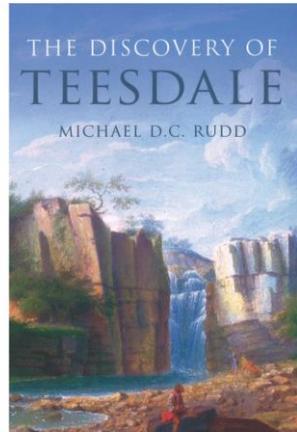


The Discovery of Teesdale by Michael D.C. Rudd



Teesdale today is renowned for its outstanding natural beauty. Yet in times gone by bleak descriptions hardly drew the visitors. That was until a tour account by two local solicitors, an agriculturist and tax officer changed people's minds. Famous writers and poets began to visit. Artists also flocked to the area including John Sell Cotman and J.M.W. Turner who depicted the natural wonders of Teesdale and in turn helped to change popular perception too. The Geologist Adam Sedgewick studied the Great Win Sill, local lead mining and smelting which later became tourist attractions in their own right.

It turns out that one of Teesdale's many claims to fame is that it is immortalised in what this book claims is 'the first detailed descriptions of actual wild scenery to appear in a novel'. Somewhat unflatteringly, the novelist in question, Thomas Amory, advised his readers in 'The Life of John Buncler' in 1756 to 'wander over this wild and romantic part of our world, at the hazard of your neck, and the danger of being starved'. On the other hand, this was the kind of scenery that was appealing to seekers of the Picturesque - just ten years earlier George Lambert made his beautiful picture in pastels, 'The Falls of the Tees, Durham' and this is reproduced in the book in colour.

As well as a chapter on local artists and poets, there is a survey of the work of Botanists in the area – by 1798 over 150 rare plants had been found in Teesdale. The plant-hunting Quaker Backhouses had a tour of Teesdale in the summer of 1844, taking the train from York to Darlington, then Bishop Auckland to Crook. They walked for 27 miles and spent the night at the High Force Inn. They were responsible for the discovery on this trip of the Teesdale Sandwort.

There follow several more chapters detailing various tours made by various famous names. The most notable and influential perhaps was Walter Scott and his poem inspired by the region, 'Rokeby' is extensively quoted. Eventually we arrive at 'The Nineteenth Century and the Railways', which later its development was obviously crucial for tourism. Barnard Castle was connected to the main London line in 1856. By 1882 there was a whole network (run by the North Eastern Railway Company), as the South Durham and Lancashire Union Railway had extended a line westwards to Kirkby Stephen and the Tees Valley Railway Company had built a line opening up the upper dale, Lartington to Middleton-in-Teesdale.

We come up to the present day (2007) with a final chapter on Teesdale: European and Global Geopark. By this stage, visitor numbers were at 40,000 walking the High Force section of the Pennine Way, 70, 000 using each of the car parks at Cow Green and Bowlees and the Bowes Museum receiving 120,000 visitors per year. Television made a heroine of Hannah Hauxwell in the 1970's, showing her struggle to farm at the remote Low Birk Hatt in Baldersdale. The 'Geopark' park concept concerns itself with the interpretation of the geological heritage and had UNESCO backing.

So if you are seeking a deeper understanding of Teesdale, this wonderfully illustrated account of the region's discovery will enchant anyone with an interest in landscape history as well as those looking to know the Teesdale of today.