

Transport by pack horse was very important in the past when waggons were cumbersome and roads poor. Such transport lasted into the 19th century in the steep hilly parts of the country, but rapidly disappeared with the advent of the turnpike roads. Pack horse tracks were numerous and a lot of them today have become either roads or footpaths, although some do remain using the old term for such 'bridleway'. Others have disappeared altogether just leaving marks in the landscape. There are various things to look for to identify these ancient pack horse routes:

1. The terrain. Packhorses needed a through route with firm footing. Valleys could be steep and boggy so the routes tended to keep to the uplands, especially ridges where the ground is firm. Footpaths along ridges could well be old pack horse tracks.

Some of these routes have evolved over a thousand years. Well used paths became hollow ways due to erosion. A hollow way is a narrow track or road with steep banks on either side.

The deeper they are probably the older or more important they were. If there were no restrictions (such as walls) then you can see lots of little "furrows" where a multitude of routes developed, where the track moved to avoid the eroded sections. Not all hollowed out bits of the terrain are connected to packhorses, but if it is already on a route (footpath or lane) the chances are that it is.

Where the pack horses did have to descend into the valleys to cross a river at a bridge, culvert or ford, the track is often steep and direct, steeper than a horse and cart would want to manage. We do have some very steep roads and tracks in our area which were probably based on pack horse routes.

2. Causeways. Some tracks were protected by a "causeway" or "causey" - fortifying a boggy part of the route by stone paving. Ideally this was constructed from very strong rectangular flagstones but sometimes what was nearby was used -ie rough and ready boulders placed with the smooth side uppermost. These sorts of trackways are narrow with 27" being the average. This could result in a considerable groove being worn by the use of shod ponies over the years. Steps can also be seen in these paved ways which are surprisingly easy for animals to manage. This sort of paving was always put in for horses, pack and ridden, and never just for walkers - although walkers will have used them too. Causeways would often have been created before the walls existed and this is why many of the fragments that remain run alongside walls. The wall would have been built next to the old track for convenience

maybe even incorporating some of the causey stones.



Two examples of causey paving in the Lakeland area: running alongside Thornhouse Lane, Bright-holmlee on the left and the footpath across Swan Heights on the right.



Two examples of hollow ways: Rocher Lane, nr Bolsterstone and Hob Lane footpath to Spout House Hill.

3. Old gate posts. In passing from one parish to another or through isolated settlements there would be gateways flanked by great millstone grit posts with slots or holes cut in or through the stone to hold wooden posts and hinges. The gate posts that have metal fixings or hinges are from the time of the Enclosure Awards in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when many new walls were also built. There are plenty of ancient stone gateposts with holes in the Lakeland area which are a good indication of much older roads and tracks.



Old stone gatepost on Storth Lane bridleway, Wharncliffe Side.



4. Old stone water troughs. Water availability is always needed with working horses, ridden, pack or cart. Numerous water troughs, fed by springs and streams, have survived in the Sheffield Lakeland Area on footpaths, bridleways and roads. Some are now virtually buried in undergrowth.

Water trough and gate post, Reynard Lane, Stannington.



Hidden water trough on a footpath called Bents Lane, Stannington

5. Waymarkers and guide stoops. The practice of waymarking is ancient, although standing stones probably originated for ritual purposes they became acknowledged waymarkers for the pack horse routes. Other stones, cairns and posts were erected along the line of the track on the brow of a hill so that they could be seen and followed from either direction. Many of these ancient stones and posts were crosses and were often installed by the local Abbey as guides for pack horse trains. Remember that these routes were crossing vast tracks of land without walls.



A single stone incorporated into the wall. Bolsterstone Road, Swanheight

Ancient hedges of holly or hawthorn can also mark a track and really old trees are useful pointers. Some stones have been incorporated into walls when the wall was built, the stone being used to mark



a boundary. In Tudor times the increasing importance of pack horse transport led to compulsory waymarkers which were upgraded to become stone signposts pointing the way and naming destinations and mileage.



The effectiveness of two Holly trees as markers. Bolsterstone Road looking towards Spout House Hill

The milestone on Penistone Road, by White Lee Moor Plantation

6. Pack horse bridges and culverts. Only four pack horse bridges remain in the Sheffield Lakeland area of which the one over the River Rivelin, built c1775, is a very fine example. Pack horse bridges are always narrow (6 foot wide, or less) with very low or no parapets so that the loads did not catch on the sides. Stone bridges tended to replace old wooden ones. Culverts are far more common in this area, and some that have been built for lanes can be high and well engineered.



However there are many other humble culverts (see photo on left) on old routes still waiting to be discovered.



Rivelin pack horse bridge.