

# Walk the Way in a Day

## Walk 2 The Cheviot from Bowmont Valley

A challenging hill-walk encompassing both the Schil and the Cheviot, with a dramatic rocky gorge forming the focal point of the wonderful views. Whilst the route crosses some difficult terrain, passage of the notorious Cheviot bog has been improved with flagstones.

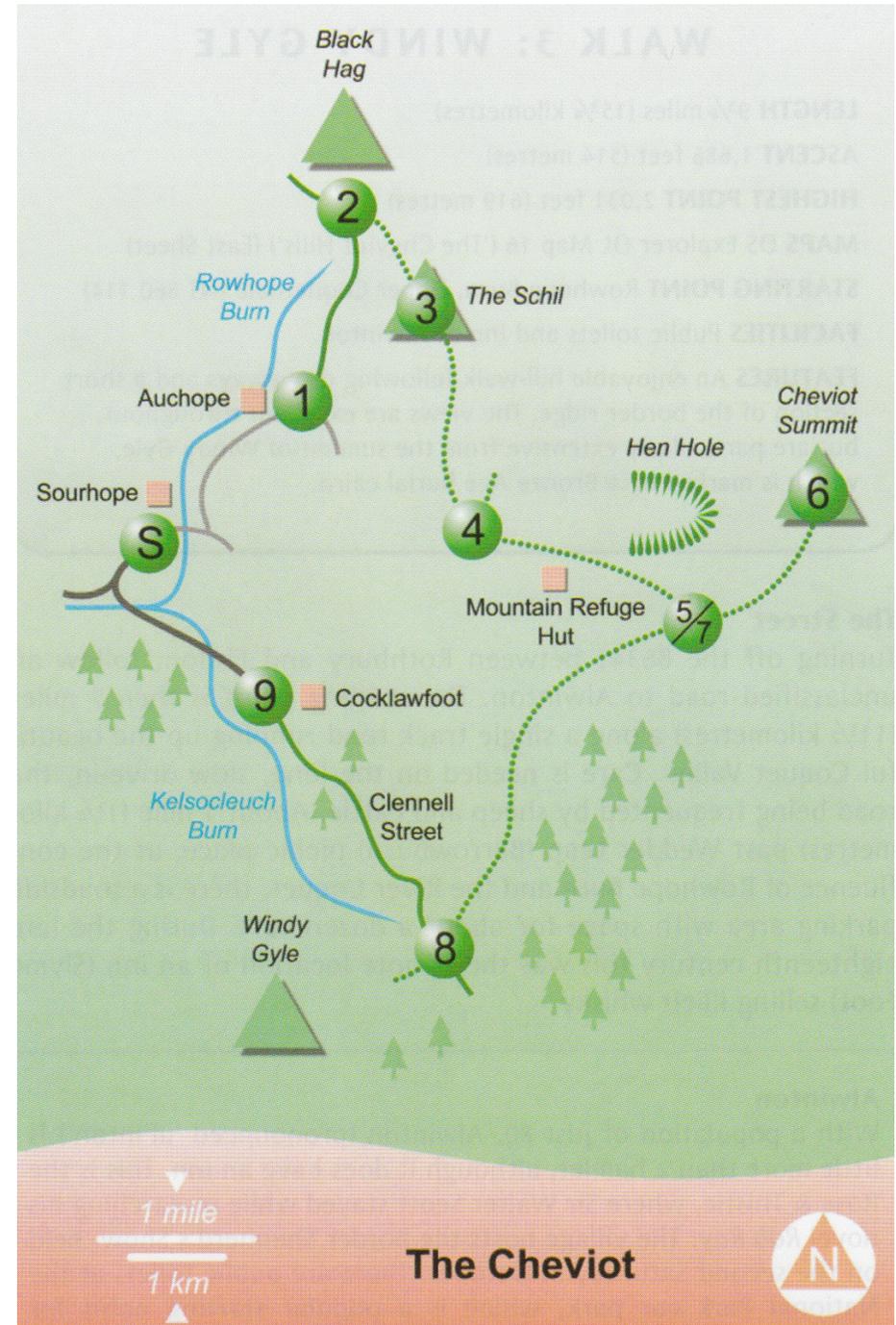


Length:	16 miles (26 kilometres)
Ascent:	3,250 feet (990 metres)
Highest Point:	2,674 feet (815 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Map 16 ('The Cheviot Hills') (East Sheet)
Starting Point:	Sourhope Farm, Bowmont Valley (NT 843 201)
Facilities:	None.
Website:	<a href="http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-2-cheviot-bowmont-valley">http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-2-cheviot-bowmont-valley</a>

### Bowmont Valley

The remote starting point is reached by turning off the B6401 at Primsidemill, about 1 mile (1½ kilometres) south of Town Yetholm, then following a narrow road up the Bowmont Valley. After about 6 miles (9¾ kilometres), a short way along a side road signed for Sourhope, a dug-out area provides roadside parking for a few cars.

*Go sit old Cheviot's crest below,  
And pensive mark the lingering snow  
In all his scaurs abide,  
And slow dissolving from the hill  
In many a sightless, soundless rill,  
Feed sparkling Bowmont's tide.  
Sir Walter Scott, 'Cheviot'.*



The first part of the walk follows tracks for 3½ miles (5½ kilometres) up onto the border ridge. Walking past Sourhope farm, the broad shoulders of the Cheviot can already be seen. Over a bridge, head up a tarmac track towards a fork. Turning left, follow the track as it contours around bracken-covered slopes above Sourhope Burn, eventually heading north-east. A short way past the access to Auchope farm, as the track again divides, turn left through a gate (1 = NT 858 215).

### **Sourhope Farm**

*Sourhope Farm stands at the head of the Bowmont Valley. There has been a farm here since the 14th century, although today it is the location of a research station run by the Macaulay Land Use Research Unit, investigating sustainable hill-farming methods. It also acts as a site for monitoring climate change - part of the Environmental Change Network.*

