

Discover TEESDALE



Gateways to Teesdale

Gateway Itinerary: Scotch Corner and Yorkshire Dales

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.

Explore Teesdale
Tourist Information Centre
Woodleigh
Flatts Road
Barnard Castle
County Durham
United Kingdom
DL12 8AA

Telephone: +44 (0)1833 696356

E-mail: tourism-teesdale@durham.gov.uk

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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.

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Route Plan

Scotch Corner - A66 west – Bowes village – A67 – Barnard Castle – exit town via County Bridge onto B6277 – Cotherstone – Romaldkirk - Middleton-in-Teesdale – B6282 – B6279 – Staindrop – A688 – A689 – A1 (north).

Coach Timings

Scotch Corner – Bowes village	=	30 mins
Bowes village – Barnard Castle	=	10 mins
Barnard Castle – Middleton-in-Teesdale	=	25 mins
Middleton-in-Teesdale – A1	=	50 mins

Attractions

Include one or more of the following in your itinerary:

Barnard Castle		2-3 hours
Bowes Museum		2-3 hours
Middleton-in-Teesdale	1.5-2 hours	
Raby Castle		3 hours

Refreshments

Barnard Castle	Variety of tearooms/pubs
The Bowes Museum	Group bookings: 01833 694605
Thorpe Farm Peel House	Group bookings: 01833 627242 Email: info@thorpefarm.co.uk www.thorpefarm.co.uk
Morritt Arms Hotel	Groups bookings: 01833 627232 Email: relax@themorritt.co.uk www.themorritt.co.uk
Middleton-in-Teesdale	Village bakery/tearoom Low Way Farm, Holwick near Middleton-in-Teesdale – pre-booking essential

Commentary

For travellers past and present **Scotch Corner** is a famous road junction on the A1. The road which branches off to the northwest from here – now called the A66 – follows the established shortest route to Scotland from this point via Penrith, Carlisle and Gretna Green. The Scottish border is about 60 miles further south at its western end than at its eastern end at Berwick upon Tweed.

The modern road in places lies directly over the line of a Roman road established by the Roman Governor Agricola around the year AD79/80. He brought his Roman army to the north of England and established a garrison at Eboracum which was the early name for today's modern city of York. From Eboracum Agricola pushed north and north west on a programme of exploration and expansion. We know a lot about Agricola's approach because

his son-in-law was the Roman historian Tacitus. And Tacitus only wrote good things about his father-in-law.

Sensible man.....

The construction by the Romans of new metalled roads with a cleared strip on either side must have made such an impression on the native tribes. Similar to dual carriageways or modern motorways across the landscape today.

For travellers past and present refreshment opportunities along the way were essential. And the 21st century traveller has the best choice of all.

Thorpe Farm Peel House (advance booking for groups essential) is housed in a lovely converted Georgian house. Browse through the local history exhibition and the gift shop before settling down for a brew of fresh coffee/tea and lovely pastries or treat yourself to a more substantial meal.

The historic **Morrith Arms at Greta Bridge** (advance booking for groups essential) offers another choice. Whichever venue you choose you have the added bonus of following in the footsteps of literary and artistic giants of the 19th century.

The little river Greta takes its name from Old Norse origin and means the “stony or gravely stream”. In 1805 the landscape watercolourist and etcher, **John Sell Cotman**, was commissioned to provide painting lessons to the wife of **John Morrith** of nearby **Rokeby Hall**. Cotman took the opportunity to capture on canvas the lovely Greta Bridge and that painting is now housed in the British Museum in London.

Greta Bridge was a staging post for the mail coach from London in the 19th century and this is where the author Charles Dickens spent his first night in Teesdale in 1838 staying in the coaching inn.

Across the A66 **Rokeby Hall and Park** make for a delightful visitor experience. This is a lovely Palladian style country house with a unique collection of 18th century needlework pictures and period furniture. Valesquez’s painting the “Rokeby Venus” hung on the walls here until 1905.

