

THOR'S CAVE

CULTS, CAVE BEARS AND CRANESBILLS

Thunder and Lightning

Locals in the Dark Ages named the cave after the Norse god of thunder. The arrangement of the cavern mouth, fissures and smaller entrances means that strong winds occasionally moan and boom like thunder through the openings. Redhurst Cave - or Old Hannah's Hole - is rumoured to emit thunderous roars, flashes of lightning and clouds of steam! Where the wind now blows water once flowed; Thor's Cave was formed by an underground river millions of years ago.

Pagan Practices

In the mid 1920s the cave took centre-stage in the re-enactment of Druidical ceremonies initiated by the eccentric Ralph de Tunstall Sneyd, Bard and self-styled Knight of the Round Table. Held in a mixture of Sanskrit, Welsh, English and Latin, these celebrations of "The Bardic Circle of the Imperishable Sacred Land" attracted crowds of up to 2,000, an unexpected boost for the railway's finances.

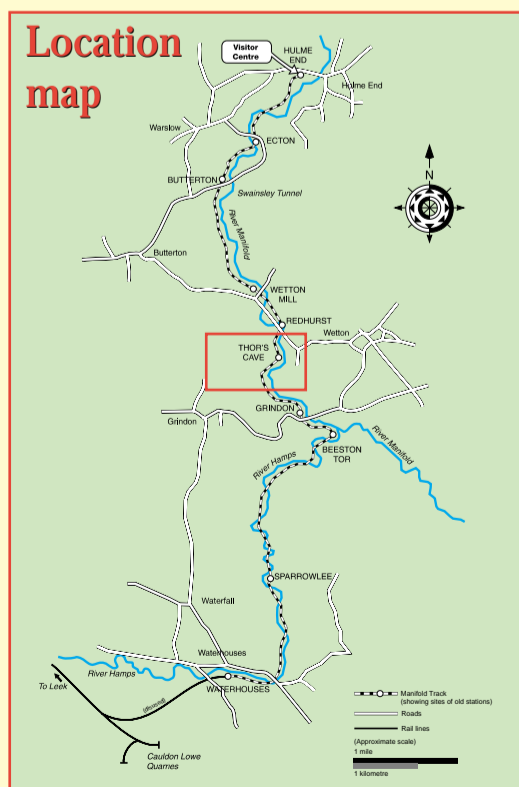
A Mirror on the Past

Many of the Valley's caves were excavated in the 1850s by Thomas Bateman and in the 1930s by Rev. G.H.Wilson, revealing multiple use during the past 50,000 years. Finds included both human and animal bones, flint implements, simple jewellery and pottery. Animal bones included those from long extinct species of cave bear, giant deer, woolly rhinoceros and cave lion.



Thor's Cave yielded dolphin bones, thought to be associated with religious cults 3,000 years ago.

This is the only cave in the Valley which is considered to be relatively safe enough to enter. Do not remove anything from it.



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Low Life

A common name given to hilltops all over the White Peak is "Low", from the Scandinavian "H'Law" meaning hill, mound or burial. Bateman excavated many burial mounds, most dating from 4000 - 1000 BC, the New Stone and Bronze Ages. In these he found urns, bones and intricate jewellery. The most spectacular was Long Low, near Stanshope, which held the remains of 13 burials in the aptly named tumulus which is 220 yards (200 metres) long (a public footpath runs nearby, but the Low is on private ground).



