

Discover TEESDALE

Gateways to Teesdale

Gateway Itinerary: Pennines – Hexham & Alston

Our new gateway itineraries show you how to include Teesdale in your route through the north east region. Teesdale is an easy destination to reach from all directions. Don't hesitate to contact us if you need a tailor-made itinerary.

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Lake District - Penrith & M6 to A1(M)

Teesdale is just a short drive from the Lake District. Easily accessible from the A66 it makes a perfect stopping point for cross-Pennine tours.

Scotch Corner and Yorkshire Dales

Teesdale is the northernmost of the Yorkshire Dales. The little-known route over 'The Stang' Forest to Reeth in Arkengarthdale and Tan Hill, England's highest pub is an ideal country route for minibuses and people carriers. Coaches will prefer to use the main A1M/A66 access route described here.

Pennines - Hexham and Alston

The northern approach to Teesdale from Alston offers stunning views and easy access to High Force, England's highest waterfall.

Tour itineraries are prepared for Teesdale Marketing by Jan Williams, Registered Tourist Guide. The information is correct at the time of writing. Group organisers are advised to confirm opening times and arrangements for groups with individual attractions/organisations.

Gateway itinerary: Pennines - Hexham and Alston

The northern approach to Teesdale from Alston offers stunning views and easy access to High Force, England's highest waterfall.

Route Plan

Hexham – A69 west – A686 – Alston – B6277 – Middleton-in-Teesdale – B6277 – Mickleton – Romaldkirk – Cotherstone – Lartington - Barnard Castle – B6278 Eggleston - Stanhope – B6278 and unclassified road - Blanchland –B6306 – B6307 - Dilston – Hexham

Coach timings

Hexham – Alston	55 mins
Alston – Middleton-in-Teesdale	50 mins
Middleton-in-Teesdale – Barnard Castle	25 mins
Barnard Castle – Stanhope	40 mins
Stanhope – Hexham (via Blanchland)	50 mins

Attractions

Alston	1 hour
Middleton-in-Teesdale	1 hour
Barnard Castle	2-3 hours
The Bowes Museum	2-3 hours
Eggleston Hall Gardens	1-2 hours
Stanhope	1 hour
Blanchland	45 mins

Refreshments

Hexham	Variety of tearooms/pubs
Alston	Variety of tearooms/pubs
High Force waterfall	Hotel
Bowlees Visitor Centre	Site café
Middleton-in-Teesdale	Village bakery/tearoom
	Low Way Farm, Holwick near Middleton-in-Teesdale
	– pre booking essential
Barnard Castle	Variety of tearooms/pubs
The Bowes Museum	Group bookings 01833 694605
Eggleston Hall Gardens	Site bistro/café
Stanhope	Variety of cafes/pubs
Blanchland	Tearoom/Hotel

Commentary

Hexham is well known as the gateway town for **Hadrian's Wall** country. There's plenty to admire in the town from the 12th century Abbey with its original Saxon crypt to the Old Gaol museum where you can check out your family history to see if your surname matches any of the infamous medieval 'border reivers' family surnames. Or just enjoy a quiet stroll through the Sele – the green heart of Hexham – before visiting Tynedale Retail Park for some fabulous shopping opportunities.

But Hexham can equally be seen as the gateway town for a trip south through the wonderful upland scenery of the North Pennine hills and for a thrilling journey through inspiring scenery and into **Teesdale**.

Haydon Bridge on the A69 was the birthplace of the painter and engraver **John Martin** (1789-1854). Even in early childhood he was a talented artist but the family was so poor he was forced to draw in the mud of the riverbanks near his home. John Martin was painting during the last years of the Sublime movement in art when people were fascinated by the savageness of Mother Nature and looked for exhilaration in the world of beauty around them. And Martin certainly delivered. He painted grand, gloomy and dramatic landscapes, often depicting scenes from Biblical stories where human beings were reduced to tiny, struggling figures against landscapes torn apart by fire or flood.

His paintings would not have seemed out of place as a backdrop to a Cecil B de Mille Hollywood production.....

All of which made John Martin very popular in his lifetime and earned him an international reputation. But his brother Jonathan gained a reputation for another reason. He was responsible for starting a fire inside York Minster an action which earned him the nickname "Mad" Jon Martin. And a second brother, William, wore a hat made out of tortoise-shell.

Strange family.....

The A686 has been described as "one of the world's best drives....." and it is certainly full of scenic interest. In a few miles the entrance to **Langley Castle** appears on the right. What is now a luxurious hotel is housed in a 14th century tower house with symmetrical towers at each corner. Originally, each tower had a room on each floor with a single room in the centre. The number of latrines which were discovered in the south west tower indicate that the castle must previously have had quite a substantial community living within its walls!

