

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 12 Hadrian's Wall Central Crag

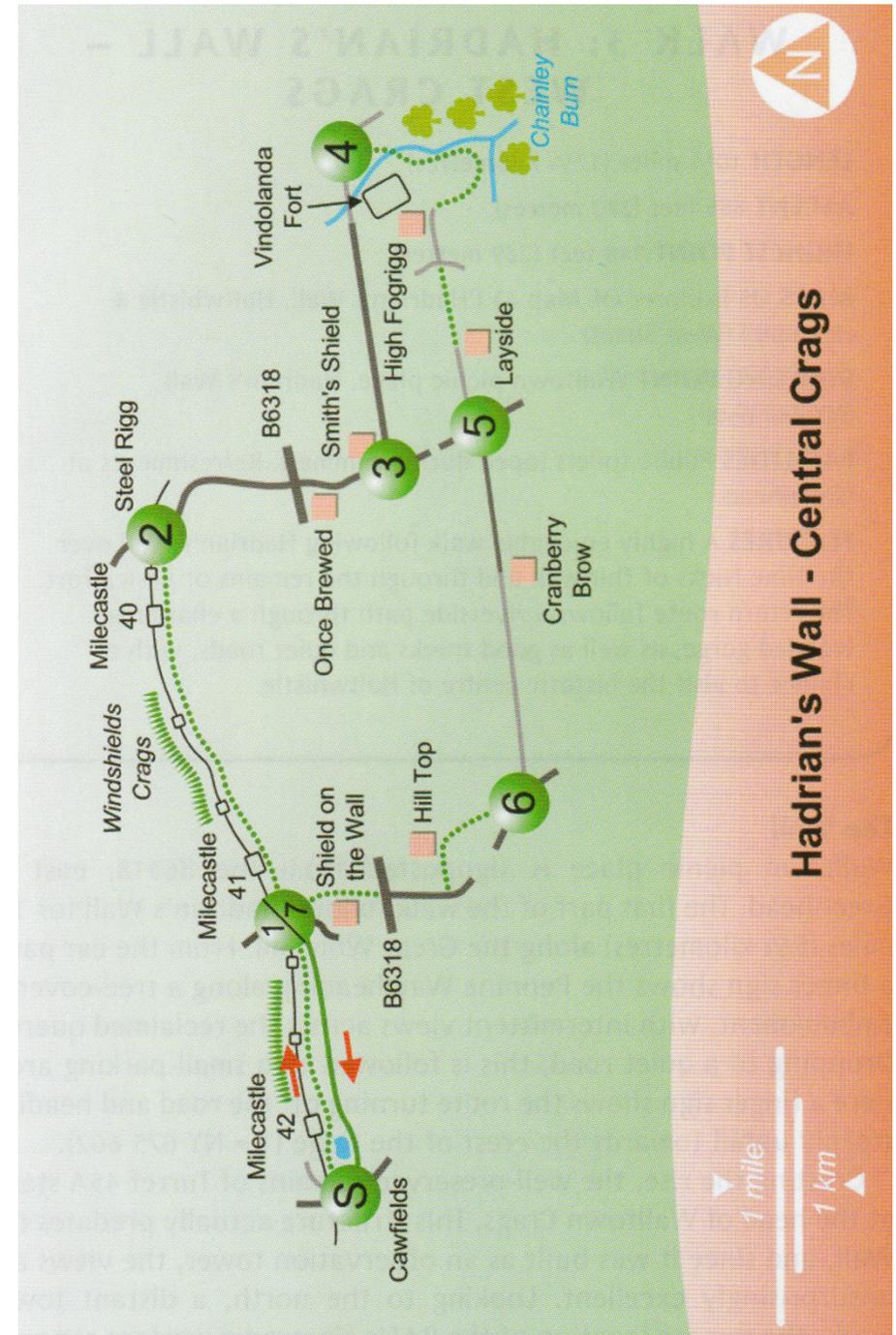


Starting at Cawfields, with its dramatic cross-section of the Great Whin Sill and famous milecastle, this is another wonderful roller-coaster ride along Hadrian's Wall. The return route follows a combination of paths, tracks and quiet roads, with an opportunity to visit Vindolanda fort.

- Length: 10¼ miles (16½ kilometres)
- Ascent: 1,444 feet (440 metres)
- Highest Point: 1,132 feet (345 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 43 ('Hadrian's Wall, Haltwhistle & Hexham') (West Sheet)
- Starting Point: Cawfields picnic place, Hadrian's Wall (NY 712 665)
- Facilities: Public toilets (open during summer). Inn at B6318 junction.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-12-hadrians-wall-central-crag>

The Wall

The starting point is at a reclaimed quarry, 1½ miles (2½ kilometres) north of Haltwhistle, and is signposted from the B6318. The first part of the walk follows Hadrian's Wall for 2¾ miles (4½ kilometres) along the Great Whin Sill. From the car park, a path runs around the north side of the lake, joining a track heading up through a nick in the ridge. This is Hole Gap, where the Wall climbs steeply on both sides (a short 'there and back' diversion up the stepped path on the right is well worth the effort, with exceptional views from the head of the quarry face). Passing the remains of Milecastle 42, the path runs alongside the Wall as it follows the crest of the ridge. Looking to the south, beyond the Roman Military Way, the vallum is prominent. Crossing a shallow nick (Bloody Gap), the path continues



along the ridge until it eventually starts downhill, passing the remains of Turret 41A to arrive at an unclassified road cutting through Caw Gap (1 = NY 727 669).

