



A 40-mile loop along the Tyne Valley, returning on the old Lead Road from Hexhamshire to Blaydon

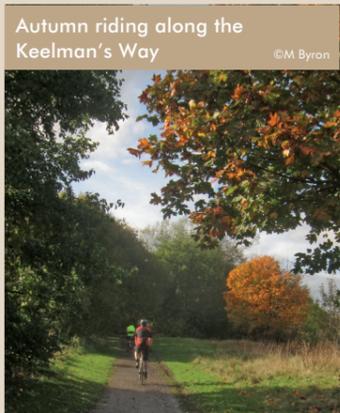
The Lead Road Cycle Route

Smelters and Carriers Project
DUKESFIELD

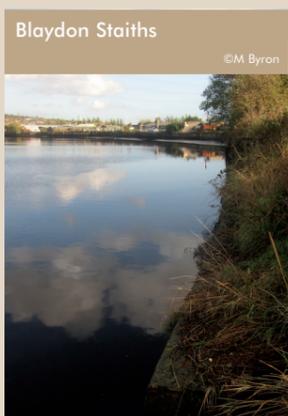
Route description

From Blaydon the route heads west along the Tyne valley to either Corbridge or Hexham. You can choose either the steady ascent from Corbridge to Dukesfield, or the steep climb out of Hexham. It may be sacrilege to suggest it, but the less fit can save their legs for the ascent to Hedley on the Hill by taking a Hexham-based bike taxi to Dukesfield. You can save even more energy by taking the Tyne Valley train from Blaydon to Hexham – ironically on the railway that finally signed the death knell for Dukesfield Mill.

From above Dukesfield the main Lead Road section is on the whole undulating and gently downhill, except for one unrelenting climb from Apperley Bank Foot to Hedley on the Hill. This whole section often benefits from the prevailing westerly wind. There is a short cut back to the Tyne Valley from Apperley via New Ridley and Stocksfield which creates an enjoyable shorter western loop in its own right.



Autumn riding along the Keelman's Way ©M Byron



Blaydon Staiths ©M Byron

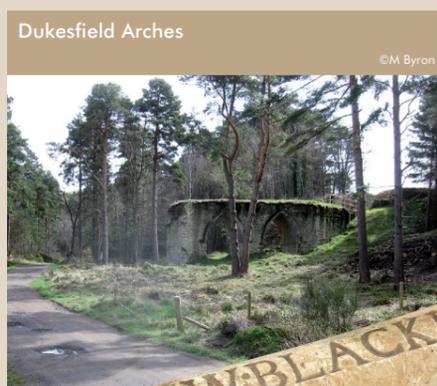
Dukesfield Smelt Mill

This was once one of the most important industrial sites in the north east. From the 1660s and right through the 18th century, strings of rugged Galloway ponies, led by equally rugged 'carriers', carried crushed lead ore from mines in the Allen Valleys and elsewhere in the North Pennines over the high moors to Dukesfield Mill, following Carriers Ways which can still be seen today.

The smelt mill used furnaces and oxygen from a blast of air to convert the mineral galena into lead metal which was cast into 'pieces' weighing about 1 hundredweight. The site of Dukesfield Mill was chosen because of its access to water power from the Devils Water and timber (and later peat) for fuel, and because it enabled carriage of the lead pieces over a relatively low-level route (the Lead Road) to the riverside quays at Blaydon.

However, the mill became increasingly cut off from the developing turnpike road network and the railway, and it was closed and demolished in 1835. All that survived were the two great stone arches we see today. In 2013 a community-led Heritage Lottery funded project (the Dukesfield Smelters and Carriers Project) set about stabilising the arches and protecting, investigating and interpreting the site and its local and national historic significance.

You can find information about the project and the site at www.dukesfield.org.uk



Dukesfield Arches ©M Byron



A lead 'pig', quite possibly from the smelt mill at Dukesfield. Weighing about 50kg, you wouldn't want to carry one in your pannier!



