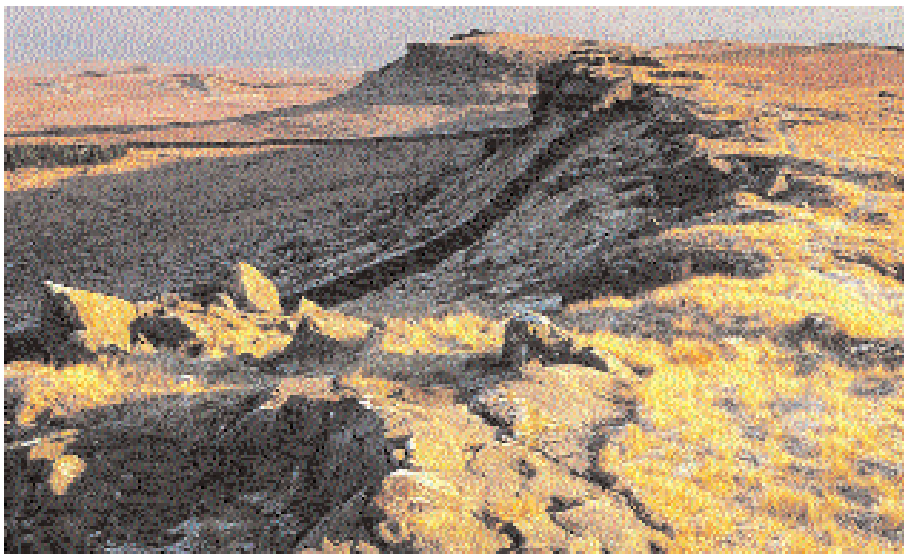


PICTURE THIS ONE OF YORKSHIRE'S UNSUNG RIVERS IS NOW GETTING THE ATTENTION IT DESERVES. **FREDERIC MANBY** REPORTS FROM SETTLE.

CAPTURE OF A LOST RIVER



FAVOURER VIEW: Whelpstone Crag, from Andy Latham's Ribble pictures.

as Yorkshire rivers go, the Ribble goes west, into the sea after flaunting most of its 70 miles of water in Lancashire. It is the only river from the White Rose county to tip directly into the sea on that side of the country. I may also say it is not one of the best-known, or even most-admired, of the major rivers that rise in Yorkshire. But for Andy Latham it is the favourite, the numero uno.

The Ribble is his river of choice, the first one on which he has expended a whole book's worth of high definition photographs and features in a water-themed exhibition in the beautiful Folly museum at Settle. It whets the appetite to see more of the Ribble.

There's no shortage of lovely books about lovely rivers and lovely hills but the Ribble has been relatively unsung. One of

its deficiencies, if you can term it that way, is it is not part of a major scenic tourist route. You do not follow the Ribble's valley in the same way that you follow the Ure through Wensleydale or Wharfe or the Swale in their dales.

The plump Ribble gives us Ribblesdale but after it reaches Settle it moves away from main roads and the hills proper as it heads in to eastern Lancashire and the flatter terrain of the Ribble Valley. It goes by Clitheroe, acquiring the rivers Hodder and Calder as it snakes in turns left and right towards Roman Ribchester. Passing Preston it flows to its exodus south of Blackpool between Southport and Lytham St Annes

Why the Ribble, Andy? Why photography? As a lad growing up on the edge of Bolton in the late 1970s he acquired a "point and shoot camera, a Kodak Instamatic type". That clicked, so to speak, and he moved on to a Praktica, a well-known budget brand from East



LONG SHOT: Worsaw Farm and Pendle.

Germany, which was cheaper than the Japanese big names. These were clunky compared with, say, a Nikon, but did have a good lens (Zeiss was in East Germany, Leica in West Germany). It was a single lens reflex, an SLR, a step-up to smarter amateur snaps because what you saw in the viewfinder was what you got on the film negative, and you were able to bring that image into focus and adjust shutter speed and contrast before you pressed the button. The film was a 35mm spool, easily loaded, up to 36 shots per cassette.

Andy is the son of a driving instructor and a nurse. After local education he went to Manchester Polytechnic and became a junior school teacher. He lives on the edge of the West Pennines. His daily view is the moors, the Winter Hill transmitter mast and "rain usually".