As on other **Discover Teesdale** itineraries through the North Pennines it isn't long before the lead-mining heritage begins to make its presence felt and no where more clearly than at **Cupola Bridge** near to where the East and West Allen meet to form the River Allen. Built in 1778 this bridge takes its name from the vertical circular furnace which was used to smelt iron in a nearby mill. The surrounding hills were once alive with the sound of pack horse trains winding their way over the fells travelling from lead mine to smelting mill and back again.

The Blakett Beaumont family dominated the lead-mining activity of Allendale and Weardale in the 19th century. They employed the services of Mr Thomas Sopwith the leading mines engineer of the day and the grandfather of the Thomas Sopwith who developed the Sopwith Camel during the First World War. Sopwith's (senior) involvement in research and

development meant the family's mines were the most modern and productive of their day. Lead from the Blakett Beamont mines was singled out on the London Lead market and sold at a premium price.

The estate village of **Whitfield** is part of the Blakett-Ord family ownership today and the construction of the parish church in 1860 was financed by the family.

Gradually the road climbs and climbs until the high moorland of Whitfield Fell is reached and the way ahead to **Alston** is clear. At 1,000 feet above sea level Alston is often named as the highest market town in England and is a busy little town with centuries of human history. In the 19th century blacksmiths, sawmills and cornmills thrived and water power was the artery which drove the machinery until electricity arrived in the town just before the Second World War. Today Alston makes a very pleasant place to stop to explore the winding alleyways and perhaps buy locally made produce in the craftshops which surround the market place.

The poet **Wystan Hugh Auden** (d.1973) loved the Alston Moor area more than any other locality in the north. He had a lifelong fascination with the lead mining story and his imagination is said to have been fired when, as a young visitor to the area, he dropped a stone down an abandoned mineshaft. Certainly that image is one he used repeatedly in his poetry.

After leaving Alston the scenery of **Upper Teesdale** begins to dominate the way ahead. Here is the heart of the 870 square miles of **North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**. This is the haunt of curlews, of the black grouse and merlins. And, of course, sheep. Making a living from agriculture up here is a tough business calling for resilience from both farmer and stock. And the Swaledale sheep is a tough breed of sheep. Black faced except for its distinctive white nose both the male and female sheep have horns. Lambing in these upland areas takes place from April onwards which is much later than lowland breeds in other parts of the country.

This is landscape which was settled by Vikings during the 10th century. The first wave came as invaders seeking out new territories and riches. Gradually, as the generations passed, they came as settlers and farmers and left their imprint on the local language. The Pennine Hills or the Lake District mountains are described as fells from the Norse "fjell". And "foss" was used to describe waterfalls – hence High Force and Low Force. When they lifted their eyes to the horizon they saw "riggs" instead of ridges and when they looked down the long valley of the River Tees they saw a "darl" which became a "dale". The local farmhouse architecture in Teesdale recalls the Scandanavian longhouse style of a dwelling house with a barn attached at one side.

The perfect place to see Teesdale's dramatic landscape in full flow is to visit **High Force** waterfall where the River Tees is at its dramatic best. Reached by a 600 metre woodland walk from the nearby coach/car park High Force is where the Tees plunges 21 metres over a ledge of Whinsill to the dark pools below. After heavy rain it is easy to understand why the name of the river translates as "seething" or "boiling".

The Whinsill is the band of rock which contributed so much to the landscape development of Teesdale. This rock was formed more than 200m years ago and is properly known as dolerite. Dolerite is an igneous rock formed directly from molten magma which was squeezed between layers of other rocks. As it cooled and solidified it formed a very hard, black dolerite which is columnar in appearance. The Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland is another well known

example of it and to the north of Teesdale the Romans made best use of the high ground formed by the Whinsill when they constructed Hadrian's Wall.

You can learn all about the whinsill – and have a cup of tea – at the **Bowlees Visitor Centre** just a few minutes drive from High Force. The centre is run by Durham Wildlife Trust and coach parking is permitted at the wide entrance (but not in the official car park). A short level walk up the access road leads into the car park and then a footbridge leads to the old Methodist Chapel housing the exhibitions on geology and local wildlife. Take time out to walk the popular route to Gibson's Cave.

