

DISCOVER: THE NORTH PENNINES

Land of waterfalls and wildflowers

The three mighty rivers of South Tyne, Wear and Tees all arise in the high moorlands of Cumbria. Walk the glacial valleys, plunging cascades, burbling streams and bloom-filled meadows of these North Pennines uplands with **Susie White**

After starting as a trickle on the heather-covered North Pennine fells, in the ancient Teesdale woodlands, the River Tees careers over the Whin Sill, plunging 21 metres into the pool below. View spectacular High Force waterfall from the Pennine Way trail



It is the sounds that are particularly soothing. The river tumbling over small falls, resonating bell-like into pools, tinkling quietly in smoother flows.

Lying here on this summer's day, lulled by the scent of thyme in sheep-cropped turf, I watch a grey wagtail bob-bobbing its way across the rocks. On the opposite bank, a vast spread of mountain pansies in every shade of blue and purple. Light dances across the surface of this, the East Allen river.

Allendale means 'valley of the shining water'. It's a name that could be used to describe any of the North Pennine dales. These lovely uplands are threaded through by shining waters that make their way down from the high fells. Yet the three famous rivers of South Tyne, Wear and Tees, beginning as striplings in the wild boggy ground of Cross Fell, will eventually issue into the North Sea among cities and industry. They see many contrasts on their journey.

Cross Fell is on the west side of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Designated in 1988 for its moorland scenery, this is one of the most undiscovered areas of England. You can walk all day and hardly see anyone. Peaceful and unspoilt,



TOP The Rivers East and West Allen meet near Whitfield to form the River Allen in Northumberland

ABOVE The River West Allen begins its journey on Coalcleugh Moor in the North Pennines AONB

and with less intensive agriculture, it's a landscape abounding with rare flowers and bird and animal life.

It was not always this way. For centuries, the area was heavily quarried for stone and mined for coal and minerals, such as lead, fluorspar and zinc. At the peak of the lead-mining industry, twice as many people lived here than now. **Coalcleugh**, said to be the highest hamlet in England, had a population

Photos: Getty, Alamy



of over 200; now there's just a scattering of remote houses. The hardships of mining life, working at 533 metres up and through harsh winters, are recorded in the place names: Shivery Hill, Roughside and Scum Hill.

It was the geology of this area that made it such a rich place to plunder. The sequences of rocks – limestone, shale, sandstone, coal and limestone – provided materials to quarry for building and industry. Valleys

that were carved out by glaciers and rivers became sheltered places for settlement and farming. The erosive action of rivers revealed great mineral wealth. This process was simulated in 'hushing' – damming then releasing streams so the torrent excavated the mineral veins. The evidence is particularly noticeable on a summer evening, picked out by the deepening shadows.

The most spectacular geological formation is the deep chasm of High Cup Nick. On its upper sides are columns of dolerite, part of the Whin Sill, a hard volcanic

rock that squeezed up through sedimentary layers as molten magma. Below these dizzying sides, the vast U-shaped glaciated valley drops away, offering incredible views out to the west. It's a full day's circular walk to High Cup Nick from Teesdale, passing by the roaring waterfall of Cauldron Snout and by Cow Green Reservoir. The area is of great importance to botanists, as rare alpine and Arctic plants from the last Ice Age can be

“THESE LOVELY UPLANDS ARE THREADED THROUGH BY SHINING WATERS”

seen here, including spring gentian and lilac-pink bird's eye primrose. The Teesdale violet grows here on Widdybank Fell and there are woods of nationally scarce wild juniper.

TOURING THE TEES

This land lies within Moor House – Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve, where you can also find the headwaters of the Tees. The modest beginnings of this famous river are among angular rocks and rushes close by the Pennine Way as it leads to the summit of Cross Fell. Upper Teesdale gives a rare



TOP On the boundary between Cumbria and County Durham, the River Tees cascades down Cauldron Snout – at 180m, said to be England's longest waterfall
ABOVE The Teesdale violet, *Viola rupestris*, is a member of the Teesdale Assemblage – a group of rare Arctic and alpine plants growing in the area that are thought to be relics of the last Ice Age



TOP Upland wildflower-rich hay meadows such as these in Harwood, Upper Teesdale, are now nationally rare **ABOVE** Golden marsh marigolds, or kingcups, thrive in damp meadows and wet woodlands **INSET** An upland bird, the ring ouzel nests on or close to the ground in crags and gullies

chance to see a ring ouzel, an upland species that looks like a slim blackbird with a striking white bib. Near the village of **Langdon Beck** is a well-known lekking site for black grouse but you need to be up at dawn to watch the males display and strut in their finery.

