

# BEESTON TOR & ILAM

PILGRIMS, CISTERCIANS AND A PLAGUE OF BOILS

**T**owering over the often dry confluence of the Manifold and Hamps rivers, the cave-studded limestone cliff at Beeston Tor was a popular spot with Edwardian trippers. The old railway refreshment room still survives but is unused. Rock climbers from those Edwardian days to the present have used the Tor as a valued climbing ground. Pilgrims of another kind visit Ilam village.

## High life

The caves on Beeston Tor have been used by both humans and animals for at least 50,000 years; Lynx Cave, high up on the cliff-face was rich in remains of this large cat. Amongst the scree and fallen rocks is evidence of far earlier residents of the area - the fossils of crinoids and brachiopods from a Palaeozoic sea 330 million years ago.

In 1924 Rev. G.H. Wilson excavated the long, narrow St Bertram's Cave, looking for evidence of prehistoric use but finding instead a hoard of 49 Saxon coins, silver brooches and gold rings.

*There is no public access along the riverbed to the Tor. The caves are dangerous and should not be entered.*

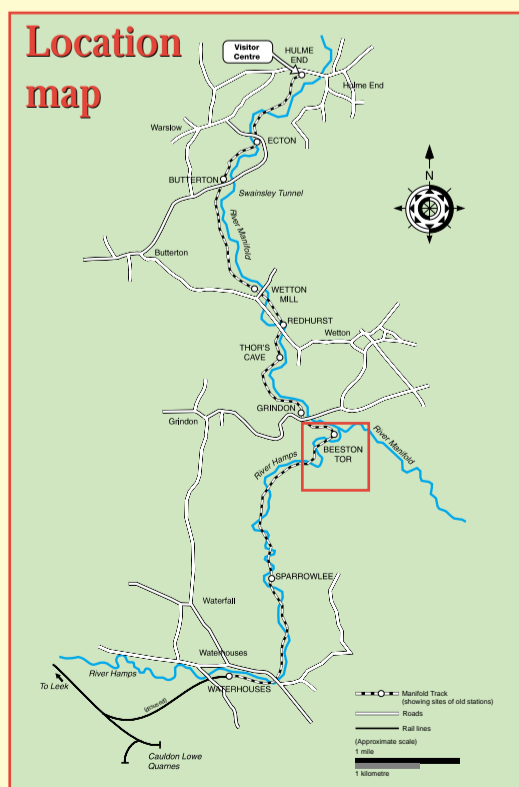
## St Bertram

Bertram, Prince of Mercia, lost his Irish Princess wife and young family to wolves in a nearby wood. As penance for his loss he renounced his birthright and became a hermit. A cave on Beeston Tor was one of his homes. His devotion to prayer and meditation made him a role model for many, his tomb in Ilam Church became a place of pilgrimage, miraculous cures attributed here leading to his Canonisation.



### St Bertram's Tomb

*Infirm pilgrims in search of a cure used to crawl through gaps in the tomb or lie on top of it; modern day pilgrims leave written prayers of supplication.*



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## Ilam

In the 1830s the manufacturing and shipping magnate Jesse Watts-Russell built a massive Gothic mansion on the site of a medieval village; the estate workers were housed in the adjoining "model" village. The Hall was largely demolished in the 1930s before the philanthropic Sir Robert McDougall bought the estate for the National Trust on condition that the remaining part of the Hall became a Youth Hostel. Of the medieval village only the much-rebuilt church and "Ridge & Furrow" field system survive, both features are in the Country Park.



*Ridge and furrow fields in winter (Home Farm, Ilam).*

## Boiling waters



The waters of the Manifold resurface at "boil holes" in Ilam Country Park, about 23 hours after disappearing down swallets near Wetton Mill; the Hamps similarly re-appears nearby after its underground meanderings from Waterhouses.



Former Light Railway, Manifold Valley

## Then and now

*A view of Beeston Tor in the days of the Railway (above), with much the same view today (right) taken from the platform. Note the old refreshment room.*



## Taming the land

### Strip Lynchets



On the plateau above Thor's Cave Neolithic Man settled tracts of land, commencing the clearance of the woodland which once blanketed the White Peak 6000 years ago. Simple stock rearing and crop growing sustained a growing population through the Roman period and into Saxon times. Strip Lynchets - narrow cultivation terraces along steep valley sides, such as at Throwley, above Ilam - suggest that all easily available land was under cultivation and such steep terraces had to be farmed to feed a rising population; they date from around 1000 to 1200AD.

### White Gold

The raising of sheep for their wool was a mainstay of England's economy from the Twelfth Century onwards, such "White Gold" earning fortunes for the Treasury, landowners and the great monastic Houses. The place name "Grange" such as Musden Grange, near Ilam, identifies the site of a monastic farm.

### Field Patterns

During the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries a falling population settled in villages on the best plateau land. Farming methods meant that cultivation was best carried out in long, narrow strips divided by low ridges of earth. This Ridge and Furrow pattern can still be seen in Ilam Park. In the long term, consolidation of family strips into wider bands led to the walling of family property, resulting in the long, narrow fields still seen today around Butterton, Calton and other White Peak villages.

### Napoleon

The vast area of open land remaining between villages was "improved" in stages in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century through Enclosure Acts passed by Parliament, by which land was parcelled into more manageable units, passing into the control of gentleman and yeoman farmers. It is from this time that many of the hundreds of miles of the characteristic stone walls date, some built by french prisoners of war during the Napoleonic Wars.



*Typical dry stone walls.*

*Below: An old railway poster shows a train near Beeston Tor.*



THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN PART FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY European Regional Development Fund

MANIFOLD VALLEY



VISITOR CENTRE

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