

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 17 River South Tyne and Garrigill

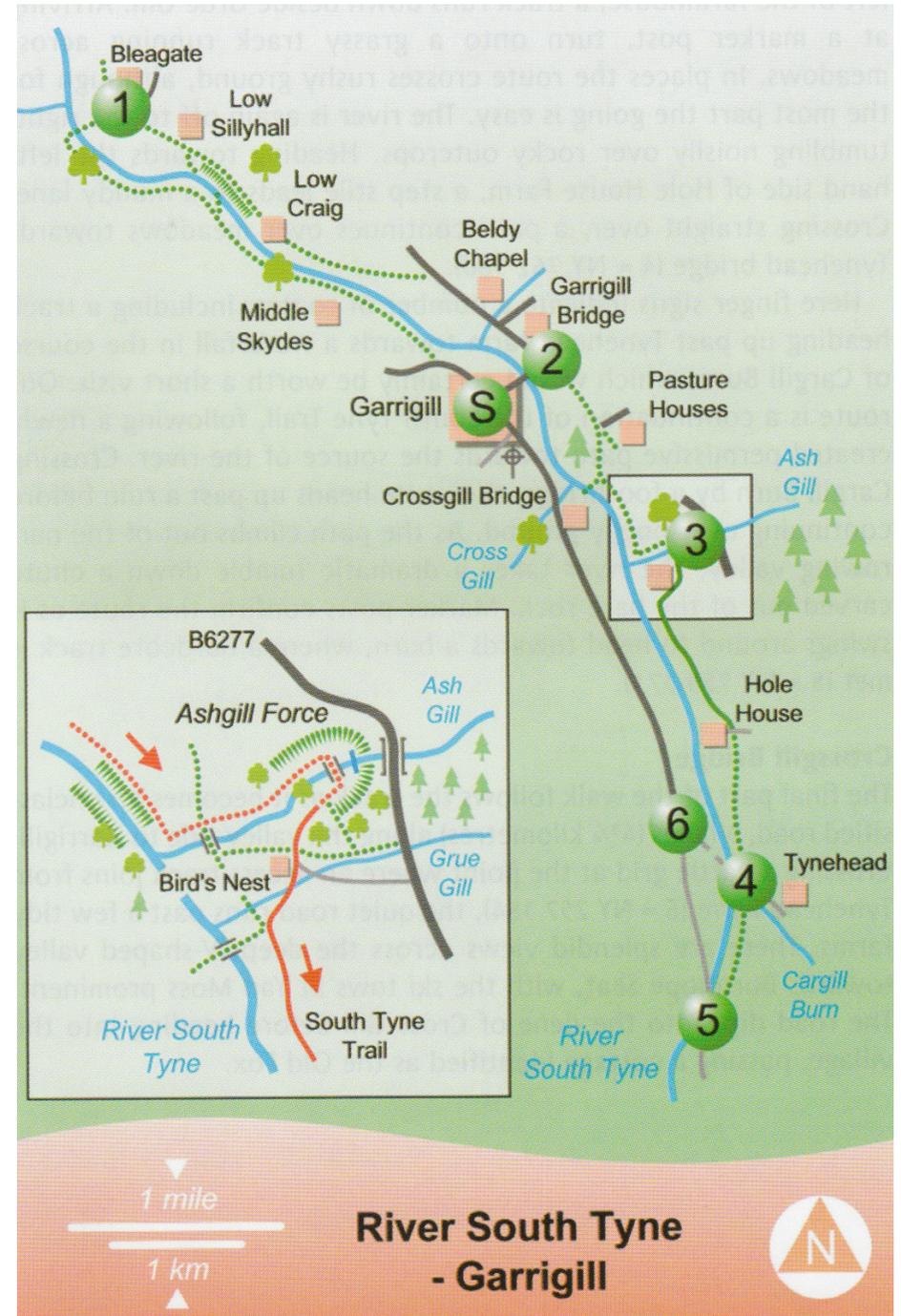
Another walk taking the form of a 'figure 8', this time centred upon England's highest market town. Crossing valley side pasture and passing the remains of a Roman fort (Whitley Castle), the return route runs alongside a narrow gauge railway. The paths can be muddy, but the views are lovely.



- Length: 12 miles (19¼ kilometres)
- Ascent: 984 feet (300 metres)
- Highest Point: 1,542 feet (470 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 31 ('North Pennines - Teesdale & Weardale') (West Sheet)
- Starting Point: Garrigill village centre, South Tynedale (NY 745 415)
- Facilities: Public toilets, inn and refreshments.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-17-river-south-tyne-and-garrigill>

Bleagate

Garrigill is signed from the B6277, 4 miles (6½ kilometres) south-east of Alston, and offers roadside parking around the village green. The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way along a riverside path to Bleagate farm, 2¾ miles (4¼ kilometres) to the north-west. Heading along Leadgate Road, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way turning onto a hardcore track. Passing the abandoned Redwing Chapel and some old spoil heaps, the path runs above the river, which is flanked with fir-trees. Farms can be seen dotted about the valley sides, which are patterned with walled pasture. As the river enters a narrow gorge, the path runs through a grove of birch trees.



