

# Walk the Way in a Day

## Walk 6 Upper Redesdale from Byrness

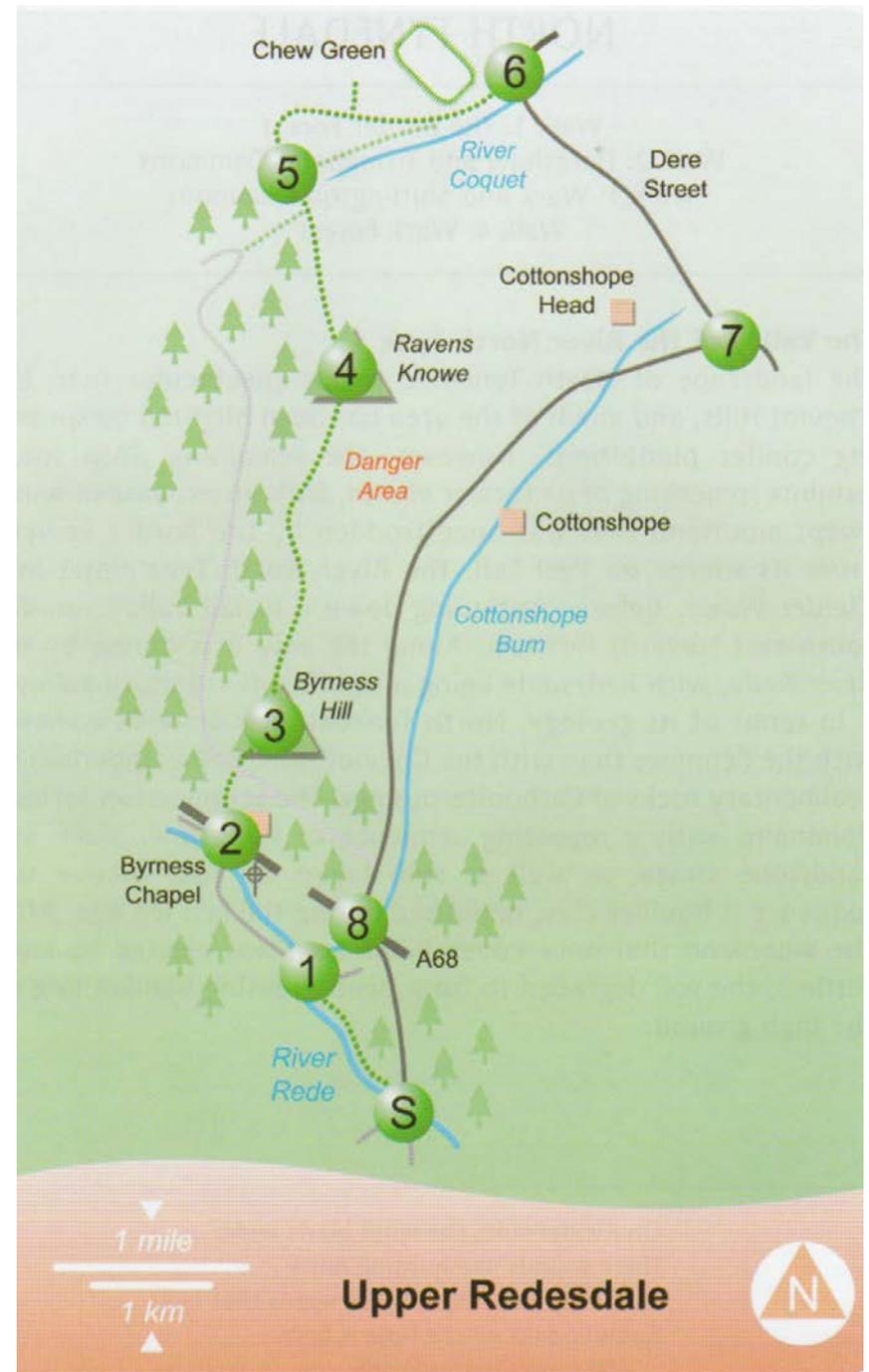
A varied walk running through the forests of Upper Redesdale and along a broad ridge leading to the Roman marching camp at Chew Green. The return route follows an MoD road over wind-swept moorland (when the range is not in use) or a forest trail.



Length:	14 miles (22¼ kilometres)
Ascent:	1,972 feet (601 metres)
Highest Point:	1,729 feet (527 metres)
Map(s):	OS Explorer OL Map 16 ('The Cheviot Hills') (East & West Sheets)
Starting Point:	Blakehopeburnhaugh picnic place, Redesdale Forest (NT 785 002)
Facilities:	Public toilets (open during summer). Inn at Old Byrness.
Website:	<a href="http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-6-upper-redesdale-byrness">http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way/route/walk-way-day-walk-6-upper-redesdale-byrness</a>

### Redesdale Forest

The starting point is reached by turning off the A68 about 1½ miles (2½ kilometres) south of Byrness, joining an access road signed for the forest drive to Kielder. Heading back along the access road, just over the River Rede ('red river') a sign shows the Pennine Way turning onto a grassy track running north-west through norway spruce. The route is here shared with the Three Kings forest walk, which takes its name from a nearby group of standing stones. Emerging from the forest, a stony path is followed along the riverbank until it meets a hardcore track at a bridge (1 = NT 778 013). Turning left, head along the track as it runs back into the forest before veering north, crossing the river by a footbridge to arrive at a chapel (2 = NT 771 023).



