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.