



THE HALTWHISTLE RINGS



WALK 22

‘Magic Spells, Fame and Fortune’

Length: 7 mls/11.3 km

Grade: 2 Moderate

Ascent/descent: 680 ft/207 m

OS explorer OL 43 Hadrian's Wall

This walk takes in the ruins of Thirlwall Castle, passes through Irthing Gorge woodland, on to the pretty village of Gilsland which straddles the counties of Northumberland and Cumbria. It also offers the opportunity to visit the well preserved Poltross Burn Milecastle on Hadrian's Wall.


 **This walk crosses the railway line.**

Start Point: By car

Start: Thirlwell View National Park car park (GR: NY658648)

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 Greenhead village, please park considerably opposite the village hall, by the church or school.



1. Turn right out of the carpark. Immediately beyond the terrace of houses, turn right on a path signed, 'National Trails Thirlwall Castle'.  The path crosses the railway under traffic light control -**STOP LOOK LISTEN**. Pass through a wicket gate and turn hard right alongside the railway following signs for Greenhead and Youth Hostel. Once in the village, turn left and follow the road to the T-junction, passing the Youth Hostel on the left. Turn left to cross over the river bridge and immediately turn left again, following the sign for Thirlwell Castle. (This finger post is on the other side of the road, to your right.) (GR: NY661653) The cobbled path passes between houses but go straight on through two gates and then into open fields. Follow the line of the telegraph poles at first bearing right and uphill. Bear left at some small trees and head for a ladder stile straight ahead. Keep ahead to a stone step stile beside a large tree. Bear left downhill on a track. Cross the burn by the footbridge, to reach Thirlwall Castle on your right. (GR: NY659663)

Did you know?

The castle was built in the early 14th century by John Thirlwall as an impressive family stronghold. The recycled Roman stone helped repel unwelcome visitors during Anglo-Scottish border raids in the 15th and 16th centuries but gradually the Castle fell into disuse. A local legend describes how the family's most prized possession, a gold table, was hidden down a deep well where it remains to this day protected by a magic spell. Abandoned by the Thirlwall family, birds, bats, and plants have now made the Castle their home.

2. Continue up the track away from the Castle and through the farmyard. Where the road forks, bear left across a cattle grid. Cross a second cattle grid and turn right on a footpath just before the railway crossing. It initially

hugs the railway and then moves away down a steep, one-sided ladder stile, and bears left at the bottom of the stile to regain the railway to reach a waymark post. (GR: NY654665)

Turn left up some steps over the railway.  **STOP LOOK LISTEN.** Go straight across the grass to the Burnt Walls farm track and turn left along it to the road. Turn right along the road and then right again up an access drive signed for Barron House.  Follow the track across the railway -**STOP LOOK LISTEN** - and continue up to the farm. Cross the farmyard between the buildings to a gate and continue uphill on the track up to a small group of trees. Go through the gate (GR: NY648672) and bear left uphill across the fields and take the ladder stile over a wall at the top.

Did You Know?

There is a great view back from here of Hadrian's Wall. The jagged ridge is known as 'The Nicks' of Thirlwall. There were nine originally but only seven remain due to quarrying.

3. Bear left across reeds and replanting, and keep left, heading for a further stile to the left of a metal farm gate. Cross this and the tarmac road beyond (GR: NY641679) and then go downhill towards the house ahead. Climb up to a metal gate and then turn left downhill on a metalled lane. Turn right at the fingerpost into the Spa Gorge Woods, initially across a little bridge. After climbing a little and crossing a step stile, the path enters Irthing Gorge Woodland.

Did you know?

A Roman Altar was found here in the early 17th century dedicated for the health of the Empress and her family. Later, the monks from nearby Lanercost Priory made a procession to this 'holy well' on St. John the Baptist Day to bless the waters and, after the dissolution, locals continued the tradition with a Midsummer Sunday Fair.

Turn right with a fence on the right as it begins to go downhill. Just before the bridge at the bottom, pass through a gate on the right. Keep the fence on your right through the woodland, cross another bridge, and TR signed to the Popping Stone. (GR: NY633679)

Did you know?

It was while on a three-month holiday in Gilsland that Sir Walter Scott met, and was captivated by, Mademoiselle Charpentier, an émigré from the French Revolution. He took her walking up the Irthing Valley, just beyond the Spa Well, and when she was comfortably seated on a large boulder, he 'popped the question'. Not surprisingly, she accepted – she had no money and only a guillotine awaited her back home! The boulder became known as 'The Popping Stone' – it is locally believed to be half the size it was then as pieces used to be chipped away for young ladies to place beneath their pillows. The 'man of their dreams' would then follow Walter's example and 'pop the question' where Sir Walter Scott proposed to his future wife. Next to the stone was the Kissing Bush, an ancient [hawthorn](#) which died in the 1940s.

