



The World's Greatest Theme Park!



Given its location out in the countryside and surrounded by rolling hills, soaring fells and within easy reach of the North Tyne River providing an enchanting and exciting environment, especially for those children from the mining communities and urban areas, it is not surprising that the pupils' activities stretched far beyond the school boundaries with a ready made 'Theme Park' on their doorstep.... And everything was for free!!!



One only had to climb over the boundary fence, jump across the little Eals Burn and you were on your way up the fell, the 'First Rise' a popular venue for sledging down when the winter snows appeared, it was also a popular haunt with the more romantic 'Brown Riggers'. Just over the rise and slightly to the left was 'Dingley Dell', an adventure playground 'par excellence', the thick bracken and many rocky hollows in the little canyon making it an ideal venue for games or hide and seek, or you could scramble up the rocky stream en-route to the Benchmark and the Cart Track.

The Cart Track featured in many school cross country runs but it was also the gateway to even more far flung places. Just to the south you could climb on Shitlington Craggs, although quite low they could be quite a challenge for any young lad. Climbing opportunities were also available farther afield at Watch Craggs and at Callerhues Craggs.

Despite having to endure a hike every single Sunday there was always a huge variety of routes, favourites like the 'Lone Pine', a long pull up out of Bellingham but a great view when you got there, Dally Castle where you could scramble all over the old ruins without anyone chasing you off, march across the rusty 'Mathew Bridge', or paddle in the

Chirdon Burn if the day was warm enough, and Lee Hall, where you could actually visit the scene of the infamous 'Long Pack' incident.

There was certainly plenty of scenery on the infamous 'Round the Bridges' hike, passing romantic Hesleyside Hall, the ruins of Tarsset Castle and the evidence of long- abandoned mine workings.

Another favourite venue was 'Grassy Bridge', the old stone bridge over the River Rede which carried the turnpike to Bellingham many years ago, and where many 'Brown Riggers' enjoyed 'plodging' in the brown peaty water trying to find the freshwater mussels they believed to be oysters containing valuable pearls. As an interesting diversion, pupils from the 1940s and 1950s era could wander along to Reedsmouth Station which was a junction of the 'Wannie' and Border Counties Railway lines and watch the engines being shunted back and forth.

