



# THE HALTWHISTLE RINGS WALK 21



## ‘A Castle Full of Treasure and Treasure from the Earth’


**Length:** 7 mls/11.3 km

**Grade:** 2 Moderate

**Ascent/descent:** 1170 ft/356 m

**OS explorer OL 43** Hadrian's Wall

A varied 7-mile, figure of eight walk, centred around Greenhead. It climbs steeply up to Hadrian's Wall at Walltown, with spectacular views in every direction, on to the upper reaches of the Tipalt Burn and down to pass the remains of Thirlwall Castle, before climbing up to Blenkinsopp Common, with more wonderful views and early industrial heritage. Stout footwear is essential.


 **This route crosses the A69 and railway line.**

**Start Point:** By car

**Start:** Greenhead Village, 4 miles west of Haltwhistle

**Car users:** From Haltwhistle take the A69 west and turn right on the B6318 (signed 'Greenhead'). In the village turn left and immediately right. Park in the Thirlwall View National Park car park.


\*If the car park is full and you must park in the village, please park considerably opposite the village hall, by the church or school. Begin the route from section 7.

1. From the car park, turn right. Immediately beyond the terrace of houses, turn onto the Pennine Way, eventually climbing the slope on to the golf course. The path across the greens is signposted, with a ditch on your right. This is the vallum, which follows Hadrian's Wall on its south side. Cross the ladder stile at the end, turn left and follow the wall on your left, ignoring all stiles back onto the golf course. Cross a ladder stile over a wall beside a group of trees at the top of the hill ahead. Continue through a gate (22 yds/20 m) and head diagonally right to the far corner of the field. Cross the stile and descend the steep bank to the A69.  Cross - WITH CARE. On the other side, turn right and then immediately left onto a track. This is still the Pennine Way.

2. Keep on this track uphill and go over a (padlocked) gate, making sure that when the wooded gully on your left ends, you keep to the track that goes right; do not take the one bending away to the left. Pass under some pylons as the track flattens out and go through a stile by a gate to continue on the track. Cross another stile by a gate. You are on Blenkinsopp Common; the Pennine Way goes to the right, and another track leads to the left, but your path is the one over the stile, immediately on your left. You begin to almost double back on yourself. Head diagonally left from the stile, downhill across rough and boggy pasture to the far corner of the field. (GR: NY 653645)

**Did you know?**

*This rather deserted looking landscape has provided much treasure from the ground over the years since the 1850s. The sandstone and limestone were extracted, the burnt limestone being used to improve acid soils, and a tile works used clay deposits left behind by retreating glaciers. Coal was mined here in the nineteenth century, and you can see disused mineshafts. In the 20th century, there was open-cast mining here, extracting all that remained. After this ended, a good job was done re-instating this land.*

3. Cross the fence stile and the ladder stile over a stone wall next to it and descend half diagonally left. Go over another ladder stile and head diagonally right, roughly in the direction of the farm and castle in the far distance (which you will see over the hill). Head for a telegraph pole beside the wood. Cross the stile next to a signpost and descend the steep bank to the A69.  Cross - WITH CARE - then turn right and immediately left on to a track. Follow the track for 44yds/40 m then turn left up some steps, over a stile. Once in the field, head diagonally right. There is an old mine track, but this is overgrown in places. Go through a gate on to the road and turn right into Greenhead.

**Did you know?**

*Greenhead developed from two communities – Glenwelt (Celtic for ‘valley of reeds’) on one side of the River Tipalt, and Greenhead on the other. Initially, both were part of the Barony of Thirlwall and later, part of the Blenkinsopp Estate. As a result of General Wade’s Military Road being built after the Jacobite Rebellions, the farm at Glenwelt became a coaching inn called The Globe in 1757 and was given a Georgian facelift (note the doorway as you pass). Mining had been carried on here since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century but saw a boom in the 19<sup>th</sup> as the railway arrived, and there were three major pits in the area.*

4. Walk east along the main road, over the Tipalt Burn Bridge and turn left on to the cobbled path between two buildings (the one on the right is called Glenwhelt) signposted, ‘Thirlwall Castle ¾ mile’. Walk through a yard and through three way-marked gates into a meadow. Go straight on, along the base of the hill to your right, over a ladder stile, and straight on with the stone wall on your right. You reach a stone wall ahead with a stone stile. Climb over it onto a gravel track.

5. This is the Pennine Way and Hadrian’s Wall path, which follow the same course for this stretch. Turn to the right and take the trail diagonally up, to a stile next to a five-bar gate. Cross the stile and walk up the path, with a stone wall to your right. At the ladder stile, stop to look at the views! Continue to follow the path along the line of the Wall.

