

# *Discover* TEESDALE



## **Themed Itinerary**

## **Writers and Artists**

Our Pick 'n' Mix themed itineraries give you the flexibility to choose which attractions to visit and which themes to follow to suit your schedule and your group's interests. Don't hesitate to contact us if you need a tailor-made itinerary.

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Our itineraries include;

### **Famous Families**

More than half of the land in Teesdale is privately owned. This tour reveals secret corners and explores Teesdale's links with the Baliol, Barnard, Bowes, Morritt, Neville, Strathmore, Vane families.

### **Gardens & Geology**

Ideal for horticultural societies, garden enthusiasts and nature lovers this tour takes in both wild and cultivated landscapes - and there is an opportunity to buy plants in the old walled gardens and nurseries at Eggleston Hall.

### **Land of the Three Rivers**

The Tees, Tyne and Wear shape the landscape in the North of England. This tour takes in beautiful upper reaches of all three rivers calling in some of the areas' prettiest villages.

### **Roman Route**

Teesdale was a key point on the Roman route across the Pennines south of Hadrian's Wall. The A66 follows the original Roman Road. This tour takes in the fort and river crossing at Piercebridge and can be extended to link up with Hadrian's Wall for history and archaeology enthusiasts - or combined with retail and refreshment opportunities in villages and towns along the way.

### **Writers and Artists**

Famous visitors to Teesdale include Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and artists Cotman and Turner. This tour explores their favourite corners, the places they stayed and the views that inspired them.

**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.**

## Writers and Artists

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### Route Plan

Barnard Castle – follow the signs from the Butter Market roundabout to Bowes Museum – turn left out of the gates of the Museum and pass Barnard School on the left – 1<sup>st</sup> turn right down unclassified road to Abbey Bridge - Egglestone Abbey (view from road. Mini coach and car access only) – Rokeby Park – (Morritt Arms hotel) - A66 (west) – exit into Bowes village (coach turning area at top of village) – A67 – B6277 – Cotherstone – Romalldkirk - Middleton-in-Teesdale – B6277 – Newbiggin - Low Force/Wynch Bridge (lay by parking) – High Force – return to Middleton-in-Teesdale – B6282 - B6278 – Barnard Castle

### Coach Timings

Barnard Castle – Bowes village (via above route)	20 mins
Bowes village – Middleton-in-Teesdale	30 mins
Middleton-in-Teesdale – Low Force/Wynch Bridge	10 mins
Low Force – High Force	5 mins
High Force – Middleton-in-Teesdale	15 mins
Middleton-in-Teesdale – Barnard Castle	25 mins

### Attractions

Include one or more of the following attractions.

Barnard Castle	Full day recommended for fascinating market town and Castle managed by English Heritage Group bookings: 01833 638212 (site custodian) or 0191 2691200 (regional head office) <a href="http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/filestore/visitsevents/asp/visits/Details.asp?Property_Id=116">www.english-heritage.org.uk/filestore/visitsevents/asp/visits/Details.asp?Property_Id=116</a>
The Bowes Museum	Designated European fine art collection, Grade 1 listed building and park. 2-3 hours. Group bookings: 01833 694605 Email: <a href="mailto:jenny.wayman@bowesmuseum.org.uk">jenny.wayman@bowesmuseum.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.bowesmuseum.org.uk">www.bowesmuseum.org.uk</a>
Rokeby Hall	Stately home on the banks of the River Tees. 1 hour. Group bookings: 01833 637334
High Force	England's highest waterfall managed by Raby Estates. 45 minutes (to include walk to/from falls). Group bookings: 01833 640209 Email: <a href="mailto:teesdaleestate@rabycastle.com">teesdaleestate@rabycastle.com</a> <a href="http://www.rabycastle.com/high_force.htm">www.rabycastle.com/high_force.htm</a>
Middleton-in-Teesdale	Former lead mining company town with new visitor attraction "Meet the Middletons". 1.5-2 hours. Group bookings: 01833 641000 Email: <a href="mailto:middletonplus@compuserve.com">middletonplus@compuserve.com</a>

## Refreshments

Barnard Castle	Variety of tearooms/pubs
Thorpe Farm Peel House	Group bookings: 01833 627242 Email: info@thorpefarm.co.uk www.thorpefarm.co.uk
Morritt Arms Hotel	Group bookings: 01833 627232 Email: relax@themorritt.co.uk www.themorritt.co.uk
Middleton-in-Teesdale	Village bakers/tearoom
Teesdale Hotel	Group bookings: 01833 640264 Email: enquiries@teesdalehotel.com www.teesdalehotel.com

## Commentary

*“The environs of this place are remarkably beautiful. The Vale of the Tees everywhere abounds in the noblest and most romantic landscapes...”* (W.E.Hutchinson 18<sup>th</sup> century local historian).

The timeless beauty of Teesdale has been admired by artists and writers down the centuries and today that same beauty and tranquillity continues to give inspiration to photographers, poets, authors and painters. So let the imagination flow as you follow in the footsteps of personalities renowned for their creative talent.