Crossing a small stream, the track continues north-east up the valley of Rowhope Burn. Looking up the valley, Black Hag can be identified by the distinctive rock outcrop known as Corbie Craig. As the track passes through a gate in a drystone wall it breaks up, re-emerging as a quad track climbing north-north-west on tussocky grass. As this converges with the Pennine Way at the saddle between Black Hag and the Schil, turn towards the point where a drystone wall is crossed by a ladder stile (2 = NT 861 233).

### **The Border Ridge**

The next part of the walk runs over the Schil before climbing the steep flanks of the Cheviot, a total of 4 miles (6½ kilometres). A finger sign shows the route heading south-east alongside the boundary, crossing boggy ground before climbing steeply. The summit reaches 1,972 feet (601 metres), and is surmounted by a shattered tor of baked andesite offering stunning views (3 = NT 869 223). The path down from the hill follows a fence as it head south-east. As the gradient slackens, the path becomes boggy, so the flagstones are a welcome addition. Arriving at the

saddle between the Schil and the Cheviot, to the left is a deep gash in the earth called Red Cribs (4 = NT 874 201).

Continuing east over tussocky grass, the path soon arrives at a mountain refuge hut. A plaque inside the hut records that it was erected in 1988 by volunteers and members of 202 squadron from RAF Boulmer. A short break might be in order, since ahead is one of the most arduous climbs on the Pennine Way, with the route heading east-south-east up beside Hen Hole to Auchope Cairn. At times the path comes quite close to the edge, which in winter is prone to the formation of wind-slab. As the gradient finally starts to slacken, the route zigzags up through a belt of scree to arrive at a groups of cairns. From here a long section of boardwalk provides safe passage of a notorious quagmire as the Pennine Way heads south-east. Crossing a fence stile, a fork is reached (5 = NT 896 194).