The Lead Road Loop

Some 18 miles of the southern, eastbound section of this very pleasant route follows the 'Lead Road'. In days gone by horses and carts carried pieces of lead from Dukesfield Smelt Mill to Blaydon where some of it was 'refined' to extract silver. The lead was then loaded onto keel boats for onward carriage to Newcastle for distribution and export. Fittingly, the route follows the 'Keelman's Way' for much of the section from Blaydon in a westerly direction along the Tyne valley.

OS maps Landranger: Hexham (87) & Newcastle upon Tyne (88)

Start Blaydon, Corbridge or Hexham

Ride time 4 to 5 hours for an average cyclist, plus stops

Grade Mostly moderate (however there is one very steep hill)

Total ascent 947m/3,106ft

Take extra care! Crossing the A68, roads in the Blaydon area



Thanks to Ted Liddle of **CycleTRAX** for providing route advice.
Leaflet design: Marcus Byron

Please ask us if you would like this leaflet summarised in another format.
Friends of the North Pennines 07935 337210

The Dukesfield Smelters and Carriers Project is led by the Friends of the North Pennines in partnership with Hexhamshire and Slaley Parish Councils and has the active support of the landowner, Allendale Estates. It is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the generous support of other sponsors. Friends of the North Pennines: Charity No: 1137467

The Friends – working to keep the North Pennines special for tomorrow.
www.friendsofthenorthpennines.org.uk Charity No: 1137467



The bike is the most efficient and environmentally friendly form of transport invented!

- Take extra care at junctions, on downhill sections and on loose uneven surfaces
- Make sure your bike is roadworthy and use lights when necessary
- Consider wearing a helmet (correctly) and suitable clothing you can be seen in
- File out to allow vehicles to pass and acknowledge driver's consideration

SAFETY

- Always obey the Highway Code
- Slow down to pass pedestrians and horse riders – always be courteous and considerate
- Always warn of your presence – pass horses slowly and widely when the rider signals
- Where possible try to reach the start of your route by cycle or public transport

Cycling code and hints

The Cycle Hub Newcastle ☎ 0191 276 7250
hires@thecyclehub.org
The Bike Place Bellingham (hybrid bikes by arrangement) ☎ sales@thebikeplace.co.uk
Newburn Sports Centre (mountain bikes only) ☎ 01434 220210
☎ 0191 264 0014 ☎ michael.rvine@newcastle.gov.uk

Cycle hire

Hexham Wentworth Carpark, Hexham, NE46 1QE
www.visitnorthumberland.com/
tourist-information-centre/hexham-tourist-information-centre
☎ hexham:TIC@northumberland.gov.uk ☎ 01434 620450
Landranger 1: 50K - 87 (Hexham), 88 (Newcastle)
Ordnance Survey maps

Tourist information

Hexham (Wentworth carpark - free/parking disk)
Blaydon Shopping Centre
Corbridge (east side of the river - free)

Parking

Newcastle to Hexham 5-6 a day stop at Blaydon. Two bikes per train (reservation not possible) ☎ www.northernrail.org

Rail

the Dukesfield Arches ☎ 01434 600600
☎ booking@600600.co.uk ☎ www.600600.co.uk

Bike transport

Ecocabs Bike taxi transport possible from the Tyne Valley up to

The Lead Road

Your route between Dukesfield Mill and Blaydon Refinery follows the ancient 'Lead Road' – the lead carriers' route. The road goes from Dukesfield through the low-lying country below Slaley to cross the present A68 at Scales Cross. A mile further on it meets a major obstacle for horses and carts at the Coal Burn, where the road originally made a big detour south to find a safe ford. In 1787 the County and the Mill owner, Sir Thomas Blackett, went to considerable expense to divert the road and construct the two fine bridges at Bridges Farm.

On the roadside below Watch Hill is a seat and inscribed stone, put there by the Quaker Richardson family of Wheelbirks and Hindley Hall. Shortly afterwards, the road crosses the Roman Watling Street (B6309) at Apperley Dene. Here, in the yard of the house still called Lead Hill, there was a large transport depot at which lead pieces were transferred from one set of carriers to another, for onward carriage to Blaydon. From here the lead road took a course across the steep hillside of Apperley Bank to Apperley Farm, rejoining your route near the top of the hill to Hedley. At this junction there is a pond in a natural hollow where the horses could be rested and watered after their strenuous climb.