Garrigill

Garrigill ('Gerard's gill') is a pleasant village of stone-built cottages, standing beside the River South Tyne. It grew-up around the lead-mining industry, and at its peak it boasted 1,600 inhabitants, although this has now dwindled to barely 200. Nevertheless, the village benefits from being located at the crossing point of the Pennine Way and the 'C2C' cycle route, which helps to support an inn - the George & Dragon. At one time there was another pub in the village - the Old Fox - which had a reputation as a rowdy establishment, frequented by lead-miners and poachers.

Arriving at a footbridge, the Pennine Way crosses the river, although for now we stay on the south bank. The path runs over meadows, and for a while follows the course of an old levy. Heading into another birch grove, it comes close to the water's edge before veering away from the river to cross a side-stream. Soon the river itself is crossed by a footbridge. Heading straight up the valley side, a drystone wall is crossed by a gap stile, before a rough track leads to Bleagate farm (1 = NY 717 437).

Garrigill Bridge

From here a path runs along the north side of the valley back to Garrigill Bridge. A finger sign shows the route heading south-east across pasture, passing the ruin of Low Sillyhall farm (which was built around a bastle house). The Pennine Way heads down towards the footbridge that was earlier passed, although we follow a path signed for Garrigill. Crossing a gated gap stile, this runs over pasture dotted with oak and horse chestnut, above the wooded gorge. Passing the imposing buildings of Low Craig farm, the route continues over meadows, crossing gap stiles identified by tall marker posts. Eventually the path arrives at an unclassified road, next to a tidy cemetery. The road runs past Beldy Chapel, where the landscaped grounds are home to tea rooms. Crossing Low Houses Bridge, the road continues towards Garrigill Bridge, where a finger sign shows a path to Pasture Houses (2 = NY 746 416).

Ashgill Force

The next part of the walk runs south-east for 1½ miles (2¼ kilometres) to Ashgill Force. A path runs above the river gorge before heading up through fields towards some old farm buildings. Crossing a drystone wall by a step stile, head straight over an access road to where a finger sign confirms the route. Passing to the right of a row of cottages (Pasture Houses), a marker post indicates a choice of ways. It is possible to follow a high-level path to Ashgill Force via Ashgillside farm, although the riverside path - the route of the South Tyne Trail - is more interesting.

Heading down towards a stand of conifers, cross a fence stile and follow a path running steeply downhill. Ignoring a quaint little bridge perched above the constricted gorge, turn onto a path following the river upstream. Crossing boggy meadows, the path turns hard as it meets a busy stream (Ash Gill). Arriving at a crossroads of routes, take the path signed for Ashgill Force, which follows the stream towards the head of the beautiful dene. The path can be very slippery, so take care. Crossing a footbridge and passing the remains of some bays where lead ore was once stored, Ashgill Force suddenly comes into view (3 = NY 759 405).

Ashgill Force

Ashgill Force is a wonderful sight after heavy rainfall. Here the waters of Ash Gill plunge from the head of a rocky amphitheatre into a boulder-choked pool. An elegant road bridge spans the head of the gorge, looking like a petrified rainbow. It is possible to walk behind the waterfall, taking great care on the slippery path and being alert to the possibility of falling rocks. In any event, you can expect to get soaked with spray!

Tynehead

Retracing your steps a short way, ignore a muddy path heading up the side of the gorge and instead follow a rough track running above the ore bays and up towards Bird's Nest farm. Passing to the left of the farmhouse, a track runs down beside Grue Gill. Arriving at a marker post, turn onto a

grassy track running across meadows. In places the route crosses rushy ground, although for the most part the going is easy. The river is again off to the right, tumbling noisily over rocky outcrops. Heading towards the left-hand side of Hole House farm, a step stile leads to a muddy lane. Crossing straight over, a path continues over meadows towards Tynehead bridge (4 = NY 762 380).

Here finger signs indicate a number of routes, including a track heading up past Tynehead farm towards a waterfall in the course of Cargill Burn, which would certainly be worth a short visit. Our route is a continuation of the South Tyne Trail, following a newly created permissive path towards the source of the river. Crossing Cargill Burn by a footbridge, the route heads up past a ruin before continuing over boggy ground. As the path climbs out of the narrowing valley, the river takes a dramatic tumble down a chute carved out of the bare rock. Marker posts confirm the route as it swings around to head towards a barn, where a hardcore track is met (5 = NY 759 371).

Crossgill Bridge

The final part of the walk follows the track as it becomes an unclassified road, 3 miles (4¾ kilometres) along the valley side to Garrigill. Crossing a cattle grid at the point where an access track joins from Tynehead farm (6 = NY 757 384), the quiet road runs past a few tidy farms. There are splendid views across the deep, 'V'-shaped valley towards Burnhope Seat, with the ski tows at Yad Moss prominent. The road dips into the dene of Cross Gill before heading into the village, passing a cottage identified as the Old Fox.

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