### **Hen Hole**

*Hen Hole is a dramatic glacial feature on the flanks of the Cheviot. The rocky gorge nestles the headwaters of the College Burn, which tumble down a series of waterfalls known as the Three Sisters. The legendary villain Black Adam was said to have lived in a cave, high up among the crags. Today these are home to peregrine falcons and rare alpine plants - the latter being relics of the last Ice Age.*

### **The Cheviot**

A finger sign shows the Pennine Way continuing along the border ridge, and offers the worthwhile option of a 'there-and-back' visit to the summit, 1¼ miles (1¾ kilometres) away. Crossing another fence stile, the path initially heads east-north-east, with flagstones providing safe passage of the treacherous bog. An un-flagged section of path leads to Cairn Hill, where a finger sign shows the path heading north-east towards the summit. Passing through a fenced enclosure, the indistinct top is marked by an OS pillar (6 = NT 909 205).

### **The Cheviot**

*At 2,674 feet (815 metres), the Cheviot stands head-and-shoulders*

above its neighbours. Its great dome dominates the skyline, and is often shrouded in an ominous bank of cloud. The OS pillar marking the summit sits atop a concrete platform, preventing it from sinking into the ground - as did its two predecessors. Around this is a 50 acre (20 hectare) area of blanket bog, a product of the formation of peat on top of the impermeable granite. This is home to cottongrass, mosses and sedges, while the drier patches show heather, bilberry, crowberry and cloudberry. The rare cloudberry has a distinctive cluster of berries, appearing in late summer and much sought after by grouse. The plateau is flanked by andesite tors and littered with the remains of air crashes.

By climbing onto the concrete platform it is possible to espy Lindisfarne and the Farne Islands. There is little opportunity to find a resting place here, so it is re-assuring that this is the half-way point on the walk, and that the remainder is mostly downhill. Ignoring a nearby ladder stile, retrace your steps over Cairn Hill to the Pennine Way. Arriving back at the fork (7 = NT 896 194), the border ridge is rejoined for the next 3 miles (4¾ kilometres).

The path initially heads west-south-west on boardwalk and flagstones. When these fail it becomes necessary to wander from the border fence in search of dry ground. It will be a blessing when this whole section of the route has been flagged, not least since the path gets wider every year. On the way down, look out for an isolated rock outcrop off to the left - the so-called Hanging Stone. Also on the left, beyond a sprawling conifer plantation, are the hills around the head of the Breamish Valley. From Score Head the path runs south-south-west down the broad ridge, passing an OS pillar at King's Seat. The driveway known as Clennell Street is met at the point where it crosses the border ridge between Upper Coquetdale and the Bowmont Valley (8 = NT 871 160).

### **The Hanging Stone**

*The Hanging Stone is a 17 feet (6 metre) high needle of rock on the western flanks of the Cheviot. It was supposedly named after an incident in which an unfortunate individual was throttled by the strap*

*of his own backpack when he fell from the rock. At one time the Hanging Stone marked the Scottish border, at the boundary between the Middle and East Marches.*

### **Clennell Street**

The Pennine Way continues on towards Windy Gyle, although we follow Clennell Street down Cock Law ridge, 3½ miles (5¾ kilometres) back to the starting point. A finger sign points through a gate, joining a rough track running north-west down a ridge. A sign requests that walkers seek an alternative route during lambing time (April-May), although it is noteworthy that there is a general right of access north of the border. Heading steeply downhill, as the track levels-out it passes to the right of one 'bump' on the ridge (The Bank), then to the left of another (White Knowe). Through a gap in a conifer plantation, Cocklawfoot farm is now just ahead, enjoying the shelter of mature sycamore trees (9 = NT 853 186). Passing through the muddy farmyard, a ford at Kelsocleuch Burn provides an opportunity to clean your boots. From here the starting point is just a short walk along the quiet road.

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