Walking was accompanied by snapping and he upgraded to a mid format Mamiya camera, taking larger film which gave more definition. His first published

picture brought him £50 from *Country Walking* magazine and Ribblesdale was one of his walking areas. He says it has the grandest scenery in Yorkshire – citing the Ribblehead viaduct near the source of the Ribble on Cam Fell, the flanks of Ingleborough and that other member of The Three Peaks club, Penyghent.

His panoramic image of the latter won an important competition in *Practical Photography* magazine. Then in 2004 the magazine gave him its major accolade, Photographer of the Year, for which he and the other finalist had a shoot-out in the Lake District. The theme was large and small and Andy's winning entry was a landscape of Cat Bells and Derwent Water, and a detail of a wood jetty on the reservoir.

He invested the £4,000 travel bursary on a three-week workshop to the Lofoten islands off Norway, led by David Ward, one of the renowned photographers working with "large format" cameras.



These use a single film negative measuring five by four inches, the sort of thing where the operator has a black cloth over their head so that they can see the image clearly. Most of Andy's book pictures were taken on such a camera, an Ebony RSW 45, made in Japan. The film is developed by Peak Imaging in Sheffield and printed by a company in Warrington. So, mostly, Andy's involvement ends after he has posted off the film.

He writes in a foreword to the show at the Folly: "Several years ago I made a conscious decision to start exploring more of Lancashire. I quickly recognised the merits of the Ribble Valley and so began a personal project to photograph its landscapes. It wasn't until I walked the Ribble Way that the thought actually occurred to me to develop the idea into covering the whole length of the river, from the wild beauty of the Three Peaks all the way to the sea at genteel Lytham St Annes.

"The concept appealed firstly as it was a genuine journey, exploring the changing landscape of a single valley and secondly, as it combined my favourite part of the Yorkshire Dales, Ribblesdale, with the county of my birth, Lancashire."

The Ribble is the thread for his book. It doesn't appear in the majority of the pictures. What we see are the

The Ribble is the thread for his book. It doesn't appear in the majority of the pictures...

surroundings, from cotton grass and heather to a marvellous vaulted lime-making chamber near Settle, Sawley Abbey, the glorious Bowland fells and even a field of sprouts at Hesketh Bank, on the estuary's south bank.

Andy explains: "The images are not meant to be a documentary of the river valley but merely my interpretation of the landscape, taking the kind of photographs that I like to take. While I planned to take particular subjects and views, I frequently found myself photographing something quite different."

As for the legwork, that took ages. He had to plan his viewpoints, often needing a longish walk into the chosen area only to find the light was wrong. "I like to take my time at a location and spend hours ambling around to get a feel for the place. The weather, light, season, time of day, my own mood, all influence what images are taken and that unpredictability and lack of control over the land are part of the joy of being a landscape photographer."

For example, his shot of Whelpstone Crag (one of his favourite Ribble views) near Rathmell, took several visits to win the picture he wanted on a frosty morning. Getting to Smearsett Scar was a 45 minute walk. The day was wet and "foul"



WARM LIGHT: Its title is *Afternoon Light, Penyghent*. Andy says: "I climbed up from Brackenbottom hoping for a spectacular sunset but was blessed with a very subtle warm light on this jumble of rocks instead."



but Andy had a hunch and his photograph is illuminated by a ray of sunlight. His celebration of the Ribble chimes with that of another son of Bolton, Frederic Riley (1879-1960), who is being recalled and brought to a new audience at the Folly.

