

Walk the Way in a Day

Walk 13 Hadrian's Wall West Crag

A highly enjoyable walk following Hadrian's Wall over the Nine Nicks of Thirlwall and through the remains of Aesica fort. The return route follows a riverside path through a charming wooded gorge, as well as good tracks and quiet roads, with a chance to visit the historic centre of Haltwhistle.

- Length: 10¾ miles (17¼ kilometres)
- Ascent: 886 feet (270 metres)
- Highest Point: 948 feet (289 metres)
- Map(s): OS Explorer OL Map 43 ('Hadrian's Wall, Haltwhistle & Hexham') (West Sheet)
- Starting Point: Walltown picnic place, Hadrian's Wall (NY 668 660)
- Facilities: Public toilets (open during summer). Refreshments at Greenhead.
- Website: <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-13-hadrians-wall-west-crag>

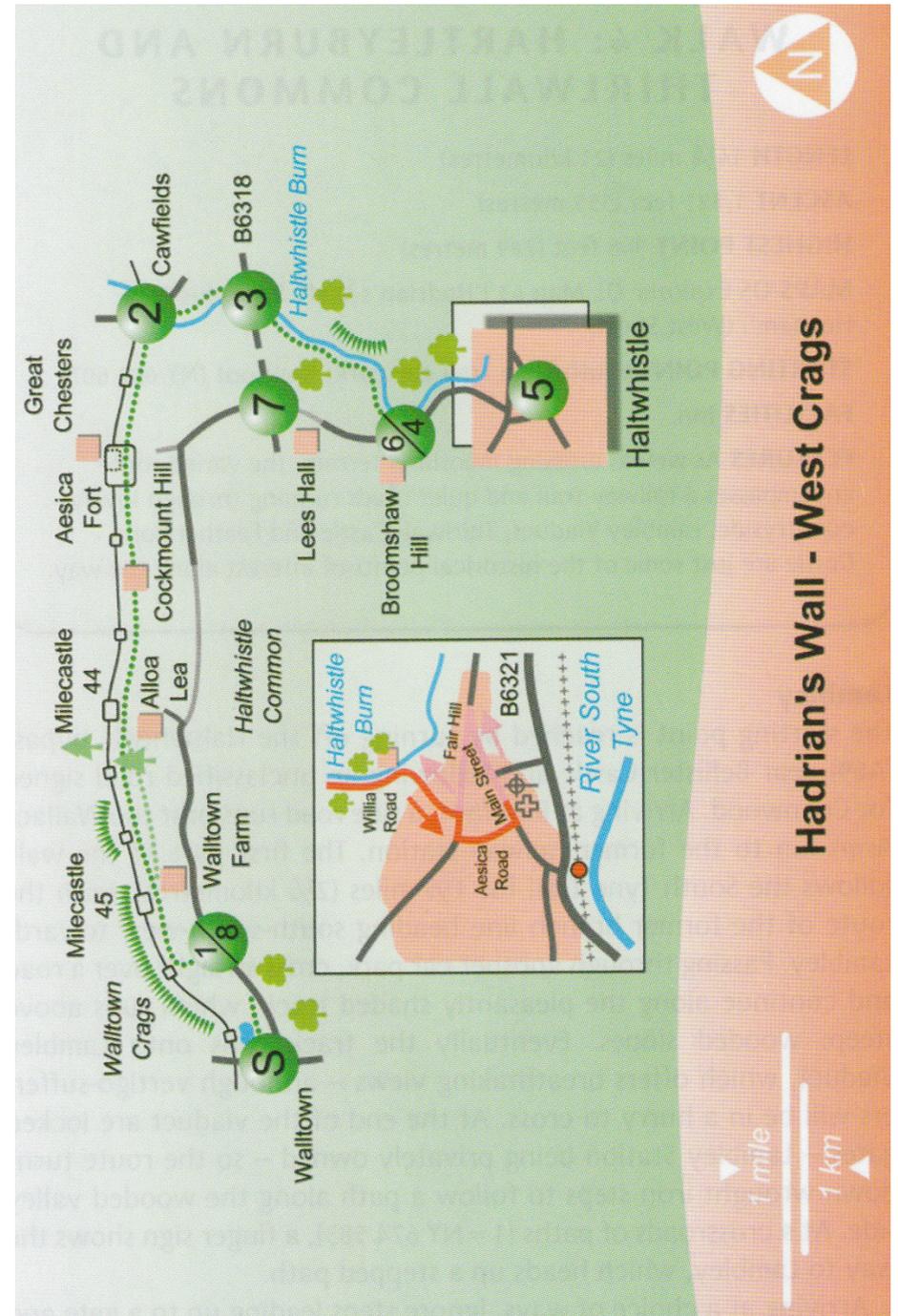


The Wall

Walltown picnic place is signposted from the B6318, east of Greenhead. The first part of the walk follows Hadrian's Wall for 3½ miles (5¾ kilometres) along the Great Whin Sill. From the car park, a finger sign shows the Pennine Way heading along a tree-covered embankment, with intermittent views across the reclaimed quarry. Dropping to a quiet road, this is followed to a small parking area. Here a finger sign shows the route turning off the road and heading steeply uphill towards the crest of the ridge (1 = NY 675 662).

Walltown Quarry

Walltown Quarry was worked for roadstone from 1871 until the



1970s. As at Cawfields, part of the Great Whin Sill was destroyed, together with a section of Hadrian's Wall. This part of the ridge is known as the Nine Nicks of Thirlwall, although only five of the nicks have survived. Once again, a picnic place has been created around an artificial lake, with a car park, public toilets and an information centre.

