



FOCUS: ABERFORD DYKES



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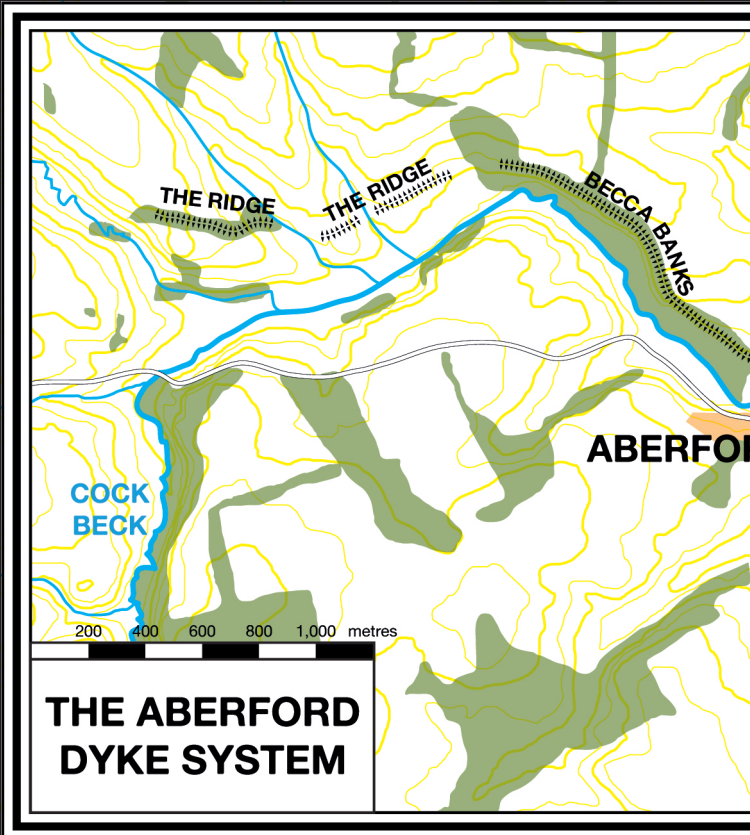
The Aberford Dykes are a series of man-made earthworks in the region of Aberford. It was originally thought they were built in the 'Dark Ages' as a defensive system to protect the Kingdom of Elmet from Saxon invasion.

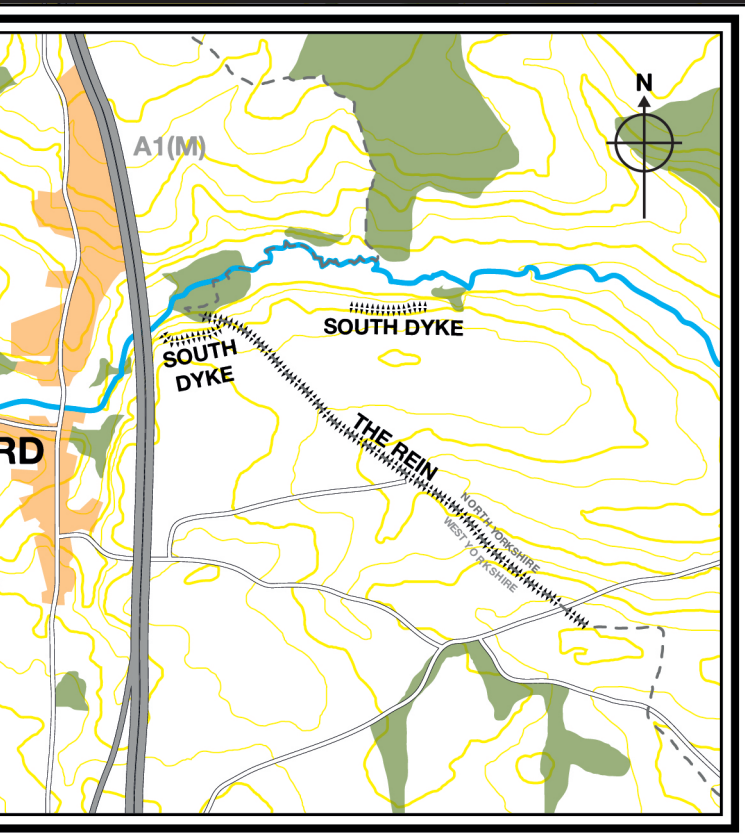
This theory has been proved wrong as recent excavations have shown them to be built in the Iron Age, although they may have been reinforced and re-purposed in the 5th and 6th centuries. Some historians have speculated that they were defensive structures built by the Brigantes tribe against the Romans, only to be revived 400 years later. On the contrary, some have suggested they could not be defensive structures as they offer no clear line of defense such as Offa's Dyke, which began construction in the 5th century and formed a marked distinction between what later became England and Wales.

A similar earthwork called Grim's Dyke (or sometimes Grimes Ditch) is also nearby but does not form a part of the Aberford Dykes. It was similarly thought this was once an Elmetian defence but has been shown to be



The shallow peak of The Rein





older, similar to the earthworks in Aberford.

It is more likely that these structures formed some kind of boundary marker, although as the example of Offa's Dyke shows, a defensive line can become a boundary. One argument for this for hundreds of years they marked the line between the Lower Skyrack and Barkston Ash wapentakes. This line was then preserved in the 1974 Local Government Act when the new counties of West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire replaced the traditional West and North Ridings.

Indeed some of these earthworks remain boundary lines for privately owned land. While conducting this survey, our researcher was harassed and accused of trespass by a local gamekeeper while examining the Becca Banks earthworks which are used as boundary marker separating a public footpath from privately owned woodland.

It is unlikely we will ever know what the intended meaning and reason for construction for the Aberford Dykes was. However, they remain a major mark on the landscape and a significant feature not just of the region, but the wider county, drawing lines across the map where perhaps they should not be.



Sign showing private woodland on the ridge of Becca Banks