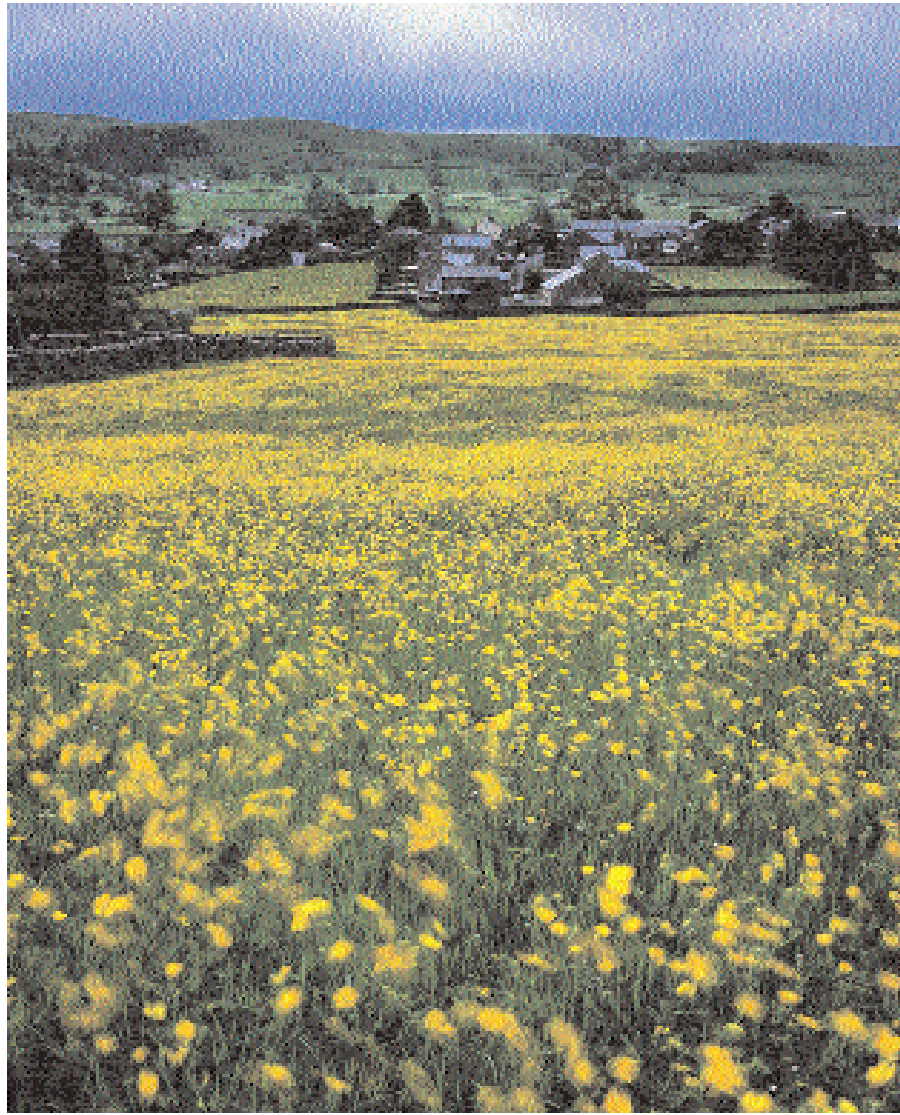
Riley moved to Settle as a young man and became an engineer at a local papermill. He was a musician, naturalist, historian and writer and lived near the Folly, which was then a private house.

On foot and on bicycle he set off on excursions, taking pictures, making notes. His books included *The Ribble from Its Source to the Sea*, published at five shillings (25p) by Lamberts of Settle. It included Riley's colour map of the Ribble, which is among the papers recently given to the town by his descendants.

Riley's book was thorough and well-received. "An extremely interesting and useful book" said the *Yorkshire Pioneer*. The *Yorkshire Post* was equally warm: "Written by one who has rambled in all directions in the Ribble Valley and would have others share in his joy in one of the most beautiful parts of England".

Men like Frederic Riley were part of a movement, often manual workers, expanding their minds and in doing so expanding the knowledge of their peers and, one could say, their employers. In those days the Ribble was powering several mills in the Settle reaches.

The squires at Ingleborough Hall, in Clapham, were using the water off the



IN FLOWER: Rathmell Meadow. **Right:** Andy Latham.



fells to light the hall in the late 19th century and the estate turbine ran the village's street lights until 1962.

The Ribble at Settle recently started generating electricity again, through an archimedes screw, subject to the lack of rain and the uncertainty of the water volume this summer.

■ **Landscapes of the Ribble: Photographs by Andy Latham. The Folly, Settle, North Yorkshire BD24 9EY: Tuesday, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday, 10.30am to 4.30pm, until October 31. Accompanied by work by Frederic Riley and the Settle Photographic Group. The Folly 015242 51388 or 01729 822 361 and www.andylatham.co.uk**