible for wheelchairs and buggies.

The Pennine Way crosses the valley at Torside Crossing.

Longdendale has a long history of supernatural happenings and has been described as the most haunted valley in the Peak District. The most famous phenomena are the '**Longdendale Lights**', unexplained strings of lights that appear to dance over the moors.

Land ownership and access

Most of the Longdendale Valley is owned by **United Utilities**. A small section of land at the mouth of the Woodhead Tunnels is owned by National Grid.

One of the main roads from Manchester to Sheffield (A628) runs right through the valley,

alongside the reservoirs. This means that the area is very accessible to people living in the surrounding areas.

There are two official car parks – Crowden (30 spaces) and Torside (100 spaces) – both of which have toilets, disabled facilities and picnic areas. Torside has an information point and wheelchair access to Torside Reservoir and the Trans Pennine

Trail. There is a campsite, youth hostel and outdoor education centre at Crowden.

The Peak District National Park Authority provides environmental education to both schools and other groups of young people and families at the Longdendale Environmental Centre.

Geology

Longdendale is situated in the Dark Peak region of the Peak District National Park. The rocks [Rocks and Minerals Fact Sheet] under the surface of the Dark Peak are gritstone (a coarse sandstone) and softer mudstones (shales), which together form the highest parts of the Peak District. The steep cliffs of the

gritstone edges are popular with climbers, and the lower lying shale valleys provide the ideal landscape for water storage.

These sedimentary rocks were deposited in the Carboniferous period around 326-316 million years ago. At this time the area was covered by the estuary of a huge river flowing down from what are now the highlands of

Scotland and northern England. Over millions of years, the sands washed down by the river were compressed into sandstones and the mud formed the shales. Periods of glaciation during several Ice Ages (between 2 million and 12,000 years ago), together with more gradual erosion by wind and rain, have formed the unusual gritstone tors and landforms seen on the moorland.

Landscape features

RESERVOIRS

The six-mile chain of five reservoirs – Bottoms, Rhodeswood, Torside, Valehouse and Woodhead – were constructed between 1848 and 1884 to supply fresh water to the cities of Manchester and Salford. The water gathering area covers 7,800 hectares (30 square miles), making the most of the heavy rainfall around Longdendale (around 132 centimetres annually).

MOORLAND

The land around Longdendale ranges in height from 633 metres above sea level on the hill tops down to 150 metres in the valley bottom. The high rainfall and poor drainage results in an acid, peat-covered moorland [Wildlife Fact Sheet]. Erosion of the peat has produced 'groughs' (steep narrow valleys) and 'haggs' (islands of peat that have not been eroded). In some places, such as Bleaklow Head, erosion has removed the peat covering altogether. Restoration work is being carried out by Moors for the Future and United Utilities.

WOODLAND

Conifer plantations dominate the valley and were originally planted for grazing stock shelter, to stabilise the reservoirs' banks and to clean the water running off into the reservoirs. The conifers are gradually being replaced by broadleaf species to increase the types of native wildlife in the woodland.

Ecology

The plantlife of Longdendale reflects the underlying geology. Oak and birch woodland once covered much of the area, but from about 3,000 BCE early farmers started to clear the land to grow crops and graze livestock. Around 500 BCE, the climate became wetter and cooler. The change in climate and the land clearance caused the upper limit of the woodland to retreat, leaving the high exposed moorland to be colonised by heather and grasses. Plants found on the moorland now include common cottongrass, bilberry, heather, crowberry, hare's tail cottongrass, cross-leaved heath, cowberry, cloudberry and wild cranberry.

The highest land has a deep peat layer dominated by cottongrass. On sloping ground there is a shallow peat layer where heather is the most abundant species. The lower slopes have a few remnants of the native oak and birch woodlands. Many of the newer conifer plantations are being replaced by native species. Numerous springs and bogs provide ideal conditions for mosses and marsh plants, tolerant of acid conditions.

The moorlands around Longdendale support a variety of highly specialised wildlife, including breeding populations of mountain hare, which turn white in winter. Longdendale also has some of the last remaining colonies of water vole in the area. A highly protected species, the water vole population has been devastated by alterations to its habitat, flood control measures and, in particular, the spread of mink.