In spring, the damp pastures are filled with the golden yellow of marsh marigolds – like buttercups but with larger cup-shaped flowers. There are globeflowers – known locally as ‘double dumplings’ – and spotted orchids in a landscape of stone-walled meadows and the distinctive white-painted farmhouses of the Raby Estate. The hay meadows of high summer are filled with yellow rattle, a hemiparasitic annual that reduces the fertility of grass enabling a wealth of wildflowers to thrive. This all makes it a fabulous area for botanists.

As the river descends, trees start to cluster around its banks, and you can see warblers, flycatchers and nuthatches. At High Force, the river crosses the hard columnar dolerite of the Whin Sill, creating the UK’s largest waterfall, plunging 52 metres into a gorge. Sketched by



Turner, it thunders down in a mist of spray, especially impressive when the river is in spate. Just downstream is the smaller Low Force, where the waters tumble in a wide arc. From here, the landscape softens to descend past **Middleton-in-Teesdale** and on to **Barnard Castle** with its weekly market, antiques and homes shops and the French château architecture of the extraordinary Bowes Museum.

WANDERING WEAR

The Wear rises to the west of **Wearhead**, the village to which it gives its name. On the moorland, you might glimpse a short-eared owl quartering the tussocky ground, for these are owls that hunt by day. Although Weardale lacks those rare alpine plant species that make up the ‘Teesdale Assemblage’, it has a diverse flora including rare lady’s mantle, mossy saxifrage, insectivorous sundews and two nationally scarce ferns. In farmer’s fields, the beautiful species-rich meadows are at their best in June and July. The North Pennines AONB has 40% of the UK’s upland hay meadows; projects have focused on their restoration and on



Photos: Getty, Alamy

flower-rich banks and road verges. The biodiversity of invertebrates attracted by the flowers provides food for breeding birds, such as redshank and lapwing.

At the head of the dale is Killhope Lead Mining Museum, which tells the story of 19th-century mining. Children can learn what it was like to work on the washing floor, separating the raw lead ore and seeing the sparkling of fluorspar and quartz. After



NORTH PENNINE RIVERS

The three great rivers of South Tyne, Wear and Tees all start life on the high moorland of Cross Fell in Cumbria. From this, the highest point in England outside the Lake District, they trace their various journeys down to the North Sea. From mere trickles in boggy ground on the wild and windy fell, they run down dales, through villages and towns, to the great cities of Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesborough.

The East and West Allens join to form the Allen River, flowing through beautiful woodlands to join the South Tyne. This then meets the North Tyne at Warden near Hexham at a place known as Watersmeet. Their confluence forms the 73-mile-long River Tyne, up which salmon and sea trout migrate each year. The Wear is the longest of the three rivers at 96 miles; the Tees is 85 miles long. Their remote beginnings could not be more different from their final destinations.

TOP Wildflowers line the banks of the Wear near Bishop Auckland, a market town in County Durham known as the gateway to Weardale **ABOVE** The romantic ruins of 12th-century Barnard Castle stand high on a rock above the River Tees



RIVERSIDE REST



Langley Castle Hotel

Set in the wooded South Tyne Valley, this romantic 14th-century fortified castle is now a luxurious hotel and restaurant. There's a rooftop chapel and the best-preserved medieval garderobes – latrines – in Europe. langleycastle.co.uk



Langdon Beck Youth Hostel, Teesdale

This well-known hostel in the heart of Upper Teesdale is close to the Pennine Way and popular with walkers, birders, botanists, cyclists and families. There are panoramic views of meadows bounded by stone walls, of distant fells and huge skies. yha.org.uk



Weardale Retreat, Weardale

Retreat is a luxury shepherd's hut on a working hill farm with views across the dale. There's a fire pit for toasting marshmallows and a wood-fired bubbling hot tub for relaxing under starry skies. weardaleretreat.co.uk

Turn over for more beautiful upland rivers recommended by Susie



TOP The 97km-long River Wear wends through a steep wooded valley when it reaches the cathedral city of Durham **ABOVE** White-throated dippers search for snacks beside fast-flowing rivers and streams **OPPOSITE, TOP** Completed in 1852, Lambley Viaduct was built to carry the Haltwhistle to Alston railway over the River Tyne

donning a hard hat, you can discover the dark underground world of the mine.