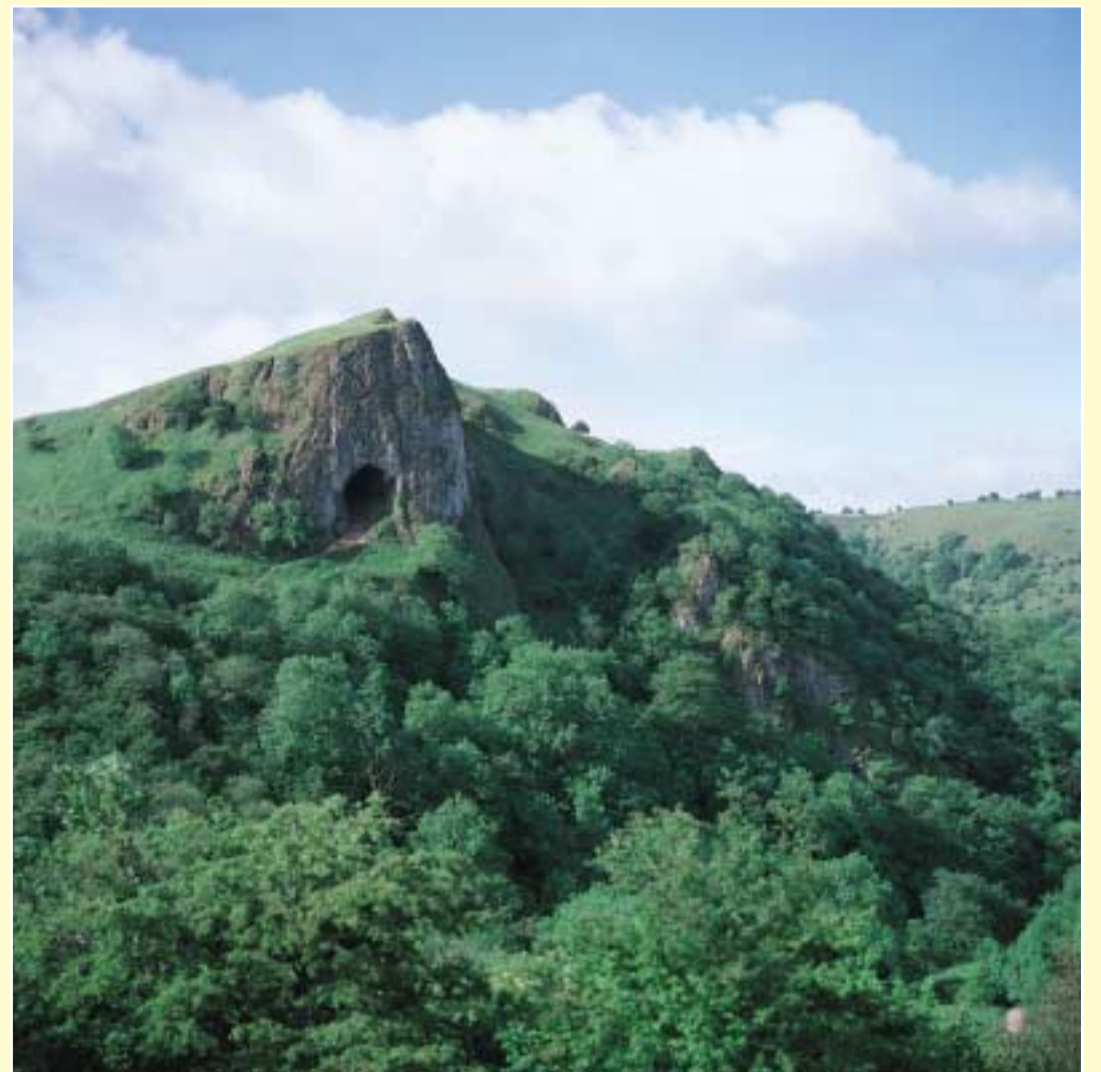
Long Low...fairies are said to dance here every Christmas Eve!



Meadowsweet - used in past centuries to stuff pillows.



Lady's Bedstraw - once harvested annually to be used in mattresses.



Thor's Cave

BUTTERFLIES OF THE DALES



Red Admiral Butterfly

The rich flora of the area attracts a good variety of butterflies and moths. The Red Admiral is commonly seen, particularly later in the summer. With a wingspan of up to 7cms it lays its eggs on nettles, the food plant of its caterpillar. The adults feed on the nectar of a wide variety of wildflowers and on the rotting fruits of crab apples and blackberries. Other commonly seen butterflies are Peacocks, Tortoiseshells, Orange Tips and Meadow Browns.

The Manifold in Bloom

Spring sees great banks of the spindly white blooms of Garlic Mustard (Jack-by-the-Hedge) whilst on the grassy slopes above the Trail are Mountain Pansy, its yellow and purple flowers out throughout the summer, and widespread displays of Dog Rose and yellow Rock Rose.

Midsummer brings swathes of Meadow Cranesbill, its distinctive blue flowers much taller than the thick grasses which are themselves laced with Tufted Vetch. At a lower level are the "bottle-brush" yellow flowers of Lady's Bedstraw.

The Common Spotted Orchid (the leaves are spotted) flowers in patches in July and August, whilst the bright pinks and reds of Herb Robert, Red Campion and Shining Cranesbill offer a contrast to these pastel blooms in the woodlands. Another unusual plant is Wood Avens, once used to flavour beer!

Taller flowers include Meadowsweet, Melancholy Thistle and, tallest of all, the metre-high Giant Bellflower, with great spikes of blue flowers. On the steep cliffs and screes grow the rare Jacob's Ladder, Alpine Pennycress and Mossy Saxifrage.



Meadow Cranesbill



The Stoat hunts in the flower-rich undergrowth, preying on the valley's rabbits, voles and mice...even occasionally raiding birds nests.

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MANIFOLD VALLEY



VISITOR CENTRE

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