

F4 Colne (Slaithwaite and Marsden)

The river Colne runs through a rugged, fairly broad valley in a north-easterly direction towards Huddersfield. At the head of the valley, to the west, the landform opens out to form a wide moorland basin, which receives numerous tributaries draining the heights of Wessenden and Marsden Moors. The moorland encloses the town of Marsden, and there are strong connections between the valley settlements and the moors. Along the valley sides the steep rugged slopes support upland farming with a patchwork of small pasture fields enclosed with gritstone walls. Heather fringes the steepest edges and areas of landslip contributing to the rugged, moorland character of this valley. In the lower parts of the valley, towards Huddersfield, urban fringe elements are more common with hobby farms and horse paddocks apparent. Only remnants of the former woodland cover remain in this valley, with trees limited to the sheltered hollows and creases in the valley sides and around individual farmsteads (the extensive blocks of woodlands that characterise the valleys in the central part of the South Pennines are absent). Scattered farmhouses are dotted along the valley sides while the valley floor contains substantial development in centres at Slaithwaite and Marsden. The historic cores of these towns have been surrounded by considerable post-war development, which extends up the valley sides. Outside these centres the valley has a very rural nature which distinguishes it from many of the other South Pennines valleys. At the eastern end of the valley, development related to the post-war expansion of Huddersfield is dominant and includes substantial new blocks of development such as Linthwaite on the valley side. By comparison, to the west the valley retains a more remote 'moorland' character. The valley is an important communications route and carries road, rail and water links into Lancashire with the viaduct at Slaithwaite forming a particularly dramatic feature. The landscape of the Colne Valley and the surrounding moorland is evocatively described in the writings of the poet Simon Armitage, including his most recent book, 'All Points North'.