But it is with poets and writers of the 19th century that Rokeby Hall is particularly linked. In June 1809 the Scottish writer and poet Sir Walter Scott stayed at the hall at the invitation of the then owner John Bacon Morrith. The Morrith’s were active patrons of the arts and hosted not only Sir Walter but also the poet Robert Southey in 1812, Charles Dickens some years later and the art and social critic John Ruskin in 1876. John Morrith and Sir Walter had met in Edinburgh where a friendship had been forged. Scott was bathed in glory from the success of his recent works “Marmion” and “Lady of the Lake” and Morrith, himself a classics and history scholar, was keen to encourage Scott to produce another epic poem this time featuring Teesdale which would, so he hoped, help bring new fame to the dale.

Sir Walter Scott visited during the month of June in that year and experienced Teesdale in all its summer glory. He roamed the nearby woods and riverbanks and gradually a storyline he had been thinking of for some time began to take on a life of its own. “Rokeby” tells the

story of events over five days following the Battle of Marston Moor during the English Civil War of the 1640s.

On his second visit in 1812 Sir Walter used a small cave in the grounds of Rokeby Hall to find peace and quiet to concentrate on the completion of his work. 30,000 words makes for a good, long read and the author makes references to several local place names.

A little further west it is worth making a short detour into the village of **Bowes** (at the mini-roundabout continue straight ahead past the Ancient Unicorn pub and there is a coach turning area just beyond the end of the main street on a sharp right hand turn. Do not cross over the bridge which carries the road over the A66). The ruined medieval castle, the parish church of St Giles and the old vicarage occupy the site of the Roman fort *Lavatrae* a name which translates as “river bed”. In 1970 archaeological excavations uncovered evidence for a military bath house outside the fort walls. To the Roman soldier a visit to the bath house was not just a way of keeping clean. This was an opportunity for him to spend some of his off duty hours in catching up with camp gossip, playing gambling games with his friends, chilling out and relaxing. Hot dry rooms would alternate with steam rooms and a final cold plunge would close the skin pores before the soldier would return to his barrack block inside the fort.

We do not know if **Charles Dickens** (1812-70) would have been aware of the Roman history when he visited Bowes village. He was much more interested in researching the harrowing conditions young pupils experienced in cheap boarding schools of the day. His novel “Nicholas Nickleby” was born from this research and the infamous Dotheboys Hall was modelled on the long building at right angles to the road at the far west end of the village. Known as Shaw’s Academy in Dickens’ day the school was under the control of William Shaw whom Dickens immortalised in his novel as the bullying headmaster Wackford Squeers. The real Shaw is buried in the nearby churchyard of St Giles.

That literary link can be continued in **Barnard Castle** (see Discover Teesdale’s “Writers and Artists” theme) or you could explore the nooks and crannies of this historic market town to uncover more of its secrets. 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 down from 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.

And for a terrific view of the castle which gave the town its name just continue down The Bank and follow the sharp right hand bend towards the County Bridge.

Then look up!

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. Those Normans 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.

The journey through the village of **Lartington** leads through a gentle pastoral landscape of hedgerows, trees and pastureland. The landscape of this lower part of Teesdale reflect the better soil conditions to be found here. But this is a dale of great variety and the further along the dale one travels the more changes are apparent. Where the soil is not so fertile **drystone** walls replace the hedgerows. Miles and miles of these cleverly built field boundaries snake across the dale bottom and up to the high fell land. The Enclosure Acts of the 18th century changed the English landscape forever. For a period of almost forty years from 1780 onwards land was enclosed and new techniques were tried out to bring about the Agricultural Revolution. Better stockbreeding and more effective land use resulted in greater productivity at a time when the population of England was growing and food imports from continental Europe were reduced because of war with France.

The skill of the 18th century dry stone wallers – and the modern farmers who repair and replace the walls today - means that the stones hold together without the use of mortar or cement. Large "through" stones placed at regular intervals give stability and the top of the wall is surmounted by capping stones which help keep the worst of the weather at bay. Just like hedgerows, these dry stone walls create a shelter for bird and animal life.

Cotherstone is such a pretty dales village 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.

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).

