
43 Haltwhistle Burn

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

At the north end of Haltwhistle: Willia Road [NY 708 645]. Haltwhistle is served by both bus and rail services.

Description

The trail up Haltwhistle Burn is a fantastic place to see the Carboniferous rocks that make up most of Northumberland and at the same time get a real insight into our industrial heritage. Every rock type here in the valley has been mined, or quarried.

The rocks date from between 320 and 330 million years ago. The gorge was largely cut when the last Ice Age finished around 15,000 years ago. When the ice melted it produced an enormous amount of meltwater. This cut a channel from the north to the River South Tyne. The rocks in the gorge — the sandstone, shales, limestones and coals — were once sands, muds, coral seas and swampy forests when Britain was only 5 degrees north of the Equator. At that time sea level rose and fell every 100,000 years or so, changing the environment from sandy river deltas, to swamps and forests, to muddy coastal lagoons and sub-tropical clear coral seas.

120 years ago there were active mines and quarries all along the burn, extracting coal, limestone for agriculture and mortar, sandstone for building and shale for bricks. Over 680 men and boys worked in the coal mine (South Tyne Colliery) at the south end of the burn. The shaft there was dug by hand and goes down more than 150m.

Some of the woodland is secondary after industry, but some is remnant ancient woodland. There are surviving ancient woodland species like the very attractive oak fern, as well as commoner ones like ramsons (wild garlic) and wood crane's-bill. Limestone outcrops have characteristic plants like fairy flax and mouse-ear hawkweed. You might see roe deer, squirrels, heron and dippers, and perhaps even an otter.

Photographs

(Photo 43-1) Carboniferous rocks in Haltwhistle Burn.

(Photo 43-2) The Fell Chimney, East End Pit, Haltwistle Burn.



(Photo 43-1) Carboniferous rocks in Haltwhistle Burn.



(Photo 43-2) The Fell Chimney, East End Pit, Haltwhistle Burn.