

# The History of Honister Slate Mine

- The first slate may have been extracted from the Honister Slate Mine during the **Roman times**.
- Fragments (broken bits) of Honister slate have been found at the site of the Roman Bath House at **Ravenglass** and **Hardknott Fort**.
- Much later, the **monks of Furness Abbey** (Barrow-in-Furness) who owned land in Borrowdale are thought to have mined at Honister.



- In early times this part of Lakeland was poor, difficult to get to, with not many people living here.
- The nearest town, **Keswick**, was half a days walk away from Honister. The hamlets (group of houses) of Seatoller, Seathwaite, Rosthwaite and Grange consisted of only a few farms.

- The early quarry men **walked from Keswick to Honister**. They started early on a **Monday morning** and lived rough on the mountains until the end of the week or even longer, working the slate by hand in all kinds of weather.
- Miners even walked from as **far away as Egremont and Whitehaven** in West Cumberland to spend the week working at the Honister Slate Mine.
- The first real surviving evidence of '**slate getting**' at **Honister** is from around **1643**. The main areas where this took place is at the top of the Crag at Bull Gill and also Ash Gill, at a height of about 2000 feet.
- Stone huts called '**bothies**' were built by the miners to live in. They were built from the slate from Fleetwith Pike and were only about **3 metres wide** by **4 metres long**. They had very thick walls to keep the wind and the rain out. They contained a fireplace so the miners at least had some warmth. The men would live in these bothies for **up to two weeks**, or for as long as their supply of food lasted.



- Ponies came to collect the riven slates that they had made and transport them by way of Warnscale Bottom to **Whitehaven** or along Moses Trod via Green Gable and on to the **port of Ravenglass**.
- These **early slates were thick** and were used on local buildings. They did not look much like modern roofing slate, being from  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch to 1 inch thick and 2-3 feet in size.



- So this is how the **slate industry began**. It was to be a way of life at Honister for many generations. Little was to change here for **nearly three hundred years**.