From Bowlees it is a short walk to **Low Force** and **Wynch Bridge** which are signed by a finger post on the main B6277 (parking for min-coaches and cars only in layby). **Please be very aware of road traffic.**

The 300 metre walk across the fields leads to a lovely view over the waterfalls. The first Wynch Bridge was built in 1704 – the very year the Duke of Marlborough was fighting the Battle of Blenheim during the War of the Spanish Succession. It was described as the first suspension bridge in Europe and it was built by leadminers living at Holwick who wished to cross to the hamlet of Newbiggin. Almost 100 years later tragedy struck when the chain links broke and 11 people were killed. The present bridge was rebuilt in 1830 and frames a grand view across the River Tees.

Teesdale villages are dotted with Methodist chapels and one of the oldest is in the hamlet of **Newbiggin** (limited mini-coach parking at Village Hall. Group visits by arrangement, tel. no 01833 638272). Built in 1760 for a congregation of 200 this chapel was often visited by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, who found much support here amongst the isolated communities of the Pennine dales.

Gradually the scenery is changing. The dry stone walls are still much in evidence but the haunting beauty of the high moorland area of Upper Teesdale is gradually giving way to a more pastoral landscape of trees and hedgerows on the approach to **Middleton-in-Teesdale**.

Just the place to enjoy a stretch of the legs....

Middleton is well worth taking a stop. Local shops serve the surrounding agricultural community so it is possible to buy all types of clothing. The village bakery and tearoom offers bakery items and preserves and an excellent TIC is just the place to buy guidebooks, souvenirs and postcards.

At the road junction in the middle of the town is an elegant drinking fountain standing proudly at the corner. The name etched into the canopy is Robert Bainbridge who during the 1840s was the Superintendent for the London Lead Company. A fair but severe man he would not hesitate to fine a man found smoking in the street.

The B6277 is an interesting route to follow towards Barnard Castle. Near the village of **Mickleton** the road runs very close to the old **Tees Valley railway line**. The impressive **Lune Viaduct** is a reminder of the engineering skills of those Victorian men who built the line in 1868. The original plan was to take the railway all the way to Alston where it would join the South Tyne valley railway but in effect the line reached only as far as Middleton-in-Teesdale, apart from a short extension to a quarry at Holwick. The line carried stone and

livestock out of Middleton and brought into the dale coal, animal feedstuffs and fertilizers. When the reservoirs in nearby Lunedale and Baldersdale were constructed men and materials were carried. The line was the victim of countrywide closures in the 1960s.

The equally picturesque village of **Romaldkirk** is next. The wide village green (look for the village stocks!) is dominated on one side by the church often described as the “cathedral of the dales”. One of the rectors in the early 19th century was Reginald Bligh (d.1821) who was cousin to the more famous William Bligh of Mutiny on the Bounty Fame (1789).

And where there are two pretty villages there has to be a third.....

Cotherstone makes the grade with its wide green and attractive cottage style houses. In the culinary world the name Cotherstone is well known for a superb local cheese which has been produced in Teesdale for more than 100 years to an age old family recipe. The tradition of cheese making in the Pennine dales of Teesdale, Swaledale and Wensleydale dates back to the Roman times. Cotherstone cheese takes from 1-3 months to mature and is made from cow’s milk. A semi soft texture gives a moist and tangy flavour. Shops in Barnard Castle stock this lovely local delicacy.

And it’s not just cheese that this village is famous for. Here lives a lady who found fame in the 20th century world of modern media and television. Until 1972 she was completely unknown to the wider world beyond Teesdale. She single-handedly worked her small farm in nearby Baldersdale and eked out a living in a home without running water, electricity or gas. Then one day 30 years ago a Yorkshire television producer made a documentary about her life. And that one programme changed her life forever. From making a farming profit of £280 in a good year local daleswoman **Hannah Hauxwell** was catapulted to fame with more television programmes to follow.

Barnard Castle is everyone’s idea of a perfect little market town so leave enough time to explore its enticing nooks and crannies.

And as a settlement it really couldn’t have a more dramatic entrance. Driving into the town over the County Bridge gives an incredible view of the ruined castle high above. What better place to build a defensive structure than overlooking the river crossing? The first timber structure was built in the 11th century by Guy de Balliol and was replaced some years later by a stone building begun by Guy’s nephew, Bernard. From “Bernard’s Castle” came the modern place name we use today. The Normans often built in wood first because in times of greatest danger this was the quickest material to build in despite it being a weaker building material than stone. Once the Normans had quelled an area and brought it under their control and domination they could then replace the wooden buildings with stone to produce something which resonated strength and domination. In the medieval period nothing was bigger than the massively impressive monasteries, churches and castles built by the Normans and their successors. They were brilliant engineers.

