

Walk the Way in a Day

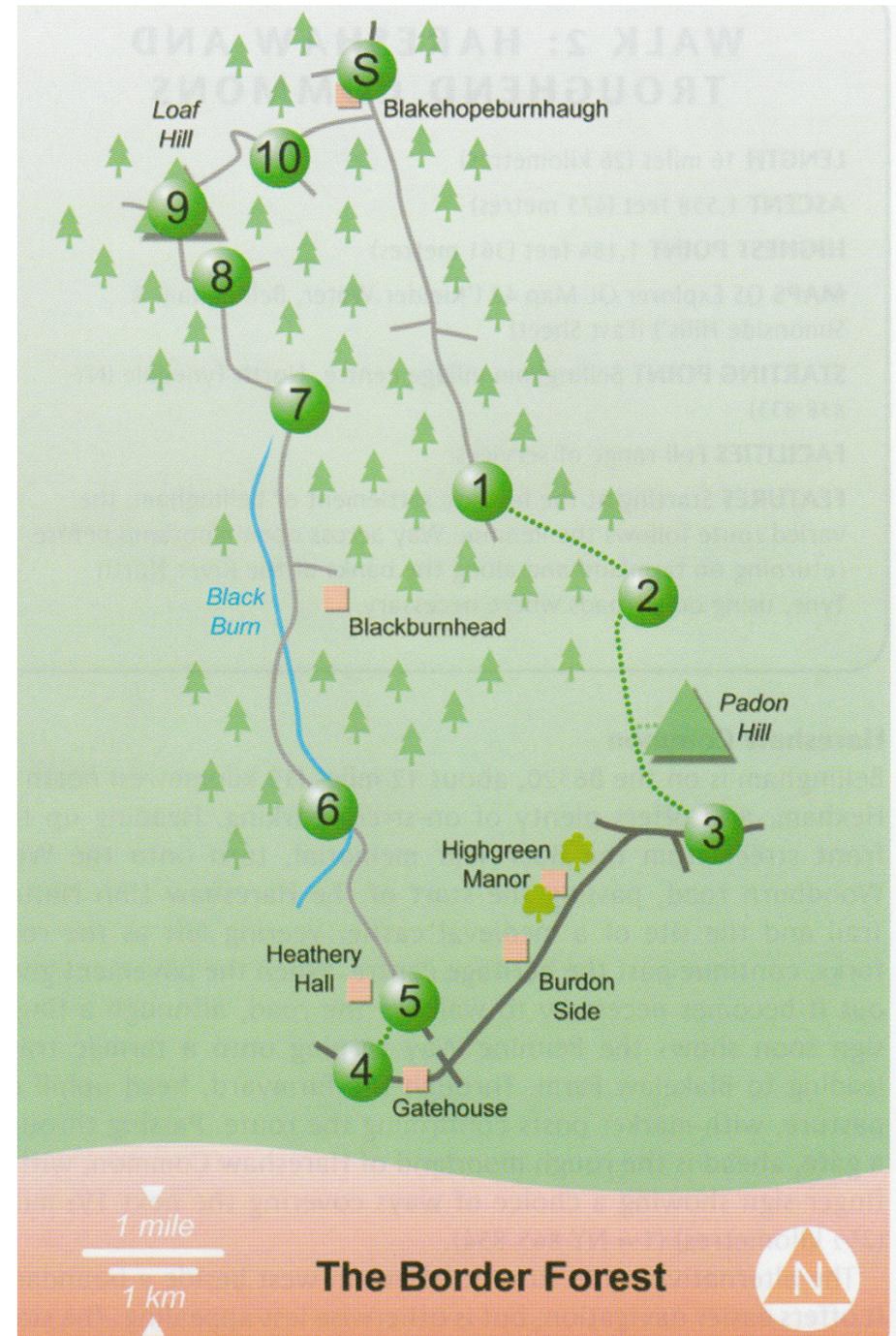
Walk 7 The Border Forest

A long and sometimes gruelling forest walk. Much of the route follows unappealing forestry roads and a moorland path that can be hard-going, although there are some significant points of interest along the way, including a prominent beehive cairn and a pair of well-preserved bastles.

Length:	19¼ miles (31 kilometres)
Ascent:	2,231 feet (680 metres)
Highest Point:	1,378 feet (420 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Map 42 ('Kielder Water, Bellingham & Simonside Hills') (East & West Sheets)
Starting Point:	Blakehopeburnhaugh picnic place, Redesdale Forest (NT 785 002)
Facilities:	Public toilets (open during summer). Inn and refreshments at Old Byrness.
Website:	http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-7-border-forest

Forestry Road

The first part of the walk follows the Pennine Way along a forestry road for 3 miles (5 kilometres). From the picnic place, head along the hardcore track as it crosses Blakehope Burn and passes some cottages and a farmhouse. Ignoring turnings to right and left, follow the track as it runs south-south-east. At a couple of points the literal route follows a parallel course over rough ground, although it is better just to keep to the track. Arriving at a gate (Rookengate), this marks the edge of a private plantation (Gibshiel Estate) (1 = NY 799 956).