Teesdale has a fabulous geological heritage to explore. Millions of years ago Mother Nature provided the Pennine hills with rich supplies of mineral wealth which shaped not only the landscape but also human life for many centuries. In the 18th and 19th centuries the lead-mining industry was a hugely important activity throughout the whole of the North Pennine area. Even the Romans were aware of the galena (lead-ore) supplies 2,000 years ago. Mining the lead was one of the longest running economic efforts anywhere in Europe and for 800 years the hills and moors of the Pennine hills yielded up their immense store of lead ore. Two major companies dominated the scene during the 19th century and one of these was the London Lead Company which had its northern headquarters at **Middleton-in-Teesdale** from 1815.

The approach over the River Tees leads up to the main street of Middleton. At the road junction is an elegant drinking fountain standing proudly at the corner on the right. 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.

Middleton is well worth taking a stop in. 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.

Driving out of Middleton towards Barnard Castle there is an opportunity to glimpse a stone arch down a side street leading into a model housing estate built by the London Lead Company for their most deserving employees. **New Town** had its own distinctive atmosphere and even today there is still the sense of entering something special. The mine managers, surveyors and others of a high moral standard were allowed to live in this specially created community.

A brilliant place to view the middle reaches of the River Tees is **Whistle Crag** layby between Middleton-in-Teesdale and Eggleston village and **Eggleston Hall Gardens** would make the perfect stop for the plantsman and amateur gardener alike. Four acres are given over to many rare plants and shrubs and organic fruit, vegetables and herbs are on sale. Delicious home made food is on offer at the Coach House Tearoom and there is even a well-stocked gift shop to tempt you even more.

On the B6279 frequent sightings of whitewashed farm buildings indicate that you are travelling through the **Raby Estate**. Across the fields to your left is the long stone boundary wall encircling the deer park and in a short while you arrive at the village which has long been regarded as the estate village for Raby Castle.

Staindrop village is quite simply one of the prettiest villages in County Durham. Although it is close to the edge of what was the Durham coalfield the effects of industry have not been felt in this graceful village. Georgian houses with distinctive pantile roofs face each other across a wide village green and at the top of the street St Mary's church is all one could wish for in a typical English village.

Continue through the village to enjoy a stunning view of **Raby Castle** from the roadside.

Just too exciting to resist, isn't it?

And a visit inside never disappoints. This is one of the best preserved castles in the north of England and is very much a family home lived in by the present owner Lord Barnard. It has a unique atmosphere born from the generations of people who have lived within its walls down the centuries. The appearance of the castle today is largely the result of work undertaken between 1360-90 by Ralph Neville, 2nd Baron Neville and his son, John, the 3rd Baron. Both developed Raby extensively. In 1397 another Ralph Neville was created first Earl of Westmorland and from that time onwards the family became big players in local and national warfare all through the medieval period. Their great rivals were the Percy family of Alnwick Castle – the Earls of Northumberland.

Warrior-like it may be on the outside but Raby Castle's interiors reflect more genteel times. Elegant saloons, fine furniture and the chance to see how the servants lived make this a great visitor experience. Don't miss the walled garden and the Stables Tearoom.

West Auckland and **Bishop Auckland** bring you back on to what was the old Durham coalfield although it is very difficult to see anything in the landscape today which shows that this was once an industrial area. Money has been spent on re-landscaping old pit areas and new housing has been developed. In the 19th century the two main employers in Bishop Auckland were the railways and coalmining. But the town was not just a product of the Industrial Age. The powerful and influential Prince Bishops of Durham built themselves a fortified manor house here in the 12th century which they used as a kind of country residence and hunting lodge. It was well placed being on the edge of Weardale which was their main hunting forest. Their main residence at that time was Durham Castle but when Bishop William van Mildert gave that castle to the newly established Durham University in 1832 the Bishop's permanent residence became **Auckland Castle**. And very impressive it is too. And whilst it is the centre of administration for the current Bishop of Durham it is also an important visitor attraction. Well worth a visit to see the state rooms and the richly decorated St Peter's Chapel and especially the famous paintings by Francesco Zurbarán a contemporary of Goya and El Greco. The paintings cost £124 in 1640 and came into the Bishops' possession when they were captured by pirates whilst being taken by ship to South America.

From Bishop Auckland it is an easy journey on the A689 to link up with the A1.

Sources

Oxford Companion to English Literature

Alan Myers, Myers Literary Guide – The North East

Teesdale District Council, In the Footsteps of Charles Dickens