



Borrowdale and Bassenthwaite

The largest of the 13 Lakeland valleys, the Borrowdale and Bassenthwaite valley extends from the high fells of Rossett Pike and Esk Hause in the south to the northern edge of the Caldbeck Fells and the wide, coastal plain of the Solway Firth. It includes the major glacial lakes of Derwent Water and Bassenthwaite as well as the busy tourist centre of Keswick.

The valley is also home to rare upland hay meadows and its steep fellsides carry one of the largest oak woodlands in England, containing many rare native species.

Borrowdale and Bassenthwaite have been settled from at least the Neolithic period and there is evidence there was a stone axe production site on Carrock Fell. Other early monuments from this period include the large stone circle at Elva Plain, east of Bassenthwaite Lake. The small hillforts at Castle Crag in Borrowdale and Castle How by Bassenthwaite Lake may date to either the later prehistoric or early medieval periods. There is a Roman fort at Caermote, north of Bassenthwaite Lake, and a well-preserved group of Roman

period native settlements survive at Aughtertree Fell.

Borrowdale was a key area for the Company of Mines Royal, set up by the English Crown in 1568. The remains of Mines Royal copper and lead mines can be seen at Goldscope in the Newlands valley, along with the copper mines of Long Work, St Thomas' Work and Dalehead. What's left of a unique mining operation can be found on the slopes above Seathwaite in Borrowdale where 'wad,' or pure graphite, was mined from the 16th century. In the 1800s, Keswick became the world centre of pencil manufacturing and the Keswick Pencil Museum, on the site of a 1920s factory, tells the story. Slate and wool are also vital industries to the region.

In 1778, Thomas West's guidebook identified a series of key viewing stations around Derwent Water and Bassenthwaite and by the late 18th century, Keswick began to develop as a tourist centre for the wealthier visitors. The Bowder Stone became, and still is, one of the quirkiest tourist attractions. Located in the 'Jaws of Borrowdale,' the enormous

stone balances improbably on one edge and is today owned by the National Trust. Also under the National Trust's protection is the photogenic Ashness Bridge, offering spectacular views over Bassenthwaite Lake and the River Derwent.

Poets Southey and Coleridge both took up residence at various times at Greta Hall in Keswick, while the poet Shelley also lived briefly in Keswick. The Wordsworths were frequent visitors to the region and Borrowdale features in many of William Wordsworth's poems.

The Borrowdale and Bassenthwaite Valley is also highly important for the early conservation movement. John Marshall, and others keen to preserve the beauty of the area, bought key parts of Borrowdale in order to prevent damaging development. Canon Rawnsley, vicar for many years of the Parish of Crosthwaite, led the battle against a proposed railway on the west side of Derwent Water to the Honister slate quarries, and the National Trust, of which Rawnsley was a founder, made its first purchases of land in the English Lake District here at Brandlehow.