Cawfields Quarry

Until quite recently Cawfields was an active quarry, where the Great Whin Sill was plundered for roadstone. This destroyed part of the ridge and a section of Hadrian's Wall. By way of compensation, it revealed a dramatic cross-section of the Great Whin Sill, and led to the formation of an artificial lake. Picnic facilities have been provided beside Caw Burn, together with a car park and public toilets (the latter being closed at present).

This area is known as Shield on the Wall - a reference to a group of shielings that sheltered in the lee of the ridge. Heading up a stepped path, the crest of the ridge is soon rejoined. Crossing a shallow nick (Bogle Hole Gap), the faint remains of Milecastle 41 are passed. The Wall itself is poorly preserved hereabouts, and for much of the way there is only a drystone wall. Eventually the OS pillar marking the top of Windshields Crags is reached. At 1,132 feet (345 metres), this is the highest point on Hadrian's Wall. The Cheviot can be seen to the north, while to the south are Cross Fell and its neighbours. Far to the west are the hills of the Southern Uplands. Following the ridge gently downhill, the site of Milecastle 40 is passed. Beyond the drystone wall on the left is a long section of the defensive ditch. Crossing an intersecting wall by a step stile, an unclassified road is met (2 = NY 751 676).

Vindolanda Fort

Here we leave Hadrian's Wall (and the Pennine Way), with the next part of the walk following roads for 2¼ miles (3½ kilometres) to Vindolanda fort (whilst these are normally quiet, they are prone to spates of tourist traffic). Turning right, head down the road as it passes Peel Bothy, which stands on the site of a peel tower and offers basic accommodation. Arriving at the B6318, cross straight over to join an unclassified road signed for Bardon Mill. This passes the National Park visitor centre, and heads south to

Smith's Shield farm, where there is a turning onto a single track road (3 = NY 755 662).

At this point it is possible to continue straight ahead, cutting 2½ miles (4 kilometres) off the walk. However, even if there is no time for a proper visit to the fort, a circuit of the perimeter is again worthwhile. The road heads east along the course of Stanegate, with the remains of a Roman mile post on the left (this being the only example in Britain still in its original location). Beside the road is an 18th century cottage, Causeway House, which is the only surviving heather-thatched building in Northumberland. Arriving at the car park, if you wish to visit the fort there is a charge. Otherwise, continue along a hardcore track running down a lane towards Chesterholm farm. Just before crossing a stream, beyond the hawthorn bushes on the left is another mile post. A short way further along the lane, at the entrance to the staff car park, a finger sign marks the start of a footpath to Bardon Mill (4 = NY 773 665).

Chesterholm (Vindolanda) Fort

Vindolanda ('bright heath') sits atop a bluff, and was one of a chain of timber forts built around AD 90 to guard Stanegate. It was abandoned when Housesteads was built, but was later rebuilt in stone. The visible remains date from the early 4th century. As well as the stone ramparts, the headquarters building and commanding officer's residence can be seen. To the west is a 10 acre (4 hectare) civilian settlement, with a bath-house and a mansio (a kind of post-inn). Excavation of the site has turned-up a wealth of written records giving an insight into life on the northern frontier, as well as the remains of a timber structure that might have been built for Hadrian's visit. The site hosts a speculative reconstruction of a part of Hadrian's Wall, with both stone and turf sections.

Following the path along the wooded banks of Chainley Burn, on the far side is an ornamental garden with a reconstruction of a pagan temple. Crossing the stream by a footbridge, those who have visited the fort rejoin the route. Arriving at a fence stile, the path leaves the stream, heading uphill on pasture. Joining a track running towards a farmhouse, cross

another fence stile on the right and head north over fields towards High Fogrigg farm. Turning onto a hardcore track, when this meets another farm access, look for a fence stile to the right. Heading west over pasture, a tree-filled gully is crossed. A hardcore track runs from Layside farm to the Bardon Mill road, where a sign shows the start of an access road leading to Cranberry Brow farm (5 = NY 756 658).

The Roman Military Way

Ahead is a straight track, running west-south-west along a broad ridge for 1¼ miles (2¼ kilometres). Initially the surface is tarmac, heading up a hawthorn-lined lane. The views over the valley of the River South Tyne are unfortunately spoiled by a line of electricity pylons. Passing the farm, a rough track continues along the top of some fields until arriving at an unclassified road. Turning right, head along the road for a short way. Soon a gate on the right leads to an access track signed for Hill Top farm (6 = NY 735 655).

From the farmhouse, cross a ladder stile and head diagonally (west) over a field. The road is rejoined as it heads north to the junction with the B6318. Off to the left is a pair of standing stones, the Mare and Foal. Crossing straight over the main road, a finger sign points to a step stile, with a path heading over rough grazing towards Shield on the Wall farm. A marker post indicates a turn, with the path leaving the drystone wall on the left to cut across the vallum. Joining the Roman Military Way, the track contours around the back of the ridge to arrive at Caw Gap (7 = NY 727 669).

Crossing straight over the road, a finger sign shows the route to Cawfields, 1 mile (1½ kilometres) along the Roman Military Way. The pleasant track runs in the lee of the ridge, parallel to the vallum. Approaching Hole Gap, instead of threading through the nick, stay on the track as it swings to the left. Just before reaching the vallum, turn right and follow a narrow path running beside a fence. Arriving at an unclassified road, turn right and head back to the starting point.

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