Throughout the dale, there are Methodist chapels, a religion that was popular in the lead-mining population. High House Chapel in **Ireshopeburn** has been converted into an exhibition space for Weardale Museum, an independent folk museum on the history of the people of the dale. The Wear runs on through market towns and settlements, meandering as it widens, carrying migrating sea trout, before making a large U-shaped bend around Durham Cathedral and Castle – and thence to the sea.

TRAILING THE TYNE

A tall abstract sculpture to the south of the village of **Garrigill** marks the spot where the South Tyne begins, in an area peppered with disused mine workings. Here the South Tyne Trail starts, following the river to **Alston**, which claims to be the highest market town in England. Along the river valley, the South Tynedale Railway chugs its delightful narrow-gauge journey, using steam locomotives or diesels from the 1950s.

On the hill above is Epiacum Roman Fort, its lozenge shape bordered by rippling earthworks with extensive views. The river

winds past defensive houses and castles, meadows and woodlands where goosanders nest in the trees. Numerous footpaths include the long-distance Isaac's Tea Trail and A Pennine Journey. At Lambley Viaduct, the South Tyne Trail crosses high above the now-wide river on a series of elegant arches. In winter, you might see a flash of an ermine; heavy snowfall sees the stoats change their fur colour. In spring, the woods echo to the sound of drumming woodpeckers.

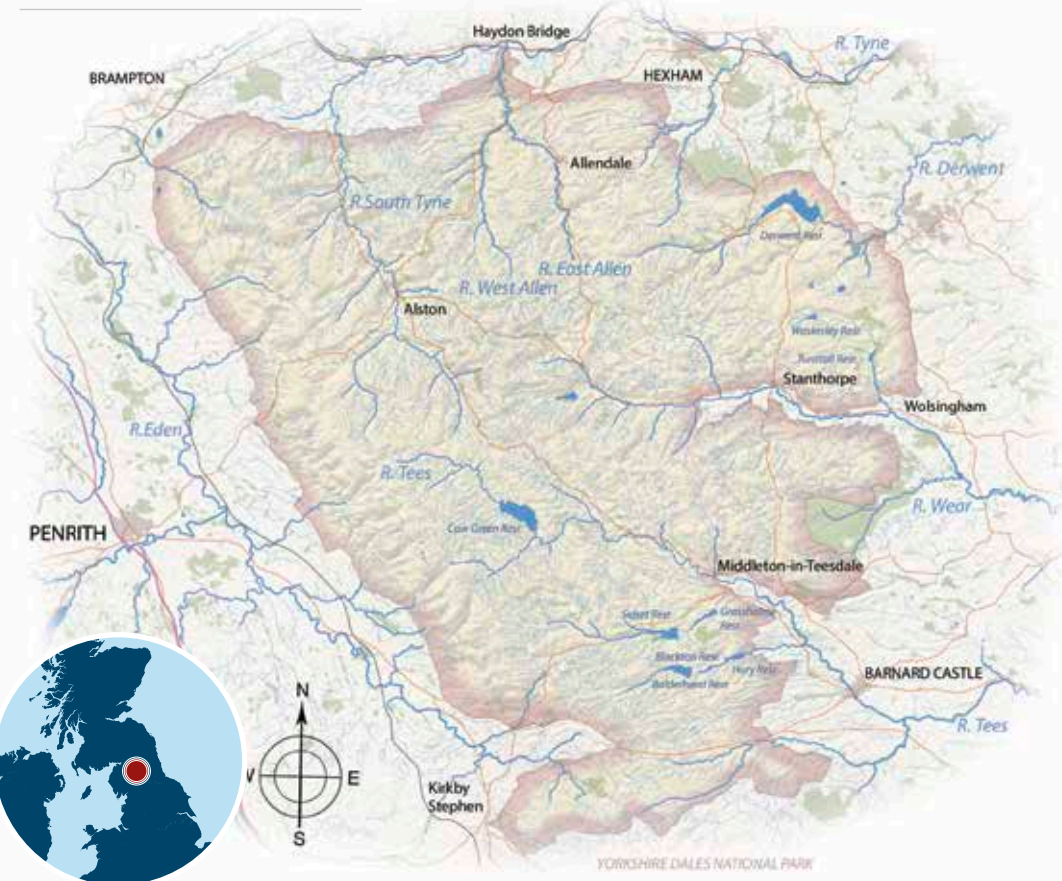
Through beautiful National Trust woodlands, where dippers feed in the fast-flowing water, the now-conjoined Allen River flows into the South Tyne near **Bardon Mill**. On a summer's day, the high call of a kingfisher is followed by a flash of turquoise blue and in quiet stretches you might see the sleek back of an otter. Oystercatchers call overhead and salmon swim the depths. The Tyne, like the two other great rivers that gather water from the North Pennines fells, carries with it a dynamic and varied life. 