Cresting the rise, the well-preserved remains of Turret 45A stand at the head of Walltown Crags. This structure actually predates the Wall, and since it was built as an observation tower, the views are unsurprisingly excellent. Looking to the north, a distant tower marks the remote location of the RAF's electronic warfare range at Spadeadam, where the Blue Streak rocket was test-fired during the late 1950s. Heading north-east along the crest of the ridge, the crags on the left are home to chives that might have originally been cultivated by the Romans. Close to a northward kink in the ridge are the faint remains of Milecastle 45.

At this point the Pennine Way used to leave the ridge for about 1½ miles (2½ kilometres), following the Roman Military Way along the reverse slope. However, the path beside the Wall has now been established as a public right of way. Continuing along the ridge, the Wall appears as an overgrown dyke among rock outcrops. Arriving at a nick, swing to the right to avoid a steep descent. Crossing a drystone wall by a ladder stile, head steeply uphill, passing Turret 44B. Further along the ridge, the faint remains of Turret 44A are passed. Ahead is another gap - the last of the Nine Nicks, where a turn to the right avoids a drop. Rejoining the ridge, the path begins a gentle descent as it swings around to head east.

Passing the site of Milecastle 44, to the north of the Wall is the defensive ditch. Crossing a drystone wall by a ladder stile, the path runs through a stand of fir trees. Here the Wall is well-preserved, despite being overgrown with brambles. Passing Cockmount Hill farm, continue over fields towards Aesica fort, where the extensive remains are worthy of a thorough inspection. Exiting by a ladder stile beside Great Chesters farm, the route crosses fields, staying parallel to a drystone wall that marks the course of the Wall. Ahead is the dramatic scar of the quarry face at Cawfields.

Crossing a drystone wall by a step stile, an unclassified road is reached (2 = NY 712 665).

Great Chesters (Aesica) Fort

Aesica (after Esus, the name of a Celtic deity) was built on the site of Milecastle 43, and housed a mixed garrison of cavalry and infantry. The west ramparts are well-preserved, with the gateway retaining the blocking material used to close it up when it fell into disuse. The headquarters building (complete with vaulted strongroom) and commanding officer's residence have been uncovered, as have the barracks and granaries. A stone altar with a carved jug relief remains in-situ near the south gateway. The western approach was protected by a system of four ditches, reflecting its perceived vulnerability due to the slope of the terrain. There was a civilian settlement beside the fort, and a bath-house to the south-east - the latter being supplied by a water channel following a winding course for 6 miles (10 kilometres) from the headwaters of Caw Burn.

Haltwhistle Burn

Heading along the road, the entrance to Cawfields picnic place is passed, offering an opportunity to stop for lunch. A finger sign on the right marks the start of a permissive path following Haltwhistle Burn downstream. This runs along the course of a wagon way that connected Caw fields Quarry and Haltwhistle, and is not marked on the map. Ignoring a flat bridge off to the right, stay on the east side of the stream. When the stream disappears into a culvert, cross a ladder stile and head up the side of an embankment to arrive at the B6318 (3 = NY 712 659).

Haltwhistle Burn

Haltwhistle Burn begins life as Caw Burn at the outflow from Greenlee Lough, and meanders about to the north of the Great Whin Sill until it finds a way through at Caw fields Quarry. It then follows a wooded gorge down to its confluence with the River South Tyne at Haltwhistle. Close to the quarry is the site of a Roman water mill that served the Wall garrison (the millstones are at Chester's Museum). A

short way downstream, atop a bluff, is the site of a small fort dating from Trajan's reign, which seems to have acted as headquarters for soldiers stationed along Stanegate.

Heading west along the grass verge, a finger sign on the far side of the road points through a kissing gate. Crossing a footbridge at the bottom of a field, a grassy track is joined. This follows Haltwhistle Burn downstream, passing a group of lime kilns, then a tall chimney and the remains of a colliery engine house. Re-crossing the burn, the way ahead enters a wooded gorge that is home to red squirrels, otters and dippers. Eventually an unclassified road is met, close to Broomshaw Hill farm (4 = NY 705 650).

At this point there is an opportunity to visit the historic centre of Haltwhistle, with a return trip of 1¾ miles (3 kilometres). Turning left, head along the road as it runs down the pleasant dene. Passing a derelict sawmill, follow Willia Road and Aesica Road, with signs indicating the way to the town centre. Upon reaching the main street, the market square is a short way to the left (5 = NY 707 641). After looking around the town centre, retrace your steps back to Broomshaw Hill farm, following the signs for Burn Gorge (6 = NY 705 650).

Haltwhistle Common

This time stay on the road as it heads up towards Lees Hall farm, from where a hardcore track runs north over pasture, with views over the wooded gorge on the right, and ahead towards the Great Whin Sill. Crossing straight over the B6318, an unclassified road is joined (7 = NY 707 658). The remainder of the return route is on quiet roads and good tracks, 3 miles (5 kilometres) back to the starting point. As the road bends sharply to the left, ignore a track leading to Aesica fort. From here the route runs west along the bottom of a broad, trough-like valley, parallel to the vallum. Passing an impressive lime kiln, the fields on the left are dotted with mature broadleaf trees. Continuing along the road as it runs past Walltown farm, the point at which the Pennine Way turns off for Walltown Crags will be recognised (8 = NY 675 662). Arriving at a 'T' junction, turn

right and head the back to the starting point.