Birds such as golden plover, red grouse, ring ouzel, dunlin, curlew and twite can be seen on the moorlands. Birds of prey such as peregrine falcon, merlin and short-eared owl all nest in the area. The moorland surrounding Longdendale is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and is also internationally recognised as a Special Protection Area (for the breeding birds it supports) and a Special Area of Conservation (for its habitats).

The lower rocky sides and greener slopes of the valley support a variety of rare and nationally declining bird species. The ring ouzel, lapwing, skylark and linnet are all on the UK Red List (species of high conservation concern). Redstart, greater woodpecker and pied flycatchers are found in the woodlands, while the grey heron can be seen anywhere in the valley. The reservoirs attract a variety of wildfowl and other birds. Mallards are the most common; others include teal, pochard, sandpipers, gulls and Canada geese.

History

Microliths (small flints) show evidence of Mesolithic hunters and gatherers living in the Peak District from around 8,000 BCE. Bronze Age farmers were the first to farm the uplands from around 3,000 BCE.

The Romans **mined for lead** in the Peak District. A Roman fort, Melandra at Glossop, was occupied until at least 370 CE and probably until the Romans left Britain in 410 CE. The road from Melandra over the moors via Woodlands Valley, Alport Bridge, Hope Cross and Hope to the fort of Navio at Brough has been known as Doctor's Gate for at least 350 years and parts of it can still be traced today. The mound called Torside Castle is thought either to be a Bronze Age earthworks or a burial ground for Roman soldiers, and the area is said to be haunted by phantom legionnaires.

Described as a 'waste' in the Domesday Book of 1086, Longdendale became part of the Royal Forest of the Peak in the 12th century. The forest was inhabited by wild boar, red

deer, wolves, bears and wild cattle which only the King and his noblemen were allowed to hunt. Later, the land was farmed by monks and most of the remaining woodland cleared for sheep grazing.

During the Industrial Revolution, power for the many textile mills in the valley was provided by the swiftly-flowing waters of the River Etherow. Cotton was processed at Valehouse Mill, Paradise Mill, Bottoms Lodge Mill and Torside Mill (later a paper mill), with a bleach works at Crowden. At one time there were 112 cotton mills in the Longdendale area, 56 of them around Glossop. Three of the mills were later covered by the waters of the reservoirs.

The railway through Longdendale, started in 1839 and completed in 1845, provided the first rail link between Manchester and Sheffield. The line closed in the early 1980s and the Trans Pennine Trail now runs along part of the railway route.

By 1841, the population of Manchester had grown to 235,507. People were just starting to link the spread of disease with polluted water

supplies and there was an urgent need to supply pure water to the people of Manchester. In 1844 John Frederick La Trobe Bateman was appointed to design and construct a series of reservoirs to provide water from the Pennines for Manchester.

Work began on the reservoirs in 1848: Rhodeswood was completed in 1855; Torside in 1864; Valehouse in 1869; and Bottoms and Woodhead in 1877.

Construction started on the Woodhead dam in 1848 but instability in the underlying rock caused the embankment to leak badly and it had to be abandoned. A second embankment, started in 1862, was one of the first to use a concrete filled cut-off trench instead of puddle clay. The dam was completed in 1877.

When the whole scheme was finally completed in 1884 it was the largest chain of reservoirs in the world at that time.

The area was once home to a thriving quarrying industry which provided the stone to build the railway and the dams. Today, they are popular climbing crags.

Land use

FARMING

For many centuries farming was the main use of the land in Longdendale. The better quality lowland provided grazing for beef and dairy cattle while the higher moorland was used for sheep grazing.

The flooding of the valleys to create the reservoirs in the mid to late 19th century significantly changed the character of the valley.

WATER SUPPLY

Construction of the reservoirs limited farming as the lowland farmland disappeared under the water and all farming in the water gathering area had to be restricted to prevent pollution.

When the water treatment works were built at Arnfield and Godley in the 1960s restrictions on farming eased. There is now a much greater emphasis on encouraging sustainable catchment management in the valley.

The Longdendale reservoirs supply some 70-80 million litres of drinking water each day. The reservoirs also provide an attractive landscape feature, wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities for the many visitors.

