

A Guide to Selected Archaeological Sites in the Ennerdale Valley



Ennerdale is one of England's wildest valleys and is, today, home to just a handful of people. However over the past 4000 years Ennerdale has been shaped by the ebb and flow of people living and working in the valley.

The archaeology of Ennerdale sets it apart from other Lakeland valleys because of the diversity, complexity, and survival of its archaeological remains. It holds the most impressive collection of valley bottom Bronze Age (2000 BC to 800 BC) and domestic mediaeval (AD 410 to AD1600) archaeology in the Lake District

Welcome.

This leaflet provides a simple guide to some of the most impressive archaeological sites in Ennerdale. These sites are regularly maintained to ensure they remain visible and accessible.



1) Smithy Beck Bloomery is a relict of the medieval iron industry. It lies between the forest road and the lake just east of Smithy Beck bridge and is associated with enclosures and hollow ways, leading up Smithy Beck. Bloomeries were iron smelting furnaces, fuelled by charcoal, which produced wrought iron. The smelting process involved the heating of iron ore to remove iron oxide and other impurities to leave a single grapefruit sized lump of metallic iron known as a 'bloom'. The bloomery was constructed here to take advantage of the extensive native woodlands that existed in the valley centuries before Ennerdale was planted with conifers.



2) Gillerthwaite Longhouse is part of a group of 11 medieval houses, with associated cultivation terraces and stock pounds, which extend in a band up the slope from the valley floor. The monuments reflect a sizeable, agricultural community that once lived in the valley some 600 years ago. You can see one of the best houses by climbing over the stile approximately 50m east of the cattle grid. The house sits on a natural terrace and appears to have two opposing gaps on its longest that formed a 'cross passage', suggesting a domestic function. The house appears to be surrounded by a bank and ditch that would have excluded grazing animals and kept provisions safe. On top of the bank there may have been a wooden fence which would have been used to cantilever roof timbers across the central room. The roof may have been covered with branches and then heather or bracken.



3) Smithy Beck Long Houses are located along the upper section of Smithy Beck. A number of these structures are 'double walled', a design unusual in the Lake District. These structures were probably the homes of the iron miners working at Clewes Gill or those involved in the smelting operation down by the lake. The

Wild Ennerdale



houses are located east of where the forest road crosses Smithy Beck. A path leads from the forest road past the houses along the edge of the forest up to Clewes Gill.



The settlement is thought to have been occupied during the Iron Age, over 2000 years ago. The interior is likely to have contained round houses and animal pounds. The settlement is associated with a cairnfield – a term used to describe an area of ground that had been cleared of stone to improve it for cultivator or grazing.



4) River Liza Settlement is a sub-circular enclosed settlement that straddles the River Liza footpath just west of the Low Beck footbridge

5) Great Cove Shielings provide the more experienced walker with a reason to explore away from the main path on route to Haycock and the southern Ennerdale ridge. This group of rectangular structures and associated stock shelters is located on the side of the mountain just below Little Gowder Crag. It is extremely remote and was almost certainly a 'shieling' – a term used to describe a seasonally occupied upland settlement. Shielings were once a common feature in the hills and mountains. These settlements were situated in areas of upland pasture where farmers and their families lived during the summer in order to watch over their grazing animals. Most shielings had fallen out of use by 1750.