NOTE: Within days of this information being written, caterpillar tracks were reported along the footpath to the Popping Stone whilst the stone itself has been rushed towards the river and turned over. It is understood that the Stone is not covered by any official protection but is known as an 'undesigned heritage asset'.

(Hexham Courant, 08.04.21)

4. From the Popping Stone, retrace your steps to the bridge but do not re-cross it, go straight on. Continue uphill with the River Irthing down below to your left and a fence line on your right. The path moves away from the river and you cross a small tributary burn on a small bridge. Bear left here and the Gilsland Spa Hotel comes into view ahead. The path passes the back of the hotel and joins the hotel carpark and drive.

Did you know?

In 1740 the first spa hotel was built, known as 'The Shaws'. [Susanna Blamire](#), the Cumbrian Muse, came to take the waters in the later part of the century and Sir Walter Scott came here in "the season" of 1797 looking for a wife - and found one! He stayed here frequently and immortalised the area in 'Guy Mannering' and 'The Bridal of Triermain.' The opening of the railway station in 1836 made it a fashionable resort but the original hotel burnt down in 1859. It was rebuilt as 'The Spa Hotel' at a cost of £12,000 and competed with Harrogate and Bath as a popular resort. During the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th, Gilsland was thronged with tourists, many of whom were working-class people from [Tyneside](#). Since then, the hotel has been a First World War military convalescent home and a Second World War maternity hospital. It was known locally until recent times as "The Home". Today it is once again a hotel.

At the bottom of the hotel drive, pass the church on your left and turn left along the road. * After 11yds/10m turn left through a wicket gate. Keeping the trees on your left, descend with the burn and ravine on your left, through a kissing gate to cross the steppingstones and up the steps on the other side. Turn right to follow the riverbank through a succession of gates to emerge on the main road in Gilsland.

*** NB an alternative route avoiding the steppingstones is to continue down the road, over the bridge and turn left into the village to re-join the route.**

5. Turn left up the road in the village, and then take a path on the right opposite the bus shelter, signed 'National Trail'. Bear left through the children's playground, signed 'Hadrian's Wall, Poltross Burn Milecastle'. Go up the steps and under the railway. (GR: NY635663) Your path turns left, but just 220 yds/200 m on the right is the Poltross Burn Milecastle.

Did you know?

Poltross Burn Milecastle is one of the best preserved milecastles on Hadrian's Wall. It is unusually large, and there are two ranges of barracks, large enough to house a garrison of some 64 auxiliary troops. The milecastle was traditionally known locally as "The King's Stables", presumably because the remains of the barrack blocks looked like they had once been stables.

Turn right at the top of the ramp and follow the Hadrian's Wall Path (HWP), signed 'Longbyre 1.5 miles'. Go left at the top of the grassy bank through a gate and then through another gate onto the road. This unassuming place is known as the Tyne Gap.

Did you know?

The Tyne Gap is the 'watershed of England' – from here waters drain west into the Irthing and on to the Solway Firth; and east into the Tipalt Burnt, and then the South Tyne and the North Sea.

Across this and into the lane opposite, the HWP continues over some steps and a gate.

6. Beside the white house on your right, bear left downhill heading for a ladder stile in the corner, by the road. The path follows the edge of a garden before a gate gives out once more onto the fields. Ahead of you is a bungalow with a dark wood conservatory. Through a wicket gate, turn briefly right and then left over a ladder sign indicated by a finger post. The path crosses the fields to another wicket gate, rising slightly towards a stone wall which you will keep on your right. The Nicks of Thirlwall come into view again indicating that the end is not far away. At the end of the fields, a ladder stile leads onto a farm track which heads towards a farm on your right. Turn left through a gate between some of the buildings signed HWP. After two further gates, cross a wooden bridge across a burn. The path continues to the east with the burn down on your left and the wall on your right, through two kissing gates, with a good view of the Vallum on your left. Finally leaving the wall on your right, move steeply downhill, cross the burn on a footbridge and go through a kissing gate. Continue straight ahead towards some trees and buildings. After another kissing gate, there is now a stone wall on your left and a house on the right. Move downhill to a final ladder stile which gives onto the road. Turn right and the car park is a short distance on your left.