

The Goyt Valley

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The Goyt Valley

The Goyt Valley lies in the west of the Peak District National Park on the Derbyshire/Cheshire border, off the A5004 Whaley Bridge to Buxton road. To the south lies Derbyshire Bridge and to the north the village of Fernilee. Shining Tor (559

metres) and Cat's Tor (519 metres) flank the western side of the valley.

With its reservoirs, waterfalls, diverse landscape, rich industrial heritage and wildlife, the Goyt Valley is popular with visitors. The remains of the Errwood

estate, once owned by the Grimshawe family, include a shrine still in use as a place of contemplation. In early summer, when the rhododendrons come into flower, the woodland of the old estate is a mass of colour.

The word 'goyt' comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'gota' meaning a stream or watercourse.

Land ownership and access

United Utilities now owns much of the Goyt Valley and surrounding moorland, which is the water gathering area for the Errwood and Fernilee reservoirs. The **Forestry Commission** leases the plantations from United Utilities.

Following the coming into force of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 there is now access to most of the open moorland surrounding the valley, while a network of concessionary and public footpaths gives access to the rest of the valley.

There are six car parks (three with information boards) with spaces for around 500 cars, plus two car parks for people

with disabilities. There are public toilets with wheelchair access at Derbyshire Bridge and Bunsal Cob. Three wheelchair routes run beside the Errwood reservoir, along the track of the former Cromford and High Peak Railway and between Errwood car park and Goytscough quarry, allowing access to the riverside. There are three picnic areas but no provision for camping.

Geology

Around 326 million years ago, mud and sand were washed down to what is now the Peak District by a vast river from the north. The mud and sand sediments were deposited on the bed of the river's delta. Over millions of years the muds and sands were compressed to become layers of shale and gritstone rock. Later, movements of the Earth tilted the rocks to form a

downward fold – the Goyt syncline. Vegetation growing in the river delta around 316 million years ago formed the pockets of coal found in the valley. The lower coal measures exposed at the southern end of the valley make the area of special geological significance and contribute to its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Successive Ice Ages have shaped the exposed shales and gritstones [Geology Fact Sheet], and later still the River Goyt started to carve out the valley as we see it today. The layers of gritstones and shales reach their highest point at Shining Tor (559 metres) to the west of the Goyt Valley.

Landscape features

The landscape of the Goyt Valley is a mosaic, ranging from the heather and grasses of the moorland pastures, to the woodland and enclosed farmland of the valley, and the aquatic habitats of the Errwood and Fernilee reservoirs. This interesting mix provides nationally important, semi-natural habitats for wildlife and nature conservation. It also adds to the attraction of the area, especially for walkers.

RIVER AND RESERVOIRS

The River Goyt rises on the moorland slopes near the Cat and Fiddle Inn (515 metres above sea level). It tumbles northwards through steep rocky 'cloughs' (ravines) and is the main feeder for the Errwood and Fernilee reservoirs. The river collects tributaries at Whaley Bridge and merges with the Etherow and Tame rivers at Stockport to become the River Mersey.

PLANTATIONS

The Forestry Commission plantations cover more than 400 hectares, mainly consisting of pine, spruce and larch on exposed upper slopes and oak, beech and birch on the lower ground.

Ecology

MOORLAND

Moorland rings three sides of the Goyt Valley with heather, cotton grass, crowberry and bilberry the most common plants. Heather is dominant in the better drained areas and there are also areas of bracken, particularly in the cloughs.

Blanket bog can be found on the higher, flatter and wetter moorland where the vegetation is dominated by cottongrass with some bilberry, crowberry and bog moss (sphagnum moss).

Birds found on the moors include kestrels, buzzards, short-eared owls and golden plover. Snipe, red grouse, curlew, lapwing, skylark, meadow pipit, whinchat and ring ouzel may also be spotted. Mammals include voles, hares and foxes.

WOODLAND

Much of the coniferous woodland in the Goyt Valley was planted between 1965 and 1981, and the timber is now being harvested by the Forestry Commission. There are, however, areas of older relict woodland in some of the cloughs where native species, such as oak and birch, mix with those introduced into Britain over the centuries.

The mixed woodlands are rich in birdlife, including owls, woodpeckers, goldcrests, nuthatch, tree creepers, jays and finches. Summer visitors include tree pipits, redstarts, warblers and flycatchers. Grey squirrels and rabbits can be seen during the day, often around picnic sites, with occasional sightings of Britain's largest mammal, the red deer. Other woodland mammals, such as bats, foxes, badgers, hedgehogs and long-tailed fieldmice, are nocturnal.

