



THE HALTWHISTLE RINGS



WALK 14

‘A Roman Pile and a Black Forest Honeymoon’

Length: 7 mls/11 km

Grade: 2 Moderate Plus

Ascent/descent: 1095 ft/334 m

OS explorer OL 43 Hadrian's Wall

A wonderful walk along the Pennine Way and over Gilderdale to the Roman Fort at Whitley. Then down to the bottom of the valley, over the wide River South Tyne at Kirkhaugh Bridge and back on the eastern side of the valley, with great views and a riverside walk.

NOTE: Although generally well-marked, there are some sections which could require navigation in adverse weather conditions due to the remoteness of the area. Stout footwear is advised. There is no mobile phone signal at Gilderdale Bridge ([GR: NY698478](#))


Start Point: Alston

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 and turn left onto the A689. Follow this road to another T-junction and turn left onto the A686 into Alston. Park at South Tynedale Railway, if open. Otherwise, park in Alston. Please park considerately.

Did you know?

In the 10th century, Alston Moor was part of the Liberty of Tynedale. This made it an estate of the Scottish Kings within England. In 1279, a hearing confirmed that the miners of the area were distinct from the local population. As a result, the miners paid their taxes to the English Crown, not the Scottish Crown. They lived in their own self-regulated communities under English protection. Edward I (King of England) reclaimed the Scottish Estates and Tynedale in 1629 when John de Balliol (the King of Scotland) invaded the North of England. As a result, Alston Moor was taken under English Crown rule. Despite being on the River South Tyne and historically part of Tynedale, Alston has never been part of Hexhamshire or Northumberland. It belonged to Cumberland, now Cumbria.

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 1. Walk south – WITH CARE - on the A686, past Alston House Hotel, to cross the bridge over the South Tyne ([NY716461](#)) and turn right onto the A689. Turn immediate right – signposted ‘Pennine Way’. You will be on this until Dyke House. ([NY695493](#)) Follow the track to the house with large wrought iron gates. ([NY714464](#)) Keep to the path to the left and follow the fence. Over a stone stile and follow the track with the stone wall on your right. Through a small gate and follow the obvious path ahead until you come to the imposing stone gateposts of Harbut Lodge. Go through and over the hidden bridge and follow the field boundary on your left up to the

Lodge. Turn left between the Lodge and an outbuilding to pass through a gate and by some estate houses on your right. Turn right at the waymark after the houses and follow the field boundary on your right to a kissing gate (NY710473) and left onto a conifer-clad drive up to the A689.

2. ⚠️ Turn right – WITH CARE - on the main road and after 110 yds/100 m turn left through a kissing gate. Go across the paddock, through a gate and straight on up the pasture. Following roughly the stone wall on your left, continue on up and, as the wall bends right, follow to a marker in the top right corner of the field. Go through the gate (NY703473) – following the way-mark – and down through several field boundaries to cross the footbridge over Gilderdale. (NY698478)

3. Follow the path up to the right, keeping the stone wall on your right. Where a wire netting fence ahead joins this wall, go through a kissing gate. Head straight up the field, past some quarry remains, to join the track out of Whitlow Farm. Head for the top left hand corner of the field and through a gate beside a five-bar-gate. Follow the grass track to another stile beside a gate and follow the track that bends right with the remains of Whitley Castle on your right. (Whitley Castle viewing point: (NY692485)

Did you know?

Although shown as 'Whitley Castle' on the OS map, this site is also known as 'Epiacum', a very important Roman Fort. It lies between the historic landholdings of Whitshaw hamlet and Castle Nook Farm and is the highest stone-built fort in Britain. Experts believe that it was positioned here to control the production and shipment of lead and silver from the Alston ore-fields. The unusual lozenge-shape of the fort was required to accommodate the advantages and limitations of the surrounding natural landscape.

In his book, 'The Geography', Ptolemy, in the second century AD, included nine named places in the Brigantian tribal area. One of these was 'Epiacum', located 280 Roman miles from London and 85 from York. Whitley Castle is 275 miles from London and 90 from York. This, along with evidence gathered from the site, has led to the conclusion that Whitley Castle and 'Epiacum' are one and the same. It is designated as a scheduled monument. Car parking and other facilities have been provided at the site, including 'The Nook' café and farm shop which provides a warm welcome to walkers.

