

## Development of the River Valley below High Tor

As mentioned above the development of the river was continuous and its course seemed to have changed over the centuries. However, my interest is in the formation of the river after the breach of the High Tor dam so I must speculate on the probable events that led to the river we see today from that point in time.

The channel at Starkholmes could only develop if the water level that it was feeding into was lower making for a progressive erosion of the hillside. However, I have speculated that this period in the history of the development of the river followed a time when the hill had already been washed away by an earlier event. At some point in history the Starkholmes depression must have been higher and a second 'tier' can be seen in the shape of Riber hill. A landslip at Starkholmes mentioned by Dalton, Fox and Jones, "..... at Starkholmes (SK 302588)" is downstream of the depression and may be evidence for when the Starkholmes depression first formed. If, as I suggested, there was an earlier route through Tansley perhaps causing the present valley through Lea and Holloway then the Starkholmes bank would have to have been much higher. When this started to collapse then the torrent would have washed the hillside away and the landslip mentioned by Dalton, Fox and Jones could have been formed.

The text accompanying my picture of the water course in chapter1 claimed that the feature is less distinct at its lower end and I speculated that this would at one time have been the height of the river which I estimate to be at 100 metres. However, for water to have been at this level a dam would have to exist down-stream. There is evidence of such a barrier opposite Willersley Castle, the home built by Arkwright. The following images are of this structure known both as Scarthin Rocks or Willersly Castle Rocks.

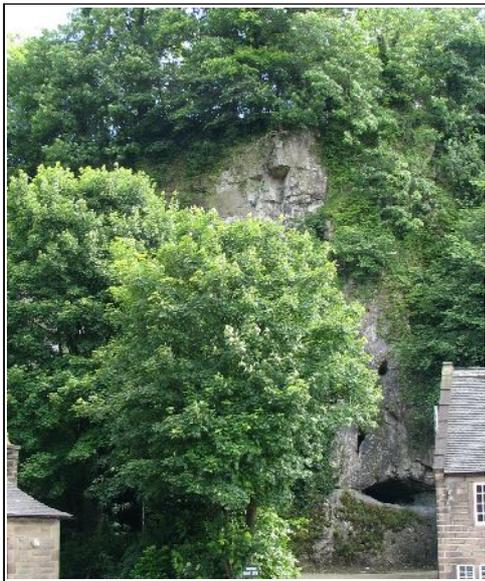


Looking east



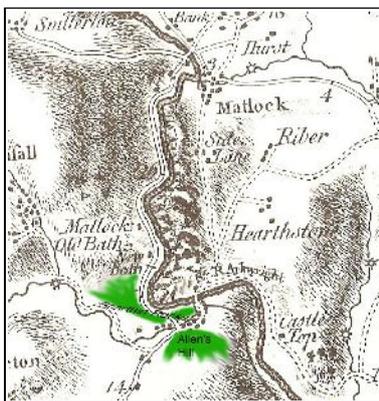
Looking west towards the A6 road

The Limestone ridge that these rocks once belonged to can still be seen on the opposite side of the A6 road and the small community of Scarthin is built into the hillside. There was no route through this rock until around 1700 when a hole was blasted into it so that access could be achieved for the newly found spa. This became known as the 'Scarthin Nick' after the local name for the area. The nick was enlarged a number of times to improve access. The rocks in the above pictures are full of large vertical fractures suggesting that they would be vulnerable to rapid erosion if exposed to a body of water. It may also explain how it was possible to blast a route through the rocks in circa 1700 to create access to the spa. If this is an example of the nature of the limestone in the Matlock area then it is not difficult to see that valley formation can occur quickly. The Scarthin Rocks stand about 105 metres at their highest and before the valley was eroded they may themselves have been part of the river-bed thereby maintaining the upper reaches above the 100 metre level as discussed herein.



