

ABERFORD DYKES

A tourist's guide to interesting archaeological sites in West Yorkshire



[Part of the Becca Banks to the west of Aberford]

Description of Site

A series of linear earthworks are situated to either side of Aberford on the eastern edge of West Yorkshire. They comprise of the Ridge, and Becca Banks which form a continuous line of earthworks running for about 3 miles along the top of the scarp to the north of the Potterton and Cock Becks. To the south of the Cock Beck are South Dyke, which has now been ploughed completely, and Woodhouse Moor Rein which forms the boundary between West and North Yorkshire. Collectively these features are known as the Aberford Dykes.

It is difficult to be certain of the function of these earth works and of their relationship to one another. It is tempting to view them as defensive structures. Parts of the south-facing Becca Banks, for example, are between 6.1 and 7.6m from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the rampart. If this were topped by a wooden palisade the height differential would be increased even further. Their general appearance has therefore led historians to see the Dykes as being the product of a number of different conflict situations. Could they, for instance, have been created by the Brigantes as a defence against the invading Roman armies? Or by

the post-Roman inhabitants of Elmet as a defence against the Anglo-Saxons. However, these sorts of interpretation are problematic. For example South Dyke faces north and is crossed by Woodhouse Moor Rein. The latter though facing south and east runs down slope rather than along the top of the hill which would be a better position for a purely defensive structure. It might therefore be better to interpret the Aberford Dykes as territorial boundaries rather than as purely military works.

Dating Evidence

The Aberford Dykes have been sectioned on a number of occasions recently in advance of major engineering works such as the building of the M1-A1 Link Road. A section excavated at Field Lane recovered Iron Age pottery from the make up of the earthwork and Roman pottery from the layers representing the initial silting up of the ditch. This might suggest that the earthworks along the north bank of the Cock Beck at least are late Iron Age in date and that they were beginning to silt up though disuse in the Roman period. Radiocarbon dating on organic material recovered from the fills of South Dyke have given a date range of 104 BC to 12 AD which suggests that it was constructed in the later Iron Age.

Access

The various earthworks which make up the Aberford Dykes are criss-crossed by the footpath network around Aberford. However, there are only two sections where the path follows the Dyke system. To the west of Aberford there is a right of way along the top of the Becca Banks and to the east Field Lane follows the embankment between the village and the A1. Beyond the motorway a footpath continues along the top of the scarp. It is therefore recommended that visitors consult the Ordnance Survey Explorer Map Number 289 to work out a route which will suit their walking capabilities. Many stretches of the Aberford Dykes are covered in trees with dense undergrowth beneath. The best time to see them is therefore in the winter or early spring before the new growth masks the features again.

When walking in the country please follow the [Countryside Code](#).

This guide was written by Dave Weldrake (© WYAAS 2011)

More information on the WYAAS website [Iron Age Research Agenda](#)

External links [Pastscape](#) features detailed information about Aberford Dykes from English Heritage.

NB: There is more information about Aberford Dykes and other historic sites in West Yorkshire held within the West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record (HER), Contact us via 01924 306797 or wyher@wyjs.org.uk. Alternatively search our records online via the Heritage Gateway website - www.heritagegateway.org.uk