

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 5 Upper Coquetdale and Chew Green

The course of a Roman road is followed from the marching camp at Chew Green, at the head of Upper Coquetdale. The return route runs down a narrow valley beside a lively stream, then along a quiet road connecting isolated farmsteads.



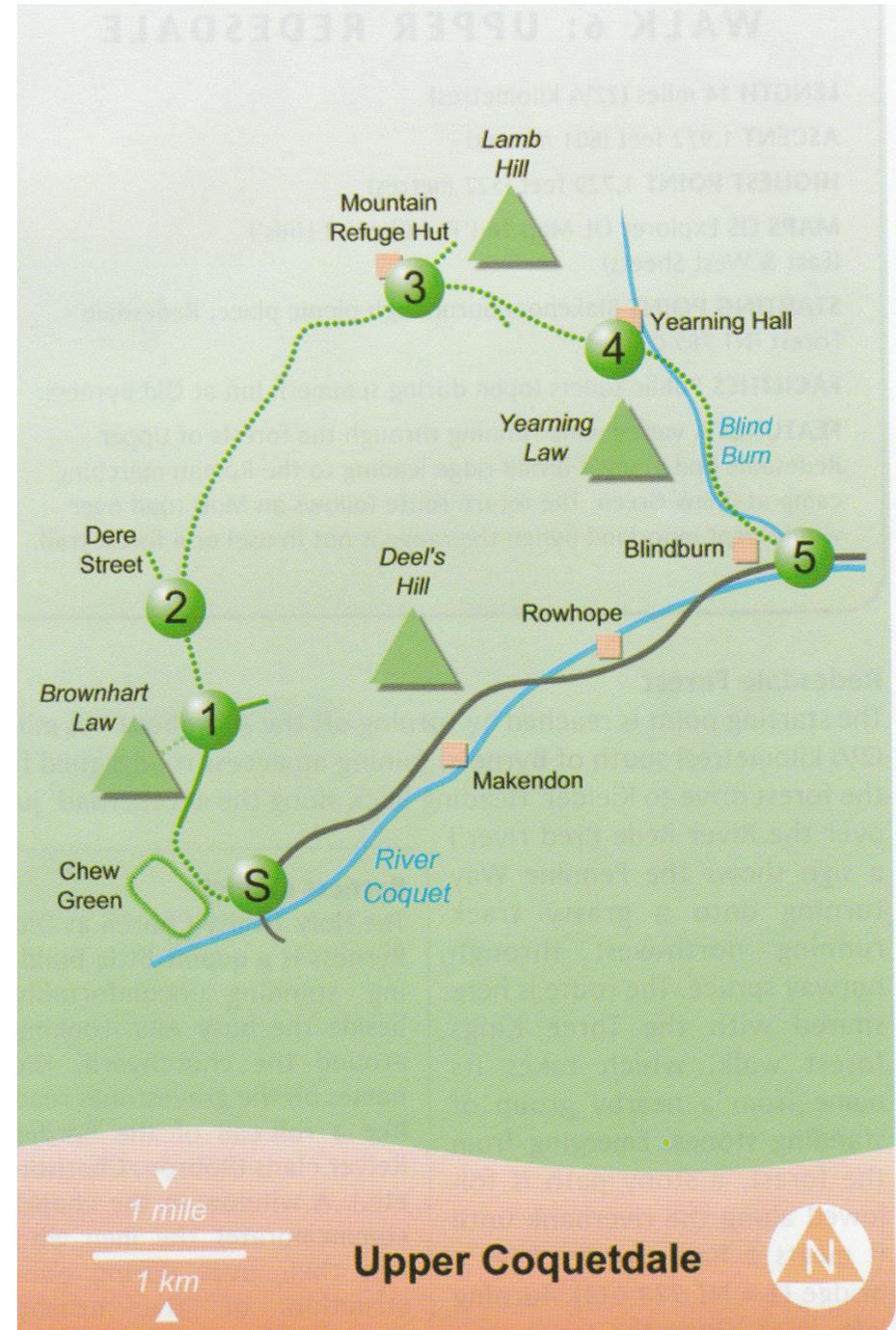
Length:	9¼ miles (15 kilometres)
Ascent:	1,148 feet (350 metres) of ascent
Highest Point:	1,575 feet (480 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Map 16 ('The Cheviot Hills') (East & West Sheets)
Starting Point:	Chew Green parking area, Upper Coquetdale (NT 794 085)
Facilities:	Public toilets and inn at Alwinton.
Website:	http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-day-walk-5-upper-coquetdale-and-chew-green

Dere Street

The starting point is close to the Roman marching camp at Chew Green, at the head of Upper Coquetdale. As an alternative to following the single track road up the valley, a shorter drive-in leaves the A68 in Upper Redesdale and follows MoD roads (Cottonshope Road and Dere Street) over the Redesdale artillery range. However, the availability of this route must be confirmed in advance. Significantly, the starting point is 1,280 feet (390 metres) above sea level, and launches straight onto the border ridge.

