

Lead Smelting in Baslow

Lead has been worked in the Peak District since Roman times. The mines were in the White Peak, locally Calver Hassop and Eyam. Smelting moved to the Dark Peak (mainly east of the river Derwent) in mediaeval times where fuel was more plentiful. Baslow has several sites, three on the Barbrook.

Lead smelting was done in two stages. An Ore Hearth released much of the lead, but left significant amounts in the slag. The Slag Hearth then extracted more of the metal

Our Ore Hearth is at the old millpond a mile up the Sheffield road, just before the turn off to Curbar Gap. It opened in 1618 using water power from the brook to drive the bellows. Then closed in the 1770s, to be replaced by a corn mill which itself was abandoned in the late 1800s. No trace of these buildings remain: the low walls near the dam was a 20th century pumping station used to boost the supply of water to Chesterfield. The deep pit nearby housed an earlier waterwheel. Pieces of slag from lead smelting can be found in the bank of the stream below the 18th century access bridge.

The Slag Hearth is 300 yards downstream. It is not known when it was built but it operated until the early 1800s. The path to it, difficult to find in the heather and bracken, starts from near the pit mentioned above: initially it is slightly uphill. As you near the smelter note the water channel which leads into the remains of the millpond.

The site, ruined as it is, is one of the best slag hearths remaining in the country, untouched by development or archaeologists. The main compartments housed the hearths: note the bare patches at the top, where lead residue in the soil still prevents plant growth. There are two ancillary sheds nearby. Access was along the path or by a hollow-way zigzagging directly up the hill.

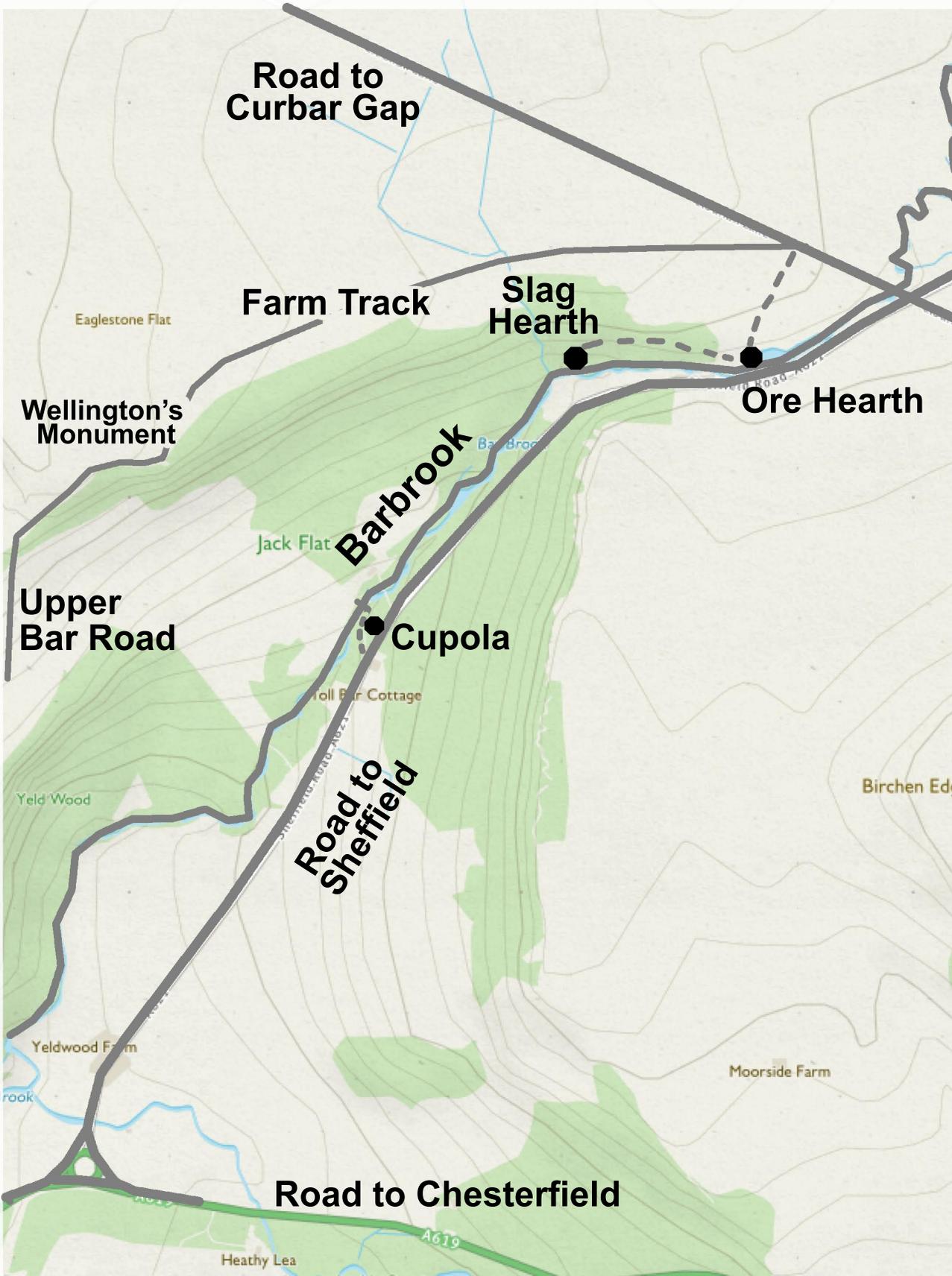
Smelting was transformed in the mid 1700s by the development of a new type of furnace or cupola. Baslow got its cupola in 1760, at the site that still keeps its name on the Sheffield Road. The remains have been carefully tidied away, but some walls can be seen on the footpath leading from the houses to the bridge over the Barbrook.

Both the ore hearth and the slag hearth are worth visiting. Park on the side road to Curbar Gap, or better catch a bus. Use the farm track gate and find one of the old routes down to the pond. Years ago these would have been used by pack horses bringing ore from the White Peak.

Suggestion, walk home along the farm track past Wellington's Monument and down Bar Road to Baslow. Good exercise!

David Dalrymple-Smith

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Road to Curbar Gap

Farm Track

Slag Hearth

Ore Hearth

Wellington's Monument

Barbrook

Upper Bar Road

Cupola

Road to Sheffield

Road to Chesterfield

Eaglestone Flat

Jack Flat

Yeld Wood

Yeldwood Farm

Toll Bar Cottage

Birchen Ed

Moorside Farm

Heathy Lea

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