

The Old Roads and Trackways of MIDDLETON & SMERRILL



The path through Kenslow and Rusden Woods was one of several that met at the footbridge at the end of Lowfield Lane. Once over Rowlow Brook the paths split again to Birchover and Gratton.

A PATH THROUGH KENSLOW AND RUSDEN WOODS

Kenslow Wood and Rusden Wood fill a deep valley that starts near the end of Whitfield Lane and runs down to Rowlow Brook. It once had a regular stream which still reappears during wet winters. On the Haddon Estate map and again on the Township of Middleton map, Kenslow Wood was labelled as Rogues Den. So were these woods once the home of outlaws, rogues and vagabonds?

“The likelihood of human habitation or hideaways in this dale is self-evident” writes Christine Gregory, who identifies five rock shelters, three caves and one fissure in Kenslow Wood. “But it is possible”, she continues “that instead of this being the place where dubious, criminal types lurked, it may have been a sanctuary for religious non-conformists or for unemployed, impoverished people persecuted by laws imposed under Elizabeth I that designated such people as Rogues and Vagabonds.” The rules of this and later Vagrancy Acts were used ruthlessly against the poor and homeless. Parts of the 1824 Vagrancy Act are still law today and there are residents who remember a man who slept rough in the barns and outbuildings of Kenslow Pastures well into the mid 20c.

At the start of Kenslow Wood a private path runs along the valley floor and reappears as a concessionary path in Rusden Wood. The enclosures of the 18 and 19c. would have closed many informal routes across Middleton Common, but there are still old tracks and paths shown by the OS from 1880s onwards that converge on the Lowfield Lane bridge across Rowlow Brook. And collective memory suggests that these were shortcuts to Youlgrave, Birchover and Gratton. The Kenslow and Rusden Woods were never incorporated in the 18c. field system so still offered a route from the Newhaven Turnpike, through Kenslow Pastures, to Rowlow Brook and the bridge.

Up till the 1980s the paths were freely used by the public. While the Rusden Wood path is still open, new owners have close the Kenslow Wood path.

Further Reading

- 1799 Estate Map of Middleton (Haddon Hall)
- 1813 Township of Middleton (Middleton Hall)
- 1819 Middleton Enclosure Map (Derbyshire Records Office)
- 1884 OS 6” County Series map
- 1898 OS 25” Map of England and Wales
- 1949 OS 1:25,000 Great Britain
- 2013 A River in Time, a Story of a Peak District River, Christine Gregory



Footpaths merging at the ford and foot bridge over Rowlow Brook.