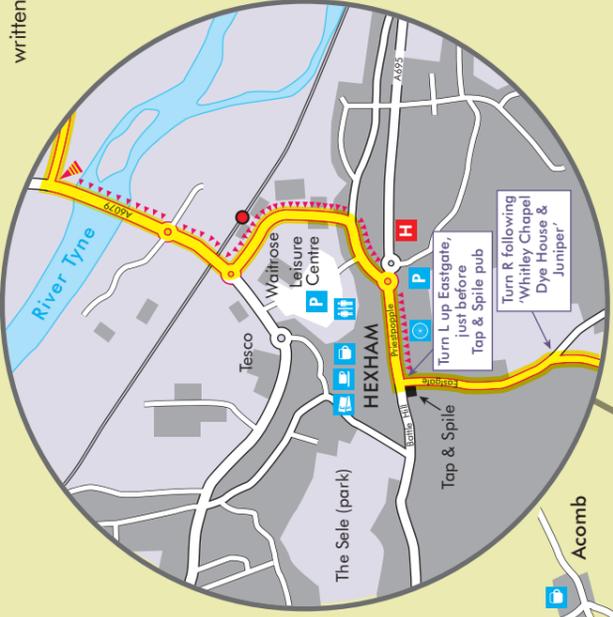
'For the Friends in Council' commemorative stone ©T Liddle

From Hedley the road continues on a gentle rise across the fell to Currock Hill near Leadgate, where it is joined by another lead carriers' route from Rookhope in Weardale, also heading for Blaydon. It carries on through Greenside, where the Packhorse Inn commemorates the trade. Beyond Greenside the lead road begins its descent to the river. Its final section is now closed off from your route (near the sign to Path Head Watermill). It joined the main riverside road at Stella, then followed it east for the last half mile to the Blaydon Refinery, which stood immediately behind the present railway station. The handsome but decaying house with an archway, above you on the right as you enter Blaydon, was once the home of the lead company's chief agent at Blaydon Refinery.

The Lead Road Loop

You can start the route at any point and cycle in either direction. However, you might prefer to cycle anti-clockwise as the climbs are generally more rideable this way*. Also you will be following the Lead Road in the same direction as the carriers led their ponies over 200 years ago. Blaydon is the ideal start and finish for Newcastle-based cyclists, but remember that to enjoy the gravity-assisted descent into Blaydon, one way or another you have to climb to the high ground first!