### **Byrness Chapel**

*The Holy Trinity Church at Old Byrness is a quaint little building, standing uncomfortably beside the busy A68. Looking around the churchyard, the names on the gravestones read like a roll-call of the Border Reiver clans (Robson, Charlton etc.). A window in the chapel commemorates the men who lost their lives during construction of the nearby Catcleugh Reservoir.*

The tree-shaded lane on the left is used by long-distance walkers to access the youth hostel at Byrness, although the Pennine Way itself runs alongside the A68 for a short way. Crossing the busy road, head up past a few cottages until a finger sign shows the route turning through a gate in a hedge. At the top of a small field another gate leads to a pair of marker posts - that on the right showing the Pennine Way heading north-east up the forested slopes of Byrness Hill on a path that can be very slippery. Forestry roads are crossed during the ascent, with marker posts confirming the route. Emerging from the forest, a short but steep clamber around large boulders leads up onto the ridge (3 = NT 774 033). The top of Byrness Hill is marked by the remains of a fire look-out tower, as well as the first of a string of MoD warning signs.

### **Ravens Knowe**

The next part of the walk runs along the broad ridge for 4¼ miles (6¾ kilometres) to Chew Green. Heading north on a quad track, there are good views across the valleys on either side of the ridge, with Byrness village and Catcleugh Reservoir coming into view. Along the western flanks of the ridge are rock outcrops, beneath which are the upper fringes of the forest. As a fence joins from the left, the Pennine Way veers to the right to avoid a cottongrass mire. Rejoining the fence, a well-defined path is followed north-north-east, with boardwalk providing safe passage of boggy ground. Arriving at the cairned summit of Ravens Knowe, at 1,729 feet (527 metres) this is the highest point on the walk (4 = NT 780 061).

### **Catcleugh Reservoir**

*Near the forestry village of Byrness is Catcleugh Reservoir, which was built in 1905 by the Newcastle & Gateshead Water Company to supply the population of Tyneside. It captures the waters of the River Rede, close to their source at Carter Bar. Construction took 15 years, with the creation of a 15 mile (24 kilometre) narrow gauge railway to carry raw materials and provisions for the 1,000 strong workforce. During the construction, shanty towns grew up on either side of the River Rede, which separated rival groups of workers from Newcastle and Gateshead.*

Continuing along a quad track heading north-north-west, the grassy ridge is boggy in places. Crossing the border fence (5 = NT 776 077), a finger sign shows the Pennine Way continuing straight ahead, as well as a faint path turning down towards the headwaters of the River Coquet. Joining a quad track heading east, another finger sign shows the route turning downhill, passing a couple of marker posts before re-crossing the border fence. From here a path runs beneath the grassy ramparts of Chew Green, above the infant River Coquet. When the Pennine Way turns left, instead continue down towards the road (6 = NT 794 085).

### **Dere Street**

The return route follows access roads for a total of 7 miles (11¼ kilometres). All but the last 1 mile (1½ kilometres) is on MoD roads that are frequently closed for safety reasons, so access must be confirmed in advance with Range Control. Also, it is essential that there is no deviation from the route. Heading steeply uphill, the road soon provides an 'aerial' view of Chew Green. Snow poles accompany the road as it runs south-east, following the course of Dere Street along a moorland ridge, with wide views to right and left. The location of a stone water trough (the curiously named 'Outer Golden Pot') is indicated by a star-shaped marker. For a way the route crosses onto the reverse side of the map, although refolding should be unnecessary. Arriving at a 'T'-junction (7 = NT 792 083), a road sign indicates a right turn.

From here an access road is followed south-west down the remote Cottonshope Valley, which is home to just a couple of isolated farmsteads. A short way before the road enters a conifer plantation, keep an eye open for the entrance to an old Royal Observer Corps bunker on the right. The A68 is met at a point just north of the picnic place at Cottonshopeburnfoot (8 = NT 788 049). Crossing the busy road, follow the grass verge for a short way before turning onto a farm access track. Instead of continuing down towards some cottages, turn left and follow a link running parallel to the A68. This joins the access road that was earlier used to access the starting point.

### **Cottonshopeburnfoot**

*There is some disagreement over whether Cottonshopeburnfoot (19 letters) or its neighbour, Blakehopeburnhaugh (18 letters), is the longest place name in England. The former is sometimes disqualified on the basis that it was formerly written as two words on Ordnance Survey maps (that is, Cottonshopeburn Foot). Putting the issue into perspective, the longest place name in Wales has 58 letters!*

### **Alternative Return Route**

If the MoD roads are closed, the alternative return route must be followed. This is shorter than the road-walk (at 6 miles / 9¾ kilometres), but crosses boggy ground and follows unappealing forestry roads. Retracing your steps along the Pennine Way, this time follow a faint path running alongside the border fence towards the source of the River Coquet. At one time the Pennine Way followed this route - the reason for its diversion becoming apparent as your boots start to fill with water! Upon reaching the place where the border fence was earlier crossed, rejoin the Pennine Way as it heads south. Ignoring a permissive path signed for Harts Toe, instead turn as a finger sign shows the Border County Ride heading through a gate into the forest (NT 776 073).

Following a hardcore path running south-west through the conifers, a forestry road is soon met. Turning left, follow the track as it heads south-west then south above the valley of Spithope Burn. The route can be

tedious, with dense walls of sitka spruce to right and left. Where the trees have been felled, an unsightly tangle of stumps and branches covers the ground. Down in the valley the remote Spithope mountain bothy be seen. When a marker post shows the Border County Ride switching back to head west, instead continue straight ahead on a forestry road running south-east. The standard return route is joined when the track arrives at Cottonshope Road (NT 780 015).

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