Routeways and transport

PACKHORSE ROUTES AND TURNPIKE ROADS

From the Middle Ages, salt was brought from Northwich, Middlewich and Nantwich on pack horses up through Longdendale to Salter's Brook where one track went on to Sheffield and the other headed north to Wakefield. The trains of horses were led by men called 'jaggers'.

Packhorse bridges were just wide enough for horses to pass in single file, with low parapets to avoid the swinging baskets. The 18th century Lady Shaw Bridge has been restored. The salt trade increased when the new turnpike road from Cheshire to Yorkshire was authorised in 1731.

RAILWAY

The railway through Longdendale, started in 1839 and completed in 1845, provided the first rail link between Manchester and Sheffield. The building of the three-mile long Woodhead Tunnel to carry the line caused much misery and loss of life among the 1,500 workers ('navvies'). The first tunnel

(Woodhead 1) was completed in 1845 at a cost of £200,000 and the lives of 26 navvies. The second tunnel (Woodhead 2) was completed in 1852. An outbreak of cholera among the workforce in 1849 caused 28 deaths.

However, the railway brought prosperity and employment to the area with heavy coal traffic between the pits of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire and the industries of Lancashire. Stations at Hadfield, Crowden and Woodhead handled passenger and goods traffic.

A new, larger tunnel (Woodhead 3) replaced the two single tunnels in 1954. However with the increasing use of road transport, traffic on the line dwindled and the passenger service was withdrawn in 1970 with the freight service ending in 1981. The Trans Pennine Trail now occupies part of the railway route.

TRAILS

A major achievement was the development of the hard surfaced Longdendale Trail. The trail, which opened in 1990,

follows the disused railway line from Hadfield station to the Woodhead tunnels and continues along the ancient packhorse route via Salter's Brook to Yorkshire. The trail now forms part of the coast-to-coast Trans Pennine Trail from Liverpool to Hull. In July 1996, the trail became an extension to **Euroroute E8** which runs 2,700 miles from Ireland to Bulgaria. The 268-mile long Pennine Way starts in Edale, crosses the Longdendale Valley at Torside Crossing and continues northwards to the Scottish borders. The Northern Horse Route creates a circuit around the eastern end of the valley for horse riders.

ROADS

The A628 runs between Manchester and Barnsley through the Longdendale Valley. It is one of the busiest and most dangerous roads in the country. Highly controversial proposals to build a bypass to relieve the traffic pressure on the villages of Tintwistle, Hollingworth and Mottram have been postponed until at least 2016.

Management and conservation

Further paths and bridleways have been established and there are circular walking routes around each of the five reservoirs. The conifer plantations are gradually being replanted with broadleaf species to encourage native wildlife.

The Peak District National Park Ranger Service

has been expanded in the Longdendale Valley with extra funding from United Utilities. The Trans Pennine Trail is managed by United Utilities in partnership with National Park rangers and the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. The rangers also organise conservation projects, help the public and liaise with farmers.

Damage to the high moorland from fire and erosion has resulted in degradation of the blanket bog and the creation of large areas of bare peat. This is being restored by United Utilities' Sustainable Catchment Management Programme in some areas and by the Moors for the Future in others.

Recreation and tourism

The Longdendale Valley provides a variety of recreational activities, including a sailing club on Torside Reservoir, fishing on Bottoms and Valehouse Reservoirs, horse riding, cycling and walking on the trails and footpaths, and rock climbing at three

different sites. There is a campsite, outdoor education centre and youth hostel at Crowden.

Many visitors come from Stockport, south Manchester, Glossop and Hadfield, and the vast majority come by car. There are trains to Glossop and

Hadfield from Manchester, and local buses from Glossop and Holmfirth.

Walkers can join the Pennine Way which crosses the valley at Torside Reservoir and follow the Longdendale Trail, now part of the coast-to-coast Trans Pennine Trail. Those on horseback or bicycle can use the Northern Horse Trail.

Further information

- **Moors for the Future**
- **United Utilities**
- **Longdendale Environmental Education Centre,**
Woodhead Road, Glossop, Derbyshire SK13 1HS
Tel: 01457 851080
- Longdendale Valley: A History
Published by The History Press, 2004, £12.99