

Proposed field trip to the Lake District iron working sites - 2018

Preliminary report

This report is intended as a guide to what is possible to see in the southern part of the Lake District. It gives details of the sites, access and amenities. It is based on two day visits to the area and it is intended to make at least one more. However, we hope it shows the wealth and range of sites to what could be a very fruitful and enjoyable field trip in 2018

Backbarrow

The furnace was originally built in 1711 but was rebuilt 1770 and coke did not replace charcoal until 1921. The works finally closed in 1966. One of the major furnace, and associated processes, sites in the southern lakes.

The site is currently a building site and closed to visitors - the work is being carried out by Barnfield Construction (01282 442300). A number of houses have been built alongside the works. However, there were workmen carrying out restoration work on the historic buildings. We managed to find the site manager who told us that work should be completed by the end of the year and that it was intended to make the site accessible to the public.

The site itself is on either side of the road. The main buildings, on the east side, are the furnace and associated buildings. On the west are the remains of ancillary buildings, including a charcoal store. These are largely inaccessible due, in part, to the undergrowth but we could see no way to see them in any detail due also to the proximity of a railway line.

Access: Very good once work completed

Parking: Parking in hotel car park - 3 minutes from site



Backbarrow

From top to bottom:

The furnace

Ancillary buildings

Trackway

Remains of charcoal store

Lowwood

Lowwood was originally an iron working site but was converted in the 19th century to a gunpowder works. Almost all the buildings are still standing but we could see no trace of any evidence of iron working. It has been taken over for housing and the main buildings are now a business park. The people were very helpful but knew nothing of the iron works. It is an impressive site and worth perhaps a very short stop.

Access: Very good

Parking: Parking next to site



Lowwood



Bigland Dock and Crane House Quay

Close to Lowwood are the remains of the quays used for the transportation of both raw materials and finished products to and from the area. However, despite a walk along the river, we could not find anything and we will make another recce if/when we can get more details.

Newland

Originally built in 1746, this furnace was rebuilt in 1770; a forge added in 1783 and a rolling mill in 1799. It is another of the major iron sites in the area and there is plenty to see .

The buildings are largely preserved but closed when we visited - access is via David Robson (01229 587153). Some restoration work was underway. We met the owner of the adjacent coal supply business, Mr McDermott (01229 585543 or 079794 13106). He runs his business using the charcoal storage sheds which are very impressive and easily accessible. There are also several ruined buildings on nearby private land including the remains of a rolling mill and a blacking house

I have contacted David Robson (jnr) who saw no problems with arranging a visit and tour at an acceptable date next year. Also said there were some associated mines nearby to which access/a tour could be arranged.

Access: Very good

Parking: Parking for 3 or 4 cars beside the furnace

Although access is easy, the small road leading to it is hard to find as the main road is quite busy and the turning almost unmarked.



Newland



Newland wheel pit



*Newland.
Top and left: Charcoal store
Bottom: Rolling mill*



Duddon

The blast furnace at Duddon, built in 1737-8, is one of the best preserved in the country and is one of the highlights of the Lake District iron sites.

Unfortunately, the site has recently suffered subsidence and is closed at the present time. However the Lake District National Park, hopes to carry out work this year and expects the site to be open by April 2018. The site is, however, very largely visible from the public footpath that runs beside it.

Access: Very easy

Vehicle access: Car parking for 6-8 cars very close to the site

Right: the furnace

Below middle: The iron ore store

Bottom left: the charcoal store under restoration

Bottom right: The blowing arch



Iron mines

There are a number of iron mines just to the south - between Ulverstone and Barrow which we tried to investigate without success. However, there is a study group who we will contact (also see comments under Newland above).



Mine/quarry?

Nibthwaite

Built in 1755, the furnace quickly closed but the forge survived until 1840. The furnace became a bobbin mill and later was used for a number of uses.

David Cranstone excavated the site in the 1980s and found the remains of the furnace intact under the current building. The nearby charcoal store has been converted for residential use and is a holiday let.

Access: Good

Parking: Parking for 3-4 cars next to buildings.

The excavation is accessible with the permission of the current owner who uses it as second home. We spoke to the residents of one of the nearby houses who agreed to get the current owner to contact us to see if access would be possible.



*Nibthwaite.
Top: The furnace is under the garage to the left.
Bottom: Charcoal store*

Stoney Hazel Forge

First documented in 1664-5, a forge was probably built in about 1718 and was abandoned around 1743.

This very evocative, but very overgrown, site, set in woodlands, contains the remains of a bloomforge and associated buildings. Walls survive to a few feet (about a metre) and the position of waterwheels and the anvil can be seen.

Access: The site is on public land but involves considerable scrambling.

Vehicle access: Parking for several cars near the church some 5 minutes walk

Extras: Grave of Arthur Ransome in churchyard



*Stoney Hazel
Above: Forge
Left: Site of waterwheels*

Cunsey forge

First mentioned in 1623, Cunsey forge was dismantled in 1760 and demolished in 1800. Rescue excavation in 2003 revealed the remains of the site on the side of the Ciunsey Beck.

Although little remains of the forge itself, there are the remains of the pond and water system including the probable site of the wheelpit.

Access: Access is a 10 minute walk from the road along a well-maintained path

Vehicle access: There is a small parking space for 3-4 cars



*Cunsey forge
This is a very intriguing
site with many
difficult to interpret
features.*



Muncaster Head bloomforge

Probably built around 1636, the site was identified in the 1920s and excavated in 1967-8. There is some confusion as to its dating and a possibility that it might be Roman

Obtaining detailed location information for this site proved somewhat difficult but we visited what we think is the site. Unfortunately what is visible today is just a few bumps in a field.

As the site is some distance from the main iron area in the southern lakes and there is little to see, we wonder whether it is worth visiting.



Muncaster Head?

Wilson House, Lindale in Cartmel

Isaac Wilkinson, father of 'Iron Mad' John Wilkinson and often in his son's shadow was, however, an innovator in his own right. He worked at Backbarrow and lived at Wilson House just outside Lindale in Cartmel.

Access: Can be seen, just, from the road.
Vehicle access: Limited parking on busy road



Wilson House

John Wilkinson Memorial

John Wilkinson built his own house, Castlehead, in Lindale in Cartmel and was buried there. His grave was marked by this amazing 20 ton cast-iron obelisk which has since been moved to the side of the road in Lindale

Access: Easy

Vehicle access: Ample parking across the road



Wilkinson Memorial, Lindale

Amenities - accommodation, food, etc

The obvious place to stay is Castlehead, the Field Study Centre in Lindale - the former residence of John Wilkinson.

<http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/castlehead.aspx>

An initial enquiry indicates that this is very possible. Costs for 3 nights (Friday - Monday) would be in the region of £125 per person.

There is the Whitewater Hotel with food/bar at Backbarrow - a possible lunch stop though probably expensive

<http://www.whitewater-hotel.co.uk/>

Kay Smith and Ruth Brown
July 2017



*Above: Castlehead
Field Study Centre,
Lindale*

*Below left: Ar-
thur Ransome's
grave and Rusland
church*

*Below right: Water
course at Backbar-
row*

