

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 10 Wark Forest

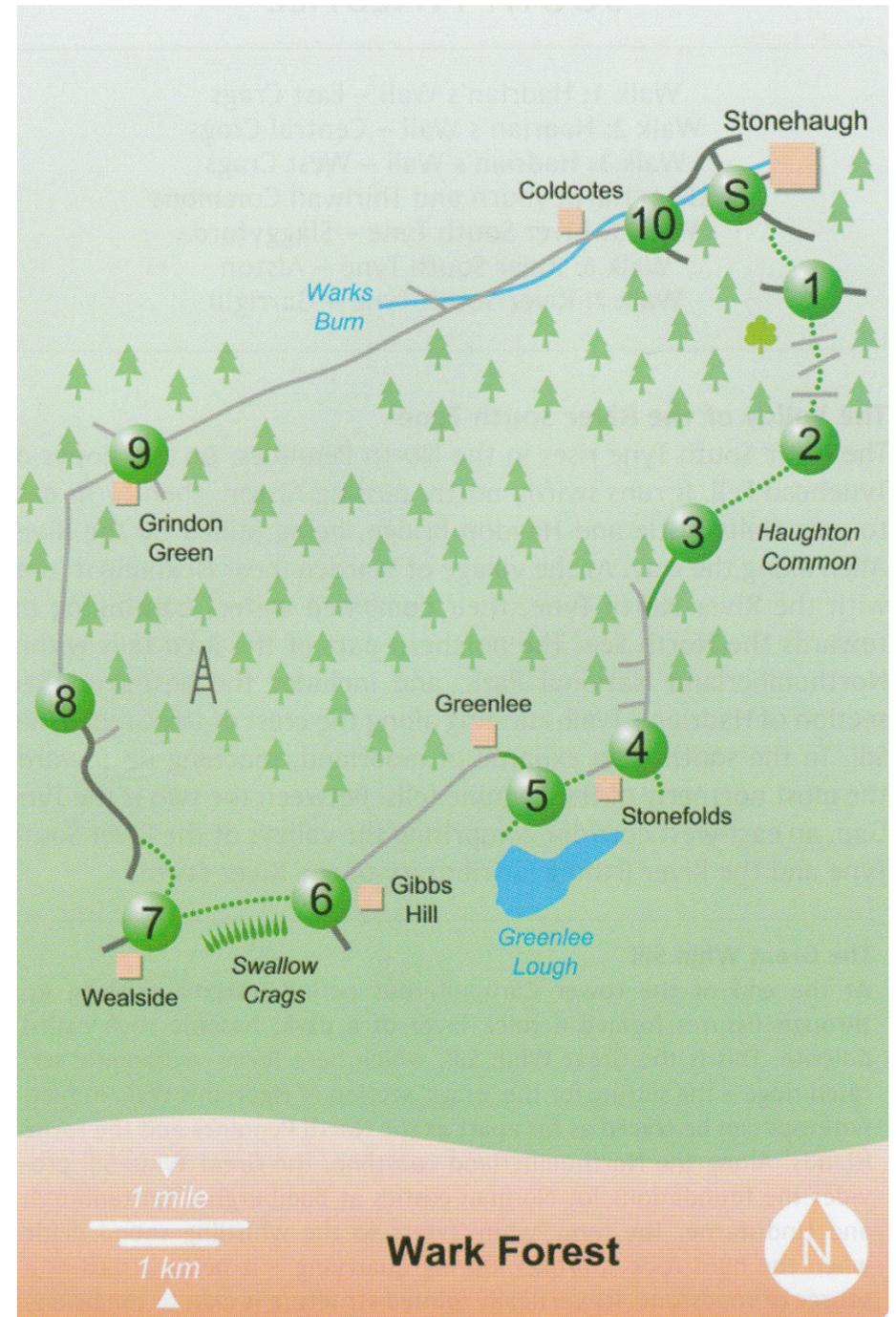
Whilst much of the route follows forestry roads, and there is some difficult terrain to negotiate as it crosses open moorland, this is not the worst of forest walks, and there are promising views over Greenlee Lough towards Hadrian's Wall.

- Length: 16½ miles (26½ kilometres)
Ascent: 1,214 feet (370 metres)
Highest Point: 1,034 feet (315 metres)
Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 43 ('Hadrian's Wall, Haltwhistle & Hexham') (West Sheet)
Starting Point: Warksburn picnic place, Stonehaugh (NY 789 762)
Facilities: Public toilets (open during summer).
Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-10-wark-forest>

Haughton Common

Stonehaugh does not appear on all road maps, but is signed from the B6320 south of Wark-on-Tyne, following a single track road west for 5½ miles (9 kilometres). From the picnic place, head back along the road to a point south-east of the village where, just past a knot of fir-trees and before a recently harvested area, a finger sign marks the start of a bridleway (this place will be remembered from the previous walk). Passing through a gate, head south-east over rough grazing, following a fence and then a drystone wall until arriving at an unclassified road (1 = NY 798 752).