Chew Green

Chew Green provided an over-night stopping place for Roman



soldiers travelling along Dere Street. There were actually several camps and small forts at this location, built one-on-top of another. This left the confusion of remains seen today, with intersecting ramparts etched into the hillside. It is noteworthy that the site is surrounded by hills - occupying the high ground being evidently less important than factors such as the availability of flat land and a reliable water supply. During the 16th century the site was a meeting place for the Wardens of the Middle Marches. By the 18th century it was a resting place for drovers, with the section of Dere Street running over the border ridge being employed as a droveway.

The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way along the border ridge for 4 miles (6½ kilometres). Following a stony track towards the camp, a finger sign shows the route turning right, heading north-west along the course of Dere Street, beside the grassy ramparts (an inspection of the remains might be in order). Soon a marker post shows the route turning east, crossing a gully (Chew Sike) before swinging around to head north along a rough track. As the border fence converges from the left, a finger sign marks the point at which we part company with the Border County Ride (1 = NT 791 096).

Dere Street

Dere Street was constructed around AD80, under the governorship of Gnaeus Julius Agricola, to connect Eburacum (the legionary fortress at York) to Cramond on the Firth of Forth. Locally there were forts at Newstead (Trimontium), Cappuck and High Rochester (Bremenium), with marching camps between. The name of the route is derived from the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Deira, which together with Bernicia made up Northumbria. This section of Dere Street is known as 'Gamel's Path', after the Old English 'kemylpethe' ('old road').

At this point a 'there and back' visit to the nearby summit of Brownhart Law is possible, with a permissive path then a quad track following the border fence. This involves little ascent, and with the summit at 1,667 feet (508 metres) the views are unsurprisingly splendid. Returning to the

Pennine Way, continue north along the rough track. A fence stile on the left provides access to the site of a Roman signal station, although the earthworks are lost beneath the heather. Arriving at a gate (2 = NT 788 105), a finger sign shows Dere Street heading down towards Towford in the Kale Water Valley, although we continue along the border ridge.

Brownhart Law Signal Station

The Roman signal station near Brownhart Law was one of a chain that ran across country to the garrison fort at Newstead near Melrose. With the magnificent views of the Scottish Borders, it is easy to forget that in the days of the Roman Empire the northern frontier must have been regarded as 'bandit country' by the men who occupied these isolated outposts.

From here the route takes a broad sweep around to head north-east, diverging from the border fence. Crossing an expanse of grassy moorland, rushy areas warn of boggy ground, although the worst sections are flagged. The view ahead is now dominated by a procession of hills running along the border ridge, with Lamb Hill foremost. A cairn and a few marker posts provide reassurance of the route, which now heads east (at this point it is necessary to re-fold the map). Passing an old finger sign, the mountain refuge hut at Yearning Saddle is reached (3 = NT 804 129).

Blind Burn

It is here that we leave the Pennine Way, following the valley of Blind Burn for 2½ miles (4 kilometres) down to the road. From the hut, a marker post shows a route heading east. As this divides, take the path running south-east through the site of an old settlement. At another marker post, veer east-south-east on a faint path, heading towards a ruin (4 = NT 817 124). This is Yearning Hall, which is shown on the map as an enclosure surrounding a spring.

Yearning Hall

Yearning Hall is a ruined croft on the northern slopes of Yearning Law, standing among a few mature conifers and looking rather eerie

in this remote location. The fireplace remains, although only sheep and goats reside here now. The name relates to the Anglo-Saxon 'erne' ('soarer'), referring to the eagles that once inhabited this area.

Heading down into a gully and crossing a small stream, the narrow path runs around a spur to where Blind Burn is forded. From here the path follows the lively stream down its narrow valley. As the valley broadens-out, veer to the right of a rushy mire. Returning to the stream, a footbridge eventually carries the path to the west bank. Passing to the left of Blindburn farm (with its noisy border collies), the Upper Coquetdale road is reached (5 = NT 830 109).

Upper Coquetdale Road

The final part of the return route follows the road for 2¾ miles (4½ kilometres) back to the starting point. The road is quiet, the scenery is beautiful and it is joy to follow the River Coquet towards its source. The river is home to trout and salmon, and an encounter with a heron or even a ring ouzel is common. There are a couple of stiff climbs along the way, although the height gained opens-up views of the surrounding hills.

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