* The notes on the two detail maps are written for anti-clockwise travel

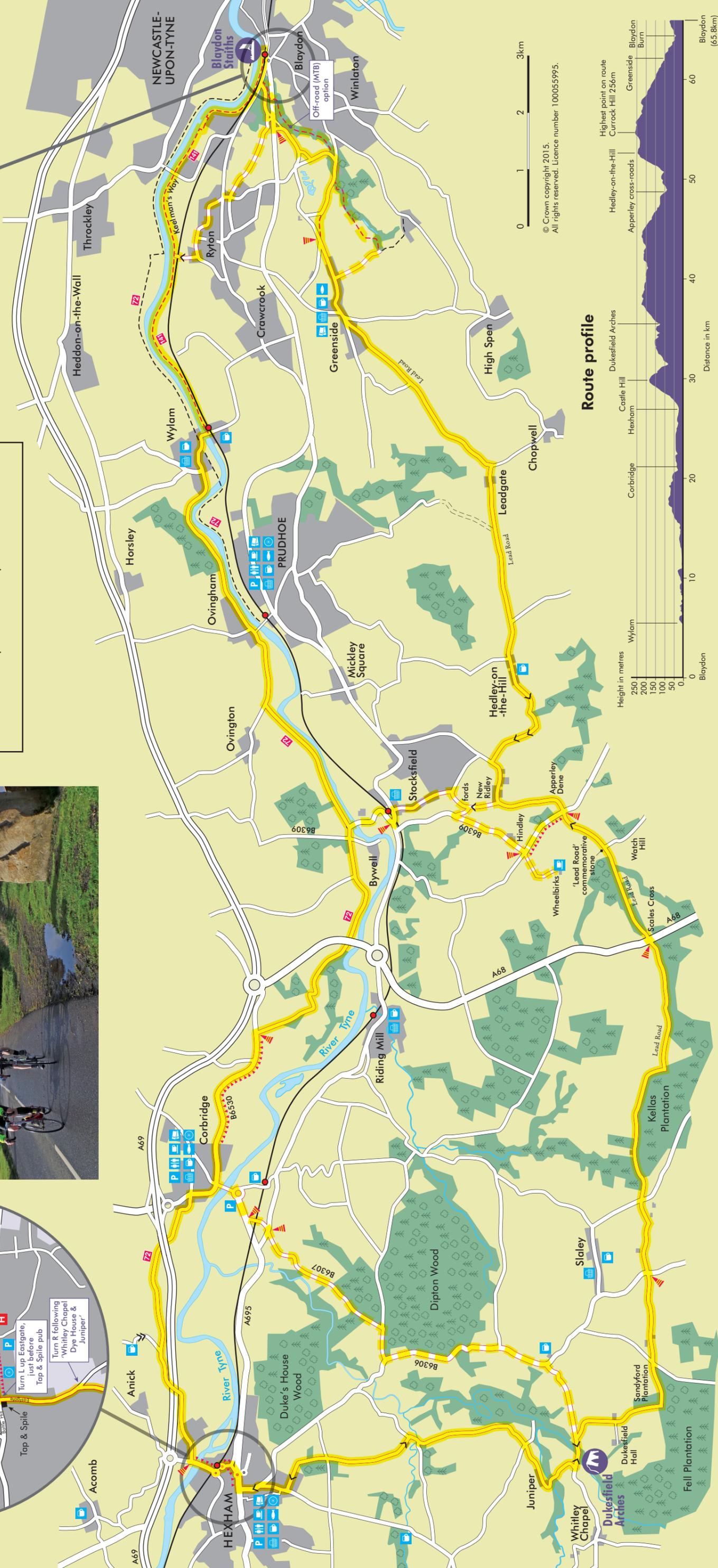
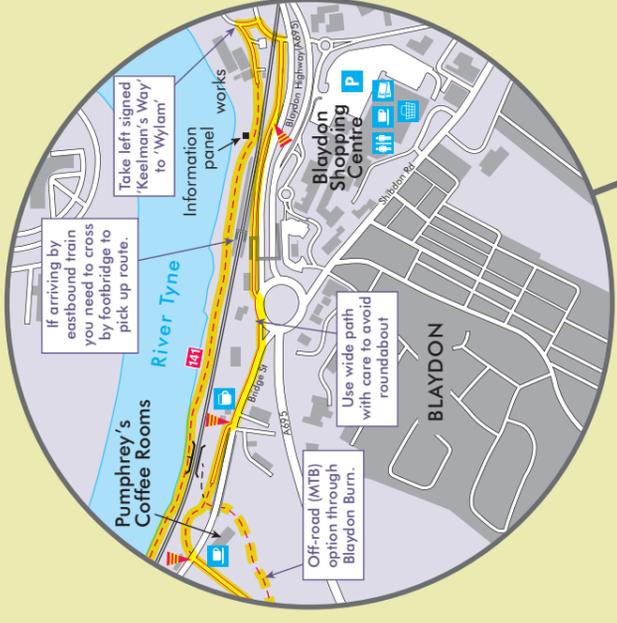


Heading towards the highest point of the route near Hedley-on-the-Hill



Key

- Route on road
- Route on cycle path/off-road
- Alternative route/short cut
- Other cycle path
- Take care at this point/section
- NCN route number/steep hill (points downhill)
- Railway and station
- Car park
- Public toilets
- Cafe
- Pub
- Food shop
- Take away
- Cashpoint
- Bike repair/sales/hire



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Route profile

