

THE MANIFOLD & HAMPS VALLEYS

"All this County is hollow, Could you strike it with a gigantic hammer it would boom like a drum, or possibly cave in altogether." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Rivers of Contrast

The Hamps and Manifold rise within a few miles of each other on the high, gritstone Morridge Edge between Leek and Buxton.

They then take divergent courses, dissecting deep valleys; the Hamps flows south, then east to join the White Peak's limestone in the south-west. The Manifold - the name a corrupted form of "many fold", describing its meandering course - runs east then south, to meet the limestone at its north-western extreme.

Disappearing Act

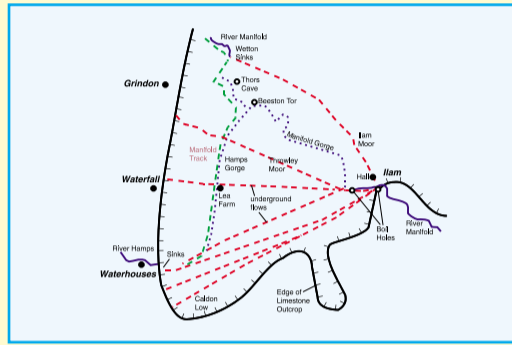
The surface gorges have little in common with today's Manifold and Hamps rivers. Only in very wet weather is the water table high enough to allow surface water to flow through the gorges. Most of the time the rivers, flowing from impervious gritstones and shales, plunge underground when they reach the limestone. Experiments using dyes, combined with explorations by cave divers, suggest that the water percolates well over 200 feet (60 metres) below the surface before the water table is reached, then flows along tunnels and joints to eventually re-emerge at the boil holes in Ilam Park, where gritstone and shales are once again met. Cave divers have reached a depth of 53.3 metres (175 feet) below Ilam Hall itself following one such underground course.

'...Gruyere Cheese...'

Conan Doyle's quote in the heading neatly sums up the character of much of the White Peak's geology, a body of rock pitted by tunnels, caverns and caves both natural and manmade. The whole has been likened to a Gruyere Cheese!



Dry river bed by Yellersley Tor near Darfar Bridge



Underground rivers flow at odds with surface features. Shown here are the presumed flows beneath the surface, based on 20 years study to 1995.

Village Lore

The settlements on the limestone plateau are not static but have changed with fortune and circumstance over the centuries. Wetton, for example, is of Middle Ages foundation, but may be a replacement for a village once standing further to the south - the remains of a Romano-British village, complete with surfaced street, were excavated in the Nineteenth Century. Other villages shrank in size as a result of the Great Plague or changes in land ownership. Some even gained population as the Cistercian monks cleared their lands of peasant farmers.

Warslow is largely the creation of one family, the Harpur Crewes', who built the Hall as a shooting lodge in the Nineteenth Century and developed the ancient hamlet as an Estate Village.

Their family seat was the baroque Calke Abbey, built in 1703 near Derby. Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe died in 1924, the house was then mothballed, passing to the National Trust in the 1980s. It is known as "The House that time forgot" as it remains essentially unchanged since then, with decoration and furnishings surviving from previous centuries.



The Red Fox - perhaps the most familiar of the valley's secretive animals.

Rivers of Green

From May to August the dry riverbeds are swamped by a vivid green swathe of enormous heart-shaped leaves up to 3 feet (1 metre) across. These are Butterbur, or wild rhubarb (*note that this is poisonous*). The flowers, which appear in spring before the leaves, are remarkable, tall stems 2 feet (60cm) high topped by discs of tiny purple or white florets arranged like a giant eye-lash brush. Amazingly they belong to the same general family of wildflowers (*Compositae*) as dandelions and thistles.



Butterbur

