

RIBBLE OR ROSSENDALE?

In a previous article about these valleys I mentioned the contrasts between them as I, a visitor, saw them. I wanted to gain a better idea of how different life in one valley would be from life in the other so I asked friends of ours who have lived in both to compare and contrast.

Karen and Graham moved quite recently from Ramsbottom to Barrow - the one between Clitheroe and Whalley, not the dock town in the far north of the County Palatine.

The first question I asked was, "Is 'Rammy' actually considered to be part of the Rossendale Valley?" If it isn't, the idea of comparing and contrasting would clearly be a non starter!

A glance at the map suggests that it's on the cusp, but since cricket is a vital component of Lancashire life and Ramsbottom cricket club is regarded as a Rossendale club, it qualifies. Another friend of mine, "Rammy" born and bred, supported this assertion. The views of our friends are therefore relevant. It seems there are more contrasts than comparisons, but both valleys are similar in that they are interesting and pleasant places in which to live. An early assertion - that Rossendale has a post industrial atmosphere and in places an "after the gold rush" feel whereas the Ribble Valley contains thriving rural communities - suggests the latter would score heavily in favour of the former, certainly from the point of view of the visitor, but Rossendale's interest cannot be underestimated.

The Ribble Valley is more isolated with its own independent spirit and, although close to Preston and Blackburn, does not seem to have much affinity to these places, whereas Rossendale has a feel of being a satellite of Manchester due to both its industrial heritage and its situation at the end of the M66 Manchester bound motorway. Cotton was king here, of course, as it was throughout much of east Lancashire. This heritage carries with it a rich industrial history, full of interest the type of which is obviously lacking in rural areas. Rossendale's inhabitants have retained the traits associated with the folk in Lancashire mill towns - friendly and positive in the face of adversity.

Rossendale's independence can be found in the local pride in each of the small towns which constitute the whole. Ramsbottom, Rawtenstall, Bacup and the smaller communities each have their own sense of identity with the usual local rivalries found anywhere.

The valleys in the area are closed in and can present a dark and rather mysterious aspect although the area's walking country should not be undervalued. Above are the moors offering bracing walks and far reaching views - an invigorating, beautiful playground for the workers below.

The Ribble Valley is more open with a less "cosy" feel; here the skies are bigger but the contrast between moorland and valley is absent. Tourism is more established here with beds and breakfasts and cafes and restaurants - to live in the Ribble Valley can give the feeling of being on holiday - and although there are "off comers" in the towns and small villages, this does not detract from the community feeling readily associated with farming areas such as this. Its position in respect of nearby areas is favourable, too - strike off west and the coast becomes accessible, travel in the opposite direction and the delights of the White Rose county can be sampled. It is quite an affluent area with good services for a mix of age groups and types. There is fine walking here, too. Based on the three rivers - Ribble, Hodder and Calder - and, of course, the district's great sentinel, Pendle Hill, there are routes to suit all tastes, but walks through pastures and along river banks predominate. These are the sorts of expeditions which ensure you should be back in time to sample a tea shop or one of the excellent pubs.

Which valley is better? Can we use the word "better"? We can't really, of course - it depends on the individual's personal taste and what he or she is looking for.

Our friends spoke highly of them both. Which would you choose?