A finger sign on the south side of the road shows the Pennine Way heading uphill beside a broken wall. As the path levels-out it runs along the edge



of the forest, which is here softened with birch trees. Finger signs confirm the route as it crosses forestry roads, heading south up a firebreak until it emerges onto the open moorland of Haughton Common (2 = NY 797 736). Hereabouts are the remains of Comyn's Cross, named for a local chieftain from the time of King Arthur. Heading south-west towards an old sheep shelter enclosing a few windswept trees, a quad track is soon joined. This crosses a stream before continuing towards the edge of the forest (which here follows an ancient boundary known as Black Dike) (3 = NY 785 727).

From here the Pennine Way runs through the forest for another 1½ miles (2¼ kilometres), and whilst the waymarking assumes that everyone is heading north, there are no real navigational difficulties. Following a firebreak south-west, the route eventually joins a forestry road heading south. Harvesting on the left has opened up views of the King's and Queen's Craggs (the reference being to Arthur and Guinevere). The Great Whin Sill rolls away to the west, with Hadrian's Wall running along its crest. Leaving the forest behind, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning off the track, although we continue straight ahead (4 = NY 780 707).

Swallow Craggs

The first part of the return route crosses rough pasture for around 5½ miles (9 kilometres) before re-entering the forest. The hardcore track continues south-west towards East Stonefolds farm, with a screen of scots pine on the left hardly obscuring the view of Greenlee Lough. The track ends at West Stonefolds farm, where a sign warns of dogs running free. Passing around the farmhouse, continue along a faint track running over grass. Crossing a small stream by a footbridge, head up to a fence stile (5 = NY 770 701).

Greenlee Lough

Greenlee Lough (a word equivalent to 'loch', and pronounced 'loff') is the largest natural lake in Northumberland - although it is only 5 feet (1½ metres) deep at most. A bird hide on its northern shore offers good views over the lake, which is visited by whooper swans, mute swans and canada geese, as well as goldeneye, tufted and mallard

ducks. The reedy banks are home to pike, while small fish and frogs attract heron. The acidic mire at the edge of the lake provides a habitat for insectivorous sundew plants.

Here a finger sign shows a permissive path to Greenlee Lough, although we turn right and follow a rutted track towards Greenlee farm. Joining a hardcore track heading south-west along the edge of the forest, on the left are views towards the lake and the Great Whin Sill. Passing the entrance to Gibbs Hill farm, head up a short incline, looking out for a finger sign on the right (6 = NY 748 691). This marks the start of a route to Wealside farm, heading west across 1 mile (1½ kilometres) of rough terrain. Navigation is fairly easy as the route initially runs parallel to Swallow Craggs, with the location of the farm itself indicated by a group of trees (7 = NY 731 690).

A finger sign to the right of the farm marks the start of a path, heading north-east on tussocky grass. Dropping into a rushy trough, a ladder stile is crossed as the route turns north-west, following a drystone wall. Joining an unclassified road, this eventually passes the entrance to Scotchcoulter farm, the name of which is derived from 'Scots colt herd', recalling the fact that the Border Reivers concealed stolen horses here. The road ends at a gate (8 = NY 722 712), where a finger sign shows a route to Grindon Green.

Grindon Green

The remainder of the return route follows good tracks and quiet roads through the forest, 6½ miles (10¼ kilometres) back to the starting point. Heading north along a hardcore track, the Hopealone radio transmitter is off to the right. Crossing a peat-stained stream by a footbridge, the track turns north-east, heading towards the ruin of Grindon Green farm (9 = NY 730 736). This is an eerie place of gnarled trees and moss-covered walls, marooned in a sea of conifers.

Continuing straight ahead, the track is shown on the map as an unclassified road, although from here to Coldcotes farm it retains a hardcore dressing. Emerging from the forest, Warks Burn is crossed by

a concrete bridge that can be over-washed in times of severe spate. Just past Coldcotes farm, a road joins from the right (10 = NY 771 758). Continuing north-east, the road runs past East Whygate farm before heading back into the forest for a way. Arriving at the Old School House, turn right and follow the road as it runs steeply downhill, back to the starting point.