By the time it was completed Barnard Castle was one of the largest castles in the north of England and the ruins today are really quite extensive. Well worth a visit inside to explore its long, turbulent history.

If antique shops are of interest then look no further than “Barney’s” bustling main street. The town is proud of its reputation as one of the best antique centres in the north of England. The steep hill leading up to the Market Place area is known as **The Bank** and is lined with shops offering fine antique furniture, secondhand books, clocks, silver, jewellery and much more besides. Take time, too, to admire the fine 17th century buildings these antique shops are housed in. Barnard Castle is a treat for anyone interested in architecture and that architectural heritage is carefully protected with Conservation Area status.

If your visit is on a Wednesday morning then you get the added bonus of being able to enjoy the banter of local stallholders at the open air market held on the cobbled market place in the main street. No one big shop dominates the town so shoppers have an opportunity to browse in individual speciality shops where personal attention is assured. It is not uncommon to end up talking to the owners themselves.

At the bottom of The Bank is the **Thorngate** area where 18th century weavers and their families added to the prosperity of the town at that period. The water of the River Tees is fast flowing and its power was harnessed to drive the waterwheels of the woollen mills which once lined the river beneath the walls of the castle. From the 17th century the town was the centre of a thriving woollen industry and thousands of stockings were made here. Much later came the town’s reputation as a carpet-making centre.

Don’t leave the town without visiting the amazingly impressive and awesome **Bowes Museum** (two minutes drive from the main street and signed). The building itself takes your breath away and the priceless art collection inside is equally impressive.

Purpose built as a museum and opened in 1892 this extraordinary building was the brainchild of John and Josephine Bowes. And theirs is a wonderful human story of a happy marriage which resulted in this enduring legacy housing their joint art collection.

John was the illegitimate son of the Scottish 10th Earl of Strathmore and a commoner called Mary Millner. Although his parents did finally marry just a few hours before the Earl’s death the young John Bowes was not able to inherit his father’s title. He was, however, given a family estate called Streatlam just a few miles from Barnard Castle and with the income from this estate and from his coalmining interests he was able to indulge his love of art and all things French.

Whilst on one of his frequent visits to France he met and fell in love with Josephine, an amateur actress and talented sculptor and painter. Together they built the fantastic collection of French and Spanish art we all enjoy today.

And don’t forget to check out the timings for the performance of the mechanical Silver Swan.....an absolute must!

Eventually we know you will have to leave Barnard Castle.....but **Teesdale** has plenty more to share with you.....

The B6278 leads easily to the village of Eggleston and **Eggleston Hall Gardens**. Perfect for both professional and amateur gardeners, these 4 acres contain rare plants and shrubs whilst organic fruit and vegetables are on sale. Follow the signs through the garden to find the ruined chapel tucked away in one corner. Delicious home made food is on offer at the Coach

House Tearoom and if you need some last minute souvenirs the well stocked gift shop is sure to be able to help out.

Continue along the B6278 and enjoy the far reaching views over **Weardale** as you drop steeply towards **Stanhope**. Look out for the stepping stones over the River Wear which mark the old ford crossing when you reach the bottom of the valley floor.

The **Durham Dales Centre** makes a convenient stopping point with facilities, a TIC and craft shops. Don't miss the walled garden area tucked away in the corner of the car park. Opened by Teesdale resident **Hannah Hauxwell** this lovely little garden is a delightful spot to sit on a warm day.

Take the B6278 north out of Stanhope passing through **Crawleyside** and on up to open moorland. A stiff enough climb for modern transport. So imagine what it was like to construct a railway up here. The Stanhope and Tyne railway was the highest standard gauge railway in England at the time of its opening in 1834. The consultant engineer was Robert Stephenson, son of the famous locomotive designer, George. Stationary engine houses at Crawley and Wetherhill were used to rope haul wagons full of limestone, iron and lead up the steep slopes. Look for the evidence in the landscape to the right: the bed of the rail track can still be seen across the open fell to the right.

A little further on an unclassified road branches left leading to Hunstanworth and **Blanchland** villages (accessible for large coaches). Originating in France the Premonstratensian Order settled in the valley of the River Derwent in the 12th century. The monks wore white habits and their property became known as the "white-land" or Blanchland. A small village with a big history Blanchland is worth a short stop (coach and car parking) to explore its secrets. Monastic and Jacobite history are only part of the story. Take time to find out how the marriage of an 18th century Bishop of Durham to a local girl still influences the village today.

The B6306 and B6307 (which avoids narrow Linnels Bridge) leads toward Dilston and easy access to the A69 Tyne Valley route and Hexham.