(Whitley Castle, Tynedale, Northumberland, An Archeological Investigation of the Roman Fort and Its Settings, D Went and S Ainsworth, 2009)

Come to a stile on your right, go over and follow the field boundary on your left. Go through a gate and ignore a stile on your left to continue down towards Castle Nook Farm. Just before the farm, go through a kissing gate into the wood. Take the path that crosses the burn on your left and go down through the wood to join the main road. (NY695490)

4. Cross the road and through the gate – signposted 'Pennine Way' – and go diagonally left across the field to a gate in front of the gable end of Dyke House (NY695493) Go through the gate then through the wicket gate on your right to pass in front of Dyke House.

Did you know?

'Dyke' means an embankment or 'something dug'. The Celts, who retreated here from Romans and, later, from Anglians dug dykes and there is evidence south of here of burial mounds from this period. High Dyke is on the higher land to the west and may suggest a Celtic hill fort like that at Warden Hill, near Hexham. There is further evidence of embankments north of here, west of Lintley. Or, more likely, the embankments may have been Roman work in the construction of the Maiden Way.

Continue on through two field boundaries and then leave the Pennine Way and go diagonally right across the field to the bridge over the railway (NY695496) just north of Kirkhaugh Station.

Did you know? Kirkhaugh is derived from 'kirk' or church on a 'haugh,' flat land by a river. The 'Defence and Security Act' in July 1803, aimed to enrol more men in response to the massing of Napoleon's Grand Army across the Channel. The Parish of Kirkhaugh, at this time, had 71 men between the ages of 15 and 60. Of these, 24 were willing to serve in the name of the King - 19 on horseback and 5 on foot. There was one problem though: the only arms available to take with them was 1 pitchfork!

Go over the bridge and then diagonally right down to some wooden steps onto the footbridge over the river. (NY697496) After the bridge turn left and then keep right on a track up to a gate and onto the road.

Did You Know?

The Kirkhaugh Footbridge (NY697496) was replaced as recently as October 2020! The previous bridge was swept away in the floods of 2018. Locals say that the new bridge cost £120,000 and took over 6 months to build. Haltwhistle Councillor and Civic Head Ian Hutchinson, who opened the new bridge said: "It was a great honour to re-open this key link which is not only for walkers but is also well used by local communities as a route to the nearby church".

5. Turn right and pass Kirkhaugh Church at Underbank on your right and turn left opposite the drive to the church up a signposted bridlepath. (NY700494)

Did you know?

The church at Underbank – Kirkhaugh Church – is well worth a visit. One reason is that it is the only church in England dedicated to the 'Paraclete' or the Holy Spirit. The other reason is that it has been modelled on a Bavarian church – steep sloping roof for the snow to slide off, a narrow spire and two big fireplaces. The reason for this is a honeymoon trip round Europe by one of the Featherstonehaughs whose new bride was much taken by the style of churches in The Black Forest. On their return, and the old church being in need of replacement, we have what you will see today.

The path bends to the right and then left to a gate. Go diagonally right up across the pasture. NOTE: the path is not obvious here. The Old School House comes into view and, 33 yds/30m before the gate at the end of the bridlepath, turn right to cross the ladder stile in front of The Old School House. Go diagonally right down towards the conifer plantation, (NY704492) through a gate and follow the track down through the trees to join the road. Turn left and keep on this road, over Randalholm Bridge (NY708486) and 0.5 ml/1km after this turn right on to a path – signposted 'Alston'. (NY713481) BEWARE: There are loose stones and protruding tree roots, along with a steep drop to the river on this path. It can also be very slippery.

6. Follow the path to a stile. Cross the stile and follow the wall boundary on your right along beside the river. At the point where the river goes right under the railway bridge, go straight on over a stile beside a field gate and on past a white house to join a track that takes you onto the main road (A686). ⚠ Turn right – WITH CARE- to return to Alston.