Around Errwood Hall the native sessile oak can be found alongside the sweet chestnut introduced by the Romans and the European larch brought over in the 17th century. Scots pine is also present, one of very few evergreen tree species native to Britain. Subsequent planting by the Grimshawe family included the rhododendrons and azaleas which, although such a feature of the present landscape, are also a management problem to keep in check.

RESERVOIRS

Common sandpipers and other birds breed along the banks of the Errwood and Fernilee reservoirs. The noisy Canada geese and mallard ducks are the most common resident summer waterfowl.

History

Neolithic farmers (around 4,000 to 2,000 BCE) were the first to start felling trees and clearing the ground for cultivation. Farming continued to be the main use of the valley for centuries. Following the Norman Conquest in the 11th century the River Goyt lay between two vast royal hunting forests (Peak Forest and Macclesfield Forest).

Since at least the 1500s and until the early 20th century, the valley had a flourishing community. Tenanted farms, coal mines, a water mill, a railway and a gunpowder mill were all part of the built landscape. The flooding of the valley to form the Fernilee reservoir in 1938 and the Errwood reservoir in 1967 changed the area's character dramatically.

The development of coal mining in the area can be traced from the opencast workings of the 17th century, through 18th century bell pits, to later shafts in the earlier part of the 19th century. Goyt's Moss colliery near Derbyshire Bridge was extensive, providing coal for the lime burning industry at Grin Low on the outskirts of Buxton.

There were several quarries [Minerals Extraction Fact Sheet] in the valley, some of which provided wall building stone for the area while others may have provided stone for the turnpike roads. Later, stone was quarried for use in building embankments and trackside walls on the Cromford and High Peak Railway.

Near Goytscough quarry are the few remains of a paint mill operating in the 19th century, where a water-powered wheel crushed barites (mined locally) to a powder, which was used in the manufacture of paint.

The Chilworth gunpowder factory, which started operation in the early 1800s, now lies under the waters of Fernilee reservoir. A serious explosion in 1909 killed three men. The factory was still very active during the First World War (1914-1918), but closed in 1920.

At the height of activity in the 19th century, the population of the Goyt Valley supported about 15 farms, mainly stocked with sheep but also some herds of Shorthorn cattle. The Derbyshire Gritstone sheep, one of the oldest native breeds, was commonly known as the Dale O'Goyt in the past, indicating that it may well have originated in this part of the Peak District. An increased demand for drinking water in the early

20th century led Stockport Corporation Waterworks to acquire the Goyt Valley to build two reservoirs. In the 1930s the farms and houses, including Errwood Hall, were demolished in order to provide an uncontaminated water gathering area.

Fernilee reservoir was completed in 1938. It cost about £480,000 to build and holds 4,940 million litres. Errwood was completed in 1967. It cost £1.5 million and holds 4,215 million litres.

ERRWOOD HALL

The grounds and ruins of the former Errwood Hall lie to the west of Errwood reservoir. Built in the 1830s by Samuel Grimshawe, a successful Manchester businessman, Errwood Hall was once a solid Victorian mansion where the Grimshawe family, devout Catholics, lived and entertained in style. The surrounding estate included a school, a coal mine, several farms and the hamlet of Goyt's Bridge. Many rhododendrons and azaleas were planted in the grounds. The last member of the family to live at the hall was Mary Gosselin, Samuel Grimshawe's grand-daughter. After her death in 1930 the hall was used briefly as a youth hostel before being demolished shortly before the

Fernilee reservoir was built in 1938. A tiny shrine built by the Grimshawe's in memory of Miss Dolores de Bergrin, a Spanish aristocrat who taught at the estate school but who died on a visit to Lourdes, remains

open for quiet contemplation and prayer. Visitors can also see the family cemetery, on a small hilltop behind the ruins of the hall where members of the Grimshawe family and their servants are buried.

Children's author Alan Garner used Errwood Hall as the location of the climax in his fantasy adventure *The Moon of Gomrath*.

Land use

FARMING

Sheep farming is still the most common form of agriculture in the valley, although enclosed farmland now occupies only the lower land around the Fernilee reservoir. The hardy hill sheep graze the large areas of moorland throughout the valley in all weathers and contribute to the shaping of the moorland landscape.

RESERVOIRS

The two reservoirs supply an average of 32-36 million litres of water a day to the Stockport region. A **fly fishing club**, a **sailing club** and a **canoeing club** use Errwood reservoir; the sailing club has a permanent clubhouse on the eastern shoreline. Errwood Reservoir is stocked with rainbow trout for fly fishing and also supports a population of wild brown trout. There is no fishing on Fernilee Reservoir.

