



# THE HALTWHISTLE RINGS



## WALK 10

### ‘The Battling Prioress and an Historical Soap’

**Length:** 6.25 mls/10 km

**Grade:** 2 Moderate

**Ascent/descent:** 614 ft/ 187 m

**OS explorer OL 43** Hadrian’s Wall

This walk uses part of the Pennine Way, down to the picturesque valley of the Hartleyburn to the landscaped valley by the South Tyne through Featherstone Park and returns by the old Haltwhistle to Alston railway and the superb Lambley Viaduct.

BEWARE - THIS ROUTE CAN BE TRICKY AFTER PERIODS OF PROLONGED WET WEATHER. ROCKS BECOME SLIPPERY AND PATHS TURN EXTREMELY MUDDY. DETAILS OF DETOURS ARE GIVEN BUT CAUTION IS ADVISED.

**Start Point:** Lambley

**By car:** From Haltwhistle go west along the A69, and take the second turning left signposted Alston, Halton Lea Gate and Coanwood, passing Bellister Castle. Follow the road to a T-junction at Lambley, turn left onto the A689 then then turn immediately right off the road onto the small parking area opposite the converted chapel.


(GR: NY673585) **Please do not obstruct the farm gate.**

#### ***Did you know?***

*The village of Lambley derives its name from ‘lamb’ and ‘lee’, meaning, ‘a pasture where lambs are kept in the summer’. The Country Estate of Lambley was originally the home of Benedictine nuns from 1132 AD until the priory was destroyed by marauding Scots under William ‘Braveheart’ Wallace in 1296 AD. The remnants of the medieval priory can still be seen at Lambley Farm.*

(lambleycottages.co.uk)

*There is a story from 1279 concerning a long-standing feud between the Prioress and the Baron of Thirwall. When she grazed some of her cattle on his land without permission, he finally complained to the King’s assizes at Wark. The prioress denied the charges and challenged the Baron to single combat to settle the issue. This did not mean that she was a 13<sup>th</sup> century Diana Prince (aka Wonder Woman)! It was common in those days for protagonists to nominate a champion to fight on their behalf. It appears that on learning that her man was so much smaller than the Baron’s man, she decided to plead guilty and paid a £10 fine.*

1.  Cross the road - WITH CARE - and pass in front of the converted chapel to walk through the village to the church. After 220 yds/200 m turn left at a finger post, past a white house on your right and through a tunnel

to reach fields. Go straight across the first field to a gate and the second and third fields using stiles to reach a short terrace of houses. Pass by the bottom house to the road and turn right. (GR: NY666586)

After 110 yds/100 m, turn left at a finger post marked 'Holly Rigg' and then diagonally right across old mine workings and slag heaps. Look for an easy path down. Looking to the north west, the route to be taken is over undulating terrain to the right of a ruined barn about 330 yds/300 m away. NOTE: The low ground on your right can be very wet. Once you are close to the field wall you are now on the Pennine Way. Turn right alongside the wall to reach a stone slab bridge. The path then crosses boggy ground, with stretches of paving slabs, in a northerly direction to a grassy knoll with a low Pennine Way stone marker post. Continue on the same line to cross a stile in a fence and then turn diagonally left, heading for a marker post on an earth ridge. (GR: NY661594) Keep straight ahead to pass another marker post and just before the next marker post, turn right. Follow a track down hill, over a stream and then uphill to the ruined barn of High House. Go straight past the buildings, keeping to the high ground for 110 yds/100 m then swing left and right to descend to a footbridge over the Hartley Burn. (GR: NY662601)

2. Once over the bridge – the Pennine Way goes left here – go straight across the field and through a gate on to the road. Cross the road through another gate and past a stone barn. Head for a wooden bridge on the far side of the field. Over the bridge, turn left to cross a step stile almost immediately. Walk diagonally right across the next field, on the higher ground, aiming for a stile in the hedge on the left. Turn right on to farm road which becomes a track once you have passed High Burnfoot Farm on your right.

Continue along the track to Low Burnfoot House. Pass the house on your left and continue straight for 55 yds/50 m over rough ground to a bridge over Hartley Burn. Go over the bridge and turn right. Take a footpath to reach the north bank of the River South Tyne, keeping close to the hillside on your left. **BEWARE** - This footpath floods when the river is high and will be impassable. At other times, this path can be slippery and requires care. Unfortunately, there is no alternative route. You eventually come to a footbridge.

**BEWARE** – THE FOLLOWING SECTION OF THE WALK CAN BE CHALLENGING FOLLOWING WET WEATHER. For those wishing to follow an easier route, follow the instructions at 2(a)

Do not cross this bridge but go straight on, ignoring the path going uphill on the left. Swing left beside a burn to cross another footbridge. The path climbs a little through open woodland. The trees become denser and the path twists and turns with evidence of debris from high flood water. **BEWARE** - Some scrambling may be necessary over fallen trees and in wet weather there will be mud. At one point there is an exposed step between 2 rocks – TAKE CARE.

The road is reached soon afterwards. Turn right here and to cross the Featherstone Bridge.

2(a) **Alternative route:** Cross the Featherstone footbridge, turn left at the road and walk 440 yds/400 m to the old stone bridge.

***Did you know?***

*The oldest part of Featherstone Castle still standing, is a tower built by Thomas de Featherstonehaugh in the 1320s. The most recent additions were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Featherstonehaugh family retained the ownership of the castle until the 18<sup>th</sup> century with only one gap in direct descent, which occurred in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the death of Abigail Featherstonehaugh. Was this the same Abigail Featherstonehaugh who, along with her bridal party, haunts the castle each 17<sup>th</sup> January? The legend says that she was to marry a neighbouring Baron's son but was in love with a local Ridley. As the bridal party rode the bounds of the estate, the spurned lover made an attack. The new bridegroom put up a good fight, however, and all were killed in the affray. At midnight, the sound of horses' hooves was heard outside the castle and, as the door opened into the banqueting hall, the ghostly apparition of Abigail and the rest of the party entered. The Baron fainted at this spectral procession and the bridal party were found dead in Píkings Cleugh the following day.*

3. Once over this magnificent old bridge cross the road to a stone stile with a finger post to Featherstone Rowfoot and cross 2 fields to Summerhouse Wood. Over a stile and climb a long series of wooden steps, big ones, with the advantage of a handrail for the last one third of the climb. From the exit from the wood go slightly left to

cross 4 fields, initially by a gate, followed by a further gate and then two stiles, using the way mark arrows for a guide. At the last field aim for the left side of a copse over a stile and descend by the side of the copse to another stile. Turn right and follow the garden fence to the road and turn left. Straight ahead at 440 yds/400m is the Wallace Arms.

4. Turn right onto the South Tyne Trail to follow the old railway line south, through a parking area, and over the road below Coanwood and finally over the Lambley Viaduct (2km/1.25m)

***Did you know:***

*The Haltwhistle-Alston line was opened in 1852, before Lambley Viaduct was complete. Work started at the termini of Haltwhistle and Alston. Passengers had to disembark the train, cross the river and then catch another train. The viaduct opened eighteen months later and is a great tribute to Victorian engineering. The magnificent structure is over 100 feet/30.5m high and underwent a thorough repair and facelift in 1996.*

5. Descend the metal stairway on the south side to the footpath crossroads. Turn left up the steps to a stile. Go over the stile, up some steps and straight on through a gate. Pass a bungalow on your right to reach the road. Turn left to return to the parking area on the A689.