Padon Hill

The Pennine Way originally continued straight ahead, but was diverted to follow a moorland path over Padon Hill, a distance of 3¼ miles (5½ kilometres). Whilst the forestry road was certainly monotonous, its hard surface will soon be remembered with fondness. A finger sign shows the route heading south-east along a boggy firebreak (at this point it is necessary to refold the map). Soon the forest gives way to moorland as the path continues alongside a fence, with occasional boundary stones (marked 'GH' for 'Gabriel Hall'). Arriving at Brownrigg Head (2 = NY 816 943), the path turns south-west to follow a drystone wall.

As the path converges with the edge of the forest it heads steeply downhill. The ground can be slippery, and the path is often overgrown with bracken, so take care. Leaving the forest behind, flagstones provide safe passage of a mire. Crossing a drystone wall by a ladder stile, the path heads south-south-east up the heather-clad slopes of Padon Hill. As the way ahead levels-out, there is the option of visiting the prominent beehive cairn marking the summit (this would make a good spot for lunch). There is no public right of way, but the cairn is often visited by walkers, and a section of fence has been left un-barbed. The views are wonderful, with the Cheviot dominating the northern horizon. In the foreground is the broad valley of the River Rede. Continuing along the path, this soon arrives at an unclassified road (3 = NY 824 917).

Padon Hill

The 15 feet (4½ metre) high beehive cairn on Padon Hill stands 1,243 feet (379 metres) above sea level. It was built by the Morrison-Bell family of nearby Otterburn Hall during the 1920s, using material from an earlier construction. Alexander Peden (c.1626-86), the Scottish Covenanter, is said to have held meetings on Padon Hill, those attending bringing stones with them to mark the place with a simple cairn.

Gatehouse

Here a finger sign shows the Pennine Way continuing straight ahead, although we turn right, following the quiet road for 2¾ miles (4½ kilometres) to Gatehouse. Ignoring the turn for Sundaysight, veer left at the next junction, taking the route signed for Greenhaugh (note the overgrown lime kiln). The road runs gently downhill as it heads south-west, passing Highgreen Manor (where it is again necessary to refold the map). The landscape becomes tamer as moorland gives way to pasture. Arriving at a crossroads (Lane End), continue straight ahead. Passing through the hamlet, a short way further along the road, take the second of a pair of gates on the right (4 = NY 786 891). Following a rough track over pasture towards Heathery Hall farm, pass to the right of the farmhouse and turn left onto an access road (5 = NY 790 895).

Gatehouse

Gatehouse (formerly 'Yethouse') is a remote settlement in the once lawless Tarsset Valley. It is the site of a pair of well-preserved bastle houses dating from the mid-16th century, standing like gatehouses on either side of the road. Today they are used as farm buildings, but retain much of their original character. In some respects they are superior to the famous Black Middens bastle, which is located further up the valley.

Border County Ride

From here the remainder of the return route follows the Border County Ride, a total of 9¼ miles (14¾ kilometres). The tarmac track runs past an imposing group of lime kilns, before arriving at a footbridge across a peat-laden stream (Black Burn) (6 = NY 780 918). Here the Border County Ride enters the forest. In failing daylight this can be a fearful place, the tall conifers creaking ominously as they sway in the wind. Worse still are the harvested areas, which look like the aftermath of a natural disaster. Whilst most of the turn-points are waymarked, careful navigation is required.

Lime Kilns

The practice of using lime to 'sweeten' acidic moorland soils is recorded in the remains of kilns dotted about the landscape, and in the visual contrast between improved pasture ('in-bye') and rough grazing ('out-bye'). Lime kilns were constructed to a more or less standard design, usually placed at exposed locations to catch the wind. Limestone would normally be quarried locally, and fed in through the top of the 'pot' in layers, with coal or charcoal in-between. After several days of burning, the slaked lime would be removed from the 'eye' at the bottom of the kiln.

The forestry road initially heads north-north-west. Passing through an open area, Black Burn is re-crossed by a concrete bridge. Ignoring the turn for Blackburnhead farm, continue north. Arriving at a 'T'-junction (7 = NY 777 965), turn left and head north-west, swinging around to north-north-west. At the next 'T'-junction (8 = NY 769 978), turn left again, heading south-west before swinging back to north-north-west. Passing a disused quarry near the top of Loaf Hill, another 'T'-junction marks the highest point on the walk (9 = NY 763 985). Ignoring the waymarked route on the left, turn right and join a gloomy track heading north-east (the marker post for the Border County Ride is hard to spot). This snakes about as it heads downhill. Arriving at a 'T' junction not shown on the map (10 = NY 774 991), take the track on the left. Eventually this rejoins the Pennine Way, just south of Blakehopeburnhaugh.

Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself within a forest dark, for the straightforward pathway had been lost. Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say what was this forest savage, rough, and stern, which in the very thought renews the fear.

Dante, 'Divina Commedia: Inferno'.

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