Ages Quarry, on the edge of Stanhope, is surrounded by the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and European Geopark.

European Geoparks
The North Pennines AONB is Britain’s first European Geopark, a status endorsed by UNESCO, and a founding member of the Global Geoparks Network. Geoparks are special places with outstanding geology and landscape, and where there are strong local efforts to make the most of geological heritage through interpretation, education, conservation and nature tourism. To find out more visit www.europeangeoparks.org.

What’s in a name?
The Weardale quarrymen called the layers of limestone ‘points’ and gave each a name that described its appearance or, in some cases, its toughness to work, such as Crabby, Mucky, Thin Cockle and Bastard. The layer called ‘Still Dick’ formed the quarryman’s bench (see overleaf).

ASHES QUARRY
Ashes Quarry is in the Weardale Dales Geopark. Discover Stanhope’s quarrying past

Welcome to a special landscape…
Ashes Quarry, on the edge of Stanhope, is

Follow this 2-mile (3km) walk from Stanhope and gain a fascinating insight into Weardale’s industrial past.

With thanks to June Crosby, Stan Harrison and William Stobbs for their invaluable help in producing this leaflet.

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The North Pennines is one of England’s most special places – a peaceful, unspoilt landscape with a rich history and vibrant natural beauty. In recognition of this it is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The area is also a Global Geopark – an accolade endorsed by UNESCO.

Follow this 2-mile (3km) walk from Stanhope and gain a fascinating insight into Weardale’s industrial past.

Ashes Quarry Geotrail Discover Stanhope’s quarrying past
Ashes Quarry

Here, for 70 years and more, hundreds of men toiled by hand using only the most primitive of tools to dig the Great Limestone out of the Weardale hills, just a short distance from the centre of Stanhope. They left behind a huge, mile-long hole in the ground which today, over 60 years since they downed tools, nature is slowly reclaiming.

This 2-mile circular route follows the paths the quarrymen would have once taken to work. It rewards a bit of a climb at the start with fantastic views over Stanhope and a fascinating insight into Weardale’s industrial past.

Welcome to a special landscape...

The landscape around Stanhope has been over 300 million years in the making. From tropical seas and deltas, to mining and quarrying – all have played their part in shaping this beautiful landscape.

Tropical North Pennines

The rocks that make up most of the North Pennines are layers of limestone, sandstone and shale. They formed in the Carboniferous Period – 360 to 300 million years ago. In those distant times, the North Pennines lay near the equator and was periodically covered by shallow tropical seas. Limy ooze and the shelly remains of sea creatures accumulated on the sea floor. Rivers washed mud and sand into the sea, building up vast deltas on which swampy forests grew. In time, the limy ooze hardened to limestone, the mud and sand turned into shale and sandstone, and the forests became thin coal seams. Periodically, the sea rose and deposited limestone again. This cycle happened many times, building up repeating layers of limestone, shale, sandstone and coal. One of these layers is the Great Limestone, the rock that was once quarried at Ashes Quarry.

Quarrying in the Dale

We can see today how Weardale’s many old quarries in the Great Limestone have left their imprint on the landscape. The opening of the Stanhope and Tyne Railway in 1834 paved the way for large scale extraction of limestone from the dale, via the unique Crawleyside incline.

Ashes Quarry

Limestone quarrying began near the foot of the incline at Ashes in the 1870s. The loaded wagons were hauled over 1½ miles up the incline to nearly 1500 feet above sea level by an ingenious system using ropes, gravity and winding engines.

The Consett Iron Co. Ltd bought the quarry in 1900 as it needed a secure supply of limestone for its expanding steel works. Limestone was used as a flux in the furnaces and helped remove impurities as slag. In its heyday, at the start of the First World War, the quarry produced 136,000 tons of limestone in one year.

Layers in the landscape

The contrast in hardness of these different rocks has shaped the North Pennine hills. Layers of hard limestone and sandstone stand out as terraces, whereas the softer, easily eroded shales form the gentler slopes between the terraces. On this walk you’ll not only see the Great Limestone that was quarried, but sandstone, shale and terraced hillsides too. The limestone beds at Ashes Quarry are either horizontal or gently folded which helped make quarrying viable as a long term activity.

Look out for the START on the map overleaf and follow in their footsteps...

Walk length/time: 2 miles (3 km), taking about 1 ½ hours. A shorter version (about 1 mile/less than 1km), avoiding the climb and rougher paths on the fell, is shown on the map.