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Photos: Alamy/Getty, Naturepic.com, Weir, Stuart Jackson-Carter

THE RIVER ROUTES



BRITAIN'S BEAUTIFUL UPLAND RIVERS

Six more sensational rivers to wander as they wend their way down from higher ground

1 LANGSTRATH BECK, CUMBRIA

A favourite with Alfred Wainwright; he described the hidden valley of Langstrath as being "one of the most perfect corners of Lakeland". Along the Langstrath Beck, the full splendour of the valley opens out among dramatic mountain scenery: the spectacular cliffs of Eagle Crag and Sergeant's Crag, Glaramara on its long ridge. A path follows the beck as it cascades down the valley, tumbling through miniature gorges with numerous small pools for wild swimming.



2 GREY MARE'S TAIL, MOFFAT

The spectacular Grey Mare's Tail is a hanging valley waterfall formed by the Tail Burn that flows out of Loch Skeen. Cascading over 60m-high cliffs, it eventually flows into Moffat Water. Walk the path that follows the burn and look out for peregrine falcons, shaggy-coated wild mountain goats and rare upland plants. Sir Walter Scott celebrated the beautiful waterfall in his poem *Marmion*.



3 WYE VALLEY, HEREFORDSHIRE

The Wye Valley Walk is a 136-mile long-distance walk that crosses the border between Wales and England. From the Wye's source on the slopes of Plynlimon amid rugged and remote uplands, the Wye descends in boulder-strewn rapids, through wooded ravines, passing historic towns, castles and abbeys. It runs through riverside meadows, ancient woodland, apple orchards and arable fields and is full of wildlife interest, such as peregrine falcons and red kites.



4 MALHAM COVE, YORKSHIRE DALES

A circular walk starts in popular Malham village, following the Malham and Gordale becks, passing the pretty waterfall of Janet's Foss and the drama of Gordale Scar with its 100m-high limestone cliffs. Climbing to the top of the escarpment reveals the limestone pavement above spectacular Malham Cove, a vast natural amphitheatre formed by vertical cliffs. These were created by meltwater from glaciers at the end of the last Ice Age.

Photos: Alamy, Getty



5 SLUIE WALK, MORAY

The Findhorn is one of the longest rivers in Scotland, descending through spectacular scenery before flowing into the Moray Firth. Near Forres, just downstream of the famous spot of Randolph's Leap is the less-well-known Sluie Walk. On this two-mile circular walk through woodland, the path runs scarily close to the cliff edge and has dramatic views down to the Findhorn as it swirls and races through a narrow gorge.



6 RIVER DART, DEVON

Drawing water from windswept Dartmoor, the rivers East and West Dart flow beneath historic clapper bridges before merging. There are beautiful walks along these upper stretches and you might see otters, dippers or pied flycatchers. The Dart Valley Nature Reserve is in a steep wooded valley, lush with ferns, mosses and lichens. Salmon leap the cascades to spawn upriver and there are high brown fritillaries, one of the UK's rarest butterflies.

 For spectacular river walks, go to countryfile.com