**Charles Dickens** (1812-70) visited Teesdale in February 1838 and stayed at the King’s Head Hotel in **Barnard Castle** (blue plaque). In his day the whole hotel consisted of the portion to the left of the present main entrance. He was an author who was able to capture the popular imagination in a way no other author of his day was quite able to do. He came to the town not for rest and recreation but for research purposes. Together with his illustrator, Hablot Browne (known as “Phiz”) he investigated the sometimes harrowing conditions pupils experienced in cheap boarding schools of the day. It was this research which was put to much good use in his lively descriptions of Dotheboys Hall in the novel “Nicholas Nickleby”. It was research worth doing. Dickens grossed £4,500 from that novel!

Whilst staying in the town the author also visited a clockmaker’s shop owned by William Humphrey (look for the small garden area and plaque at the junction of the main street and the road leading to Bowes Museum) and thus was born a new weekly publication called “Master Humphrey’s Clock” which was intended to introduce the reading public to instalments of Dickens’ forthcoming full-length novels “The Old Curiosity Shop” and “Barnaby Rudge.”

**The Teesdale Mercury** continues a long tradition of writing in Barnard Castle. First published in 1854 it is still printed in-house. Buy a copy to catch up on local issues and news. The shop also has a range of gifts and local guidebooks.

It would be hard to match the priceless beauty of the art collection at **The Bowes Museum**. 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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. His character and reputation as a shrewd businessman was tempered by his love of paintings, fine furniture and ceramics.

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. Look for Josephine's own paintings hanging on the gallery walls.....

*..... and don't forget to check out the timings for the performance of the mechanical Silver Swan – an absolute must!*

On the approach to Abbey Bridge over the River Tees the gaunt ruins of **Egglestone Abbey** (view from road. Access for mini coaches and cars only) makes a fine subject for modern day painters and photographers. This late 12<sup>th</sup> century Premonstratensian monastic settlement was never a prosperous community – some monks complained long and hard that the land was barren. And in 1346 it didn't help to have the English army camped not far from the abbey whilst on their way to the Battle of Neville's Cross near Durham. That visit cost the monks dear and seriously depleted their already meagre resources. By the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries almost 200 years later Egglestone was the poorest house of its Order.

Shortly after crossing over Abbey Bridge the boundary wall of **Rokeby Hall and Park** come into view alongside. A very lovely Palladian style country house with a unique collection of 18<sup>th</sup> century needlework pictures and period furniture and home for 100 years, until 1905, of a painting by Valesquez called the "Rokeby Venus".

In June 1809 the Scottish writer and poet **Sir Walter Scott** stayed at the hall at the invitation of the then owner John Bacon Morritt. The family were 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 Morritt and Sir Walter had met and became friends in Edinburgh. Scott was enjoying the success of his recent works "Marmion" and "Lady of the Lake" and Morritt, himself a classics and history scholar, was keen to encourage him to write another epic poem this time featuring Teesdale which would, so Morritt hoped, help bring new fame to the dale.

It being the month of June Sir Walter experienced Teesdale in all its summer glory. He explored the nearby woods and riverbanks and gradually developed a storyline he had been thinking of for some time. "**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 overlooking the nearby River Greta to find peace and quiet to concentrate on the completion of his work.

*And the result of all this tranquillity and inspiration?*

30,000 words! And whilst “Rokeby” is not the most well-known of Scott’s poems it does make reference to many local places....

“...Staindrop, who from her sylvan bowers, Salutes proud Raby’s battled towers.....”

Not far from the junction with the A66 is **Greta Bridge** where Dickens spent his first night in Teesdale staying in the coaching inn. Greta Bridge was a staging post for the mail coach from London in the 19th century and this is where both Sir Walter Scott and Dickens would have arrived from London.

The landscape watercolourist and etcher, **John Sell Cotman**, was commissioned in 1805 to provide painting lessons to John Morrill’s wife and whilst staying at the Hall the artist took the opportunity to capture on canvas the lovely Greta Bridge. That painting is now housed in the British Museum in London.

Behind the Morrill Arms hotel is a lovely green valley leading to Brignall which inspired Sir Walter Scott’s lines

*“O Brignall banks are wild and fair, And Greta woods are green.....”(Rokeby).*

**Bowes village** brings us back to Dickens’ novel “Nicholas Nickleby”. Drive into the village. The imposing Bowes Hall stands in its own garden on the right hand side of the road. This was once a school where pupils were obliged to double up as farmhands on the nearby farm when required.

At the mini-roundabout continue straight ahead past The Ancient Unicorn pub (there is a coach turning area just beyond the end of the main street on a sharp righthand turn. Do not cross over the bridge which carries the road over the A66).

Dotheboys Hall is 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.