The rock features at Scarthin have a more intriguing story to tell because directly behind them is another formation known as Allen's Hill, picture left, which was once a quarry. This rock precipice overlooks the junction with the A6 road and the A5012 which is locally known as Via Gellia. What is interesting is that if Allen's Hill was once joined to the Scarthin rocks then a similar argument could be made for the formation of the valley in which the Via Gellia road runs as the argument I am making for the High Tor gorge. That is, the rock barrier at Cromford caused a dam which allowed the build up of water thus eroding the valley. As the rock barrier itself eroded then the valley deepened to somewhere near it's present depth. Eventually the remaining obstacles may have been blasted away to form the Via Gellia road by Phillip Eyre Gell in 1790 to give access to the quarries owned by the Gell family.

Evidence for the water carved history of the Matlock gorge can be seen in the rocks north of Cromford and just above Arkwright's Mill. The picture, right, of the formation shows the various stages of erosion recorded as horizontal scars. These suggest that the water dropped to a level, remained there for some time then dropped again. Vertical heights of the various scar signatures need to be taken and then compared with geological features at Scarthin to try and find a match.



This modified section of the P.P Burdett **Derbyshire County Map** shows the relationship between the Scarthin Rocks and Allen's Hill. (It is not accurate and is a representation only). Measured on Google Earth the distance between Allen's Hill and the end section of Scarthin Rocks is approximately 50 metres whilst the two sections of Scarthin rocks cut by the A6 road are approximately 35 metres apart.

On the map it can be seen that the southern section of the A6 trunk road is yet to be built but the access to the baths, mentioned earlier, is shown and joins Cromford with Matlock. This access road now forms part of the A6. The Via Gellia route is also shown in dashed lines.

South of Cromford we are again faced with the lack of historical evidence below the 100 metre contour. For example, the large town of Belper is not mentioned in **Domesday** or in the rolls of the Abbey of St Mary at Darley in Derby. (**Darley Cartulary** edited by Darlington). The **Domesday** Survey records a manor of "Bradley" which became part of the de Ferrers estates and this became known as Belper. This name, in turn, is thought to be a corruption of "Beaurepaire", interpreted as "beautiful retreat" which could have been a name given to a hunting lodge and is recorded in a charter of A.D 1231. It would appear that the development of Belper has followed a course down

the hillside to the east bank of the Derwent but not across it to the west bank. This is curious because on the west side of the Derwent a Roman road runs from Millford to Farnah Green where it 'dog-legs' to remain on the high ground as it continues its way towards the Wirksworth area. If there is evidence of activity from at least the Roman period why do we not see evidence of activity in this valley until the thirteenth century. This is part of the conundrum of the Derwent valley that I see. Above a certain contour height there is significant evidence of activity from the neolithic through the Romans and up to the present day. However, below that level there seems to be nothing until the arrival of the Normans. Why?

Just before entering Belper from the north there is a rock outcrop on the east side of the A6 of what appears to be sandstone. These outcrops are visible in many places adjacent to the road much of the way from Cromford to Millford.

### **Millford**

**Shaw Lane** leaves the A6 on a tight curve and climbs up on to the moor above. At this junction with the A6, adjacent to and above the road, is the terminus of a rock outcrop which can be traced up Shaw Lane. In places the houses are built close to the rock and form the back gardens. The river also bends at this point respecting the rock.

**Strutt's mill and the river bridge.** The probable bank of the Derwent before the erosion of the rock dam at Milford can be seen as a bowl shaped feature in the landscape above the mill in the Chevin hillside. An archaeologically investigated known Roman Road runs along the rim of the bank before dropping down adjacent to what is now the mill complex. A substantial rock feature is prominent on the opposite east side of the A6 and a small children's playground has been constructed at it's foot. This rock outcrop continues in a line along the Makeney road which leaves the A6 at the bridge. It appears to be the same type of rock visible along the A6 from Cromford.

The Roman road mentioned above points directly at Little Chester but it shifts direction in a series of four angled turns to cross the Derwent at Milford before, it is claimed, continuing at a lower level on the east bank of the Derwent to Little Chester. There is no visual evidence for where the road crossed the River Derwent but it is generally accepted that evidence for the road exists on the opposite bank past Makeney. This begs the question of why the road should have diverted to cross the river at this point when it could have run straight to the claimed road through 'The Slade' on Derwent Park in Derby and across the claimed bridge into the fort.