Start: Durham Dales Centre car park, Stanhope. GR NY 996 393

Terrain: With no stiles to climb, the route follows public footpaths (and short stretches of minor roads) on stone and grassy tracks and paths. Two footbridges take the path across a disused quarry before climbing to the edge of open moorland. Strong shoes or walking boots are recommended as the ground is rough and boggy in places. Please take note of the safety signs.

Public transport: Buses run to Stanhope from Bishop Auckland and Durham (Mon-Fri only). For timetable information call Traveline on 0871 200 2233.

Facilities: Stanhope has many shops, pubs and cafes, including one at the Durham Dales Centre where there are also public toilets.

Useful maps:
Ordinance Survey – 1:25 000 Explorer 307 Consett & Derwent Reservoir
British Geological Survey – 1:50 000 Geological Sheet 26 Weardale

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1. **Stanhope**  
By the 1900s lead mining had declined in Weardale with quarrying becoming the main source of employment. The market town of Stanhope was the centre of much of the quarrying activity in the area.

2. **Roadstone** – one of the quarry’s products  
Weardale District Highway Board steamroller and horse-drawn water cart repairing the road with stone from local quarries outside Stanhope Castle, close to the site of the Durham Dales Centre. Note the old footbridge, which was demolished in the 1960s and allowed the road to be widened for lorries needing access to the new Blue Circle Cement works up the dale.

3. **Turn left out of the Dales Centre, pass St Thomas’ church and the fossil tree on your left and then turn left again up Church Lane. Turn left at the top along High Street.**

4. **Methodist chapel**  
Ashes Quarry supplied both builders and sandstone for this impressive chapel, completed in 1871. Comfortably seating 350, it stands as a testimony to the important role that Chapel played in the lives of the many mining and quarrying families who were devout Methodists.

5. **Turn right at public footpath sign and follow the path (known locally as The Paddocks) up towards the quarry.**

6. **Stop, Look and Listen!**  
Towering above you at the entrance to the quarry are the waste tips of overburden. You are crossing the old railway track that, to your left, took the limestone away to Consett via the Crawley Edge incline – there are still some wooden sleepers buried in the trackbed in places. Next to the railway line there are still a few reminders of the old ‘knapping benches’. Here men used hammers to break up limestone with ironstone impurities for use as roadstone.

7. **There were once so many of them, you couldn’t hear the individual hammering but just a continuous noise in the town’, Stan Harrison recalls being told by former quarrymen.**

8. **Pay day**  
A little further up the path on your left are the foundations of the old Stanhope & Rural District Council offices, on your left. Turn right on to High Street and, after 200m, left again down Church Lane to retrace your steps back to the Durham Dales Centre.

9. **Climb to a gate in the wall, turn right through a wooden kissing gate and then turn left. Keeping the fence on your left, after 30m turn right to follow a path which climbs to the top of Crawley Edge.**

10. **View from Crawley Edge**  
There’s a great view of Weardale and the old limestone quarry workings on the other side of the river. The valley sides above Stanhope are typical of the North Pennines landscape: horizontal terraces, which mark the layers of hard sandstone and limestone, with softer shales underlying the gentler slopes between them.

11. **Continue on the path along the edge of the moor, which skirts round many old sandstone quarries.**

12. **Splendid isolation?**  
High up on the windswept moors, far away from the townfolk, these long low cottages once housed an isolation hospital for those suffering from smallpox and other infectious diseases. It was built in 1910 to replace earlier tents, where the unfortunate patients must have received plenty of fresh air! The hospital closed in 1951.

13. **Turn right and follow the path by the wall of the Spring House, the first cottage you can see. Continue down to join East Lane.**

14. **East Lane**  
You are now walking down the old drove road which led up to the left. It is lined with the stone built houses of former quarry workers. By 1902 the quarry workings had reached East Lane. A tunnel had to be built under the road so that quarrying could continue on the other side towards Shitfieldhope Burn.

15. **Landfill**  
As you walk down the hill, look over the open fields to your left where Ashes Quarry once extended. Much of this was infilled with waste from Blay’s Foundry, Stanhope’s steelworks, in the 1980s and restored as farmland.

16. **The Great Limestone**  
You are walking over the quarry waste. To your right you can see the layered grey rock, this is the Great Limestone, at 20m one of the thickest layers of limestone in the North Pennines.

17. **Back to nature**  
In recent years, with the old quarry now in the hands of the Stubbs family, some of the old waste heaps have been landscaped and trees planted. Other areas are just being left for nature to reclaim. Where once was all noise and dust and activity – hammering, drilling, blasting, steam engines whistling and wagon wheels screeching round the sharply curved railway tracks – now just a few sheep quietly graze and the sounds you are most likely to hear are those of the birds that are returning to nest here. The dust has settled in Ashes Quarry.