

Beldi Hill and Swinnergill Mines

The Beldi Hill mines are located three quarters of a mile from Keld, between East Stonesdale and Crackpot Hall. The ruins of Beldi Hill smelt mill can be found at the mouth of Swinnergill, where it joins the main cart track from Keld to Rampsholme. The Beldi Hill lower dressing floor is very well preserved and is located near the river and the entrance to Low Level, however this is on private land and there is no public access. The Swinnergill mines are to be found half a mile up the gill and the remains of the smelt mill and dressing floor can be still be seen today.



Crackpot Hall Level dressing floor

Little documentation exists as to the early mining of Beldi Hill, in 1618 a declaration of tenant rights for the Manor of Muker made the provision that if any mines of lead or coal were found within the manor, then timber had to be reserved for the workings.

When the Wharton estates passed to trustees in 1721 the inventories included mines on Kisdon and Glover Gill near Muker, but no detail of Beldi Hill. During the later Beldi Hill trial Mr Smith stated that the mine was started in May 1738 by Thomas Clarkson, Alun Fryer and James Alderson.

The early mining activity involved hushing hill sides; the Old Field Hush had been worked from 1738 to 1846, after which James Kearton and a group of men made a 'bargain' with the Beldi Company to work it again. Two dams were constructed at the east and west of the head of the hush. The dams were at different distances from the hush so a complex system of signals were required to ensure the water released from each dam met at the top of the hush at the exact same time. A grated pit at the bottom of the hush trapped the ore that had been previously quarried out, and a tramway was constructed to carry ore to the Beldi Hill dressing floor and then on to the smelt mill. The hush was worked for sixteen years and was very productive. Later mining involved driving levels into the hillsides of Kisdon gorge and Swinnergill.

A level (Landy) was driven to cut into the vein below the hushed area, and behind the ruins of Crackpot Hall is the entrance to Beldi Hill (or Crackpot Hall) Top level which was commenced in 1773. At this site you can see the remains of the bouse teams (ore stores) and dressing floor which had a water wheel - powered roller crusher. Nearby are the remains of the blacksmith shop.

In 1721 the mines were passed over to trustees appointed to manage Lord Wharton's estates for the payment of his debts. In 1738 Thomas Smith bought the manor of Muker from the trustees, however all the mines and minerals on the wastes and commons were reserved to the Wharton estate. Smith subsequently leased mining ground on Beldi Hill to the Parkes brothers. The Parkes partnership developed the workings, driving Parke's level westwards from Swinnergill to drain the Beldi mining complex, and the mine became very productive. The ore was taken to Spout Gill smelt mill in Oxnop Gill, which Smith and the Parkes brothers' part-leased from another company.



The Old Field Hush

In 1768 the Parkes brothers sublet some of their ground on Crackpot Hall Out Pasture to a local partnership (John Scott and Richard Metcalfe) who developed a rich mine and paid royalties to both Thomas Smith and the Parkes brothers. Lord Pomfret 2nd (who had inherited the Wharton mines in 1764) then claimed that the Crackpot Estate was part of the Muker commons and so belonged to him and that all royalties should be paid to him and not Smith.

So the Beldi Hill trials began which lasted from 1769 – 1772. The vandalism and disputes of the trial resulted in the Parke's partnership giving up their lease of Spout Gill Mill and building their own mill in 1771 at the foot of Swinnergill where it opens into Kisdon gorge. After the Parke's lease expired, a group of local men formed the Beldi Hill Lead Mining Company and between 1840 – 1870 the mine was very productive, at one time employing over 300 men.

Pre 1843 a lower level was driven in from near the river bed to explore the lower strata and a 'rise' was driven up to connect with the higher Landy level workings, but in 1882 it was abandoned due to a near tragedy. Two miners had fired a shot that broke through into older flooded workings. *'They heard the ominous rush of water and quickly realising their danger, they rushed along the narrow drift and down the rise to escape. On reaching the bottom, the older man flung his younger companion into an empty waggon and made for the entrance. This was barely reached before water overtook them, but they just managed to escape being submerged, though the water filled more than half the depth of the level'*. The released water had completely destroyed the connecting rise by filling it with stones and debris and the mine was abandoned afterwards.

Swinnergill Mine

Miners were working Swinnergill in 1705 for Lord Wharton, and between 1751 and 1756 over 370 tons of ore was produced. Thomas Hopper, a Newcastle lead merchant and Teasdale Hutchinson, a Pateley Bridge lead merchant, leased the mines in 1804 for an annual rent of £50 and 1/6th of all lead produced. In 1808 they also leased Beldi Hill mines from Thomas Smith. They smelted their ore at Beldi Hill Mill but in 1807 they built their own mill nearer the Swinnergill mine. By 1812 they had taken on the Arngill and Lowanthwaite leases. Hopper & Co gave up the mines in 1832 having raised 1964 tons of lead, after this a small number of miners picked over the workings. The Strands Company took the lease from 1837 to 1861, then the Blakethwaite Company reopened the main level and raised 360 tons. Finally the A.D Company reopened the mine in 1873 and reopened Parke's Level, railed it out and drove it to the middle vein. This trial was a failure and the rails were taken out in 1877.

(References: Raistrick, A (1975) Lead Industry of Wensleydale & Swaledale: Vol 1: Moorland. Fawcett, E (1939) Lead Mines in Swaledale MS, Gill, M (1993) Swaledale It's Mines and Smelt Mills, Landmark)