



# THE HALTWHISTLE RINGS



## WALK 17

### ‘The Most Uncommon Common’

**Length:** 5 mls/8 km

**Grade:** 2 Moderate  
(with one long climb)

**Ascent/descent:** 669 ft/204 m

**OS explorer OL 43** Hadrian’s Wall

A 5-mile walk across the heather, bracken and rock-clad Thorngrifton Common to the magnificent views and history on Barcombe Hill, down to the Roman Fort at Vindolanda and along the secluded wooded valley of Chainley Burn. **BEWARE:** This route can be very muddy in wet weather. Stout footwear is recommended.

**Start Point:** By car, bus, train

**For bus timetable:** [www.arrivabus.co.uk](http://www.arrivabus.co.uk) for AD122: [www.gonortheast.co.uk](http://www.gonortheast.co.uk)

**For train timetable:** [www.northernrailway.co.uk](http://www.northernrailway.co.uk)

**Start:** from The Bowes Hotel, Bardon Mill

**Bus users:** stop at The Bowes Hotel, Bardon Mill

**Train users:** From station, walk through parking area and bear right to reach the road. You will see the chimney of Errington Reay Pottery directly in front of you. The Bowes Hotel is to the left.

**Car users:** From Haltwhistle take the A69 east towards Newcastle and turn right after 4 miles to Bardon Mill. There is limited road parking on the approach to the village from the east. Alternatively, by the recreation ground. Please park considerately.

***Did you know?***

*The Bowes Hotel extends a warm welcome to walkers and the shop offers a wide range of items. There is also the opportunity to visit the superb Roman Fort and Museum at Vindolanda (admission charges apply).*

1. From The Bowes Hotel walk east past the entrance of the pottery and through the village to the war memorial. Turn left up the road under the bridge (signposted ‘Westwood & Thorngrifton’) and past the recreation ground on your left. Go straight on and as the road bends left, turn right through a gate by a telegraph pole (signposted, ‘West End Town ¼ mile’). Walk straight on, down and then up the field ahead, aiming for the right hand side of the last house on the left ahead of you. When you arrive in front of the house turn right through a metal kissing

gate to the left of the renovated barn. Turn left past the entrance to West End Town Farm. Head up the tarmac road for about 30 ft/9 m then straight up the farm track ahead of you.

2. Keep on the track, (ignore a path over a ladder stile on your right), over a ladder stile by a gate and on to where the wall on your right turns right. This is Thorngrifton Common which is Open Access Land. Your path goes up right and then left and then becomes an indistinct grass track. Ahead of you, on top of the ridge, you can see the 'Long Stone'. Keep the stone wall over to your left and head uphill to a gate in the corner beside a small plantation of trees. (GR: NY778664) Go through the gate to reach the Long Stone.

**Did you know?**

*This spot offers a great 360° panorama, including a bird's eye view of Vindolanda Roman Fort. Scan the horizon behind you to pick out Stublic Chimney, part of the Langley Lead Smelting