**Did you know?**

*The remains of Carvoran Roman Fort are on your right and predate Hadrian’s Wall. The fort was known to the Romans as ‘Magna’ but in written records of AD395 it was referred to as ‘Magnis’. Like Vindolanda, it was built on the earlier Stanegate Road. The course of the vallum of the Wall swings north, as if to avoid something, which seems to suggest that something larger lies beneath, as does its name. ‘Magna’/‘Magnis’ means ‘large’. It is now the site of the of the Roman Army Museum.*

Go through the gate onto the road at Walltown.

**Did you know?**

*Walltown Quarry was used to supply road stone. It was closed in 1978. Quarrying on the site led to the destruction of a milecastle and parts of Hadrian’s wall itself, and defaced the landscape meaning the ‘Nine Nicks of Thirlwall’ were reduced to seven. The quarry waste from Walltown was used in the construction of the Greenhead bypass. The space this created enabled the formation of the current country park.*

Turn right onto the road and then left into the car park.

**Did you know?**

*There are toilets, picnic benches, and a kiosk selling food and drink. Buses stop here, and the Roman Army Museum is just a few yards down the road. It is well worth a visit. Admission charges apply.*

Walk through the picnic area and follow the path to the left of the pond and up right to the far right hand corner of the quarry. Continue to follow the Pennine Way through a gate and turn left to ascend steeply with the stone wall on your left, turn right at the top and continue to follow the path beside the Wall.

6. You are now on Walltown Crag, the first of the 'Nine Nicks of Thirlwall'. Walk past Turret 45A, with information board, and superb views to every direction. Descend into a gully to the track that comes from Walltown Farm. The Pennine Way continues ahead of you over a ladder stile, but you turn left onto the track and follow it northwards. BEWARE: The path here is very boggy, and so you may need to skirt around it. Go through a gate in the stone wall, and head diagonally left, up a gentle slope. The path is not obvious here, but from the top of the rise look for a ladder stile over a wall. If you cannot see it, head for the roof of the farm that appears above the wall. Cross the stile, descend to a foot bridge, and on to the road. Turn left and walk along the road, taking the next turning right into High Old Shields Farm, signposted, 'Cairny Croft'.

7. Before you reach the farmhouse, turn right to go over a stile to cross a paddock, with the gable end of the farmhouse on your left. Go over a ladder stile and then head diagonally left to the right hand side of the barn to cross another ladder stile. Follow the course of the broken stone wall to your left, and at the end of it, go diagonally right down the field to a step stile. Cross, go straight on and then over a ladder stile in the next stone wall. Turn left and, where the wall on your left bends left, go straight on and over the next ladder stile. Walk on to a signpost.


8. From here, go diagonally right, heading for the white cottage that comes into view. This is Cairny Croft. In front of the cottage, cross a stile to then cross a footbridge over the Tipalt Burn. Just below the bridge are a set of steppingstones, which you may prefer to use if the water is low.

9. Turn left on to the road and follow it for about 275 yds/250 m until you come to a signposted footpath crossing the road. Turn left over a stile and cross the fields over two more – poor – stiles and then through a gate onto the road. Turn left and follow the road through a farmyard and follow the path through a half gate opposite the entrance to the castle ruins. This is the Pennine Way and Hadrian's Wall Path, which you follow south (right), and which takes you along a grassy track past Thirlwall Castle on your left.

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

*The spectacular remains of Thirlwall Castle on the Tipalt Burn were once the centrepiece of the considerable town and Barony of Thirlwall, created by King Malcolm IV of Scotland in the 1150s, which remained in the hands of the 'Fierce Thirlwalls' until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. During the Civil War, it was held by Scottish troops supporting Parliament, but they caused so much damage that it was considered not worth repairing, and by 1831, the east wall had fallen into the burn. It has now been restored and is worth a visit.*

*Baron John of Thirlwall returned from the Crusades a very wealthy man, with a haul of treasure including a solid gold table, supposedly guarded by a hideous dwarf called Sad Dam. Word spread around these lawless borderlands, and many attempts were made to raid the castle. None succeeded until Scots raiders, led by a burgher from Glasgow named McDonald, stormed the castle and killed its defenders, in an attempt to take the table - but table, and keeper, were gone. One wounded Scot later reported seeing Sad Dam struggling with the table across a courtyard to a well, into which he heaved the table and followed after. However, on later examination, the courtyard was found to be paved from wall to wall, with no well.*

Cross a footbridge over the Pow Charney Burn where it joins the Tipalt Burn.  Cross the railway – STOP LOOK LISTEN - and pass in front of a red-bricked terrace on to the road. Turn left to return to the car park.