Bowes village is an ancient settlement. The ruins of the castle occupy a site which the Romans had identified 1,000 years earlier when they built their fort *Lavatrae*. Both Romans and Normans recognised a strong strategic position when they saw one. The ancient cross Pennine route across Stainmore could be controlled most effectively from here.

A more modern literary theme comes in the village of **Cotharstone**. This is home to a lady who found fame in the 20<sup>th</sup> century world of modern media and publicity. Until 1972 she was completely unknown outside of 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. No one, least of all the lady herself, could have anticipated what came next. Letters, presents and gifts of money came pouring in. People who had missed her name sent gifts addressed to “The Lonely Lady of the Hills near Barnard Castle....”

The name of the television programme?

*“Too Long a Winter”.*

And the name of the lady?

*Hannah Hauxwell.*

From making a farming profit of £280 in a good year Hannah’s life changed dramatically when her life story was retold in books and more television documentaries.

Some attention from the media may have been welcomed by the next poet on this route. **Richard Watson** (1833-1891) was born in Middleton-in-Teesdale at a time when the town and surrounding area was a hive of lead-mining activity. At the age of 14 he was faced with the awesome responsibility of providing for his mother and eight siblings. A good sense of humour was essential and Watson could indeed be relied upon to come up with a witty verse or two when occasion demanded it. But his real talent lay in describing the landscape he loved and in capturing the spirit of the human character. He had a natural, free flowing writing style and one which made use of the local Teesdale dialect. Eventually he moved from lead-mining to labouring. He died following an accident in a local quarry. The **“Teesdale Poet”** is buried in Middleton cemetery.

Watson followed the Methodist movement as did many of his lead-mining contemporaries. 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 01833 638272). Built in 1760 for a congregation of 200 John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was a frequent and popular preacher in the isolated communities of the Pennines.

By now you will have seen that Teesdale’s landscape never disappoints. Certainly the landscape painter **Joseph Millord William Turner** (1775-1851) never tired of the sense of space, light and atmosphere he encountered on his travels through the North Pennines. In 1797 and again in 1816 he stayed in Middleton-in-Teesdale and visited **Low** and **High Force** waterfalls and **Cauldron Snout**. He undertook long, arduous journeys and truly experienced nature in the raw. The umbrella he carried on his travels conveniently converted to a fishing rod when required.

It is possible to visit **Low Force** today and enjoy the view Turner captured on canvas so brilliantly. To do so continue past the entrance to **Bowlees Visitor Centre** on the B6277. Just a short way ahead a finger post on the left of the road points through a gateway into a field leading to Low Force and **Wynch Bridge** (300 metres). To park continue past this gateway and stop in the long lay by on the left just a little further on (parking for mini-coaches and cars only). Walk back to the finger post (*please be very aware of traffic*) and walk across the field to view **Low Force** and the **Wynch Bridge**.

The first Wynch Bridge was built in 1704 – the very year that 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.

And if you visit Low Force then surely you can't miss its big brother **High Force** (small charge) just a little further on. Lovely views of the River Tees can be seen along this route and on the far bank the largest stand of juniper bushes in England stretch along the hillside. Look out for hikers on that side of the riverbank. They are following the route of the **Pennine Way** long distance footpath. The Lake District writer Alfred Wainwright described it as "a walk of near perfection."

High Force is reached by a 600 metre woodland walk from the nearby coach/car park. This is the River Tees at its dramatic best. Plunging 21 metres to the dark pools below the river tumbles over a ledge of **Whinsill** rock. The geological story of Teesdale is bound up with the great outcrop of Whinsill a band of hard, dolerite rock which stretches from High Cup Nick in the North Pennines to the coast of Northumberland. Resistant to erosion by the ice flows the Whinsill has made its own unique contribution to the landscape of Teesdale - and its own unique contribution to the artistic legacy of the dale.

Return to **Middleton-in-Teesdale** and take the opportunity to explore the lead-mining heritage of this picturesque town. Middleton has a long history as an agricultural centre and the development of lead mines in the area resulted in an industrial centre being grafted on to a farming community. That industrial influence has left its mark in the architecture of the town. The London Lead Company built a model housing estate on the edge of the town centre. **New Town**, as it became known, had its own distinctive archway entrance to echo the local lead mine architecture. There still is very much a sense of entering something special. Only the most deserving employees of the Company were encouraged to live in New Town. People like the mine managers and surveyors. People who were hardworking, sober and of a high moral standard. "**Meet the Middletons**" is an exciting new attraction on the main street of the town which tells the social history of a local family living during the heyday of the lead-mining period.

The local shops in Middleton serve the surrounding agricultural community. The village bakery and tearoom offers fresh-bakes and preserves and an excellent Tourist Information Centre is just the place to buy those last minute guidebooks, souvenirs and postcards before returning through the poetic landscape of mid-Teesdale to arrive back in Barnard Castle.

#### Sources

Oxford Companion to English Literature

Alan Myers, Myers Literary Guide – The North East

Teesdale District Council, In the Footsteps of Charles Dickens