WOODLAND

The Forestry Commission manages the plantations for commercial timber production, for wildlife conservation and for recreation.

Routeways and transport

PACKHORSE ROUTES AND TURNPIKES

Medieval packhorse tracks and hollow-ways (sunken lanes) criss-cross the area and show its past significance as a trade route.

Before surfaced roads, packhorse trains, led by 'jaggers', were the main form of transport for valuable goods such as salt. One packhorse route traversed over the hills from Cheshire via Pym Chair, across the River Goyt, over a packhorse bridge at Wildmoorstone Brook and on to Buxton. There is a local legend that Pym, a notorious

highwayman, used to watch the route from Pym Chair, ambush the jaggers and steal their goods. The old packhorse bridge was dismantled when the reservoirs were built and rebuilt over the river at Goytsclough quarry. It is now known as Goyt's Bridge.

The old 1759 Macclesfield to Buxton turnpike road passed behind the Cat and Fiddle Inn and then followed the road down to Derbyshire Bridge and along the Old Macclesfield Road to Buxton. The present road, the A537, was built in 1823.

RAILWAY

In 1830 the Cromford and High Peak Railway was built to link the Peak Forest Canal at Whaley Bridge with the Cromford Canal at Matlock. Stationary steam engines were used to haul trains up the steep Bunsal Incline. Following a fatal accident in 1877 passenger services were ended and this part of the line closed in 1892.

Management and conservation

MOORLAND

Much of the moorland and the cloughs that cut across it have been designated an SSSI in recognition of its national importance for upland heath and blanket bog habitats and for upland breeding bird species. The designation helps to protect the habitat and bird species such as red grouse, curlew, lapwing, snipe, golden plover, merlin and short-eared owl.

Human influence is still shaping the moorland of the Goyt Valley. Sheep graze the moors and maintain the shrubby vegetation. Heather is burned or cut in rotation to encourage new

growth which provides food for both sheep and red grouse.

Between 2005 and 2010, under its Sustainable Catchment Management Programme, United Utilities has been carrying out moorland restoration work to benefit water quality and wildlife. This includes blocking artificial drainage ditches (grips), bracken control and heather cutting.

WOODLAND

Since 1963, the Forestry Commission has planted over 400 hectares of trees, mainly consisting of pine, spruce and larch on exposed upper slopes and oak, beech and birch on the lower ground. The management aim is commercial timber production, together with conservation of wildlife and the provision of recreation opportunities.

The Forestry Commission is restoring moorland edge habitat with new native woodland, in conjunction with United Utilities and the Peak District National Park Authority.

Recreation and tourism

The Goyt Valley is very popular with walkers, cyclists, horse riders, anglers and sailing enthusiasts. Many people drive through the valley to simply enjoy the scenery and maybe stop for a picnic. Recreational activities have to take account of the area's special qualities. Off-road vehicle use, for example, is not a suitable activity, with an incident in 2005 resulting in damage to vegetation.

A Peak District National Park ranger is assisted at the

weekends by part-time volunteer patrol rangers. They work with local farmers, landowners and visitors.

The Goyt has been a popular area for visitors since Victorian times, but growing car ownership since the 1970s has increased the pressure on the valley, particularly around Errwood reservoir and Derbyshire Bridge.

The approach roads to the valley are steep, narrow and difficult for coaches, and there is no coach parking. A traffic [Traffic Fact Sheet] management scheme was introduced in 1970. This closes the section of road between The Street car park and Derbyshire Bridge

to vehicles (except emergency vehicles) on Sundays and bank holiday Mondays between 10.30 am and 5.30 pm from 1 May to 30 September. On other days a one-way system is in operation, with only southbound traffic allowed between Errwood Hall car park and Derbyshire Bridge.

The Upper Goyt Liaison Group, comprising representatives from the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission and United Utilities, is responsible for day-to-day management issues. It works in partnership with other organisations to help maintain the balance between agriculture, forestry, water supply, nature conservation and recreation.

Further information

- **Grimshawe family website**
- **Goyt Valley online**
- **Landscape Character Assessment, Dark Peak Western Fringe**
- The South-West Peak: History of the Landscape, Eric Wood, Landmark, 2007.
- Barnatt, J. and Leach, J. (1997) The Goyt's Moss Colliery, Buxton, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal 117, pp. 56-80.
- The Peak District: Landscapes Through Time, John Barnatt and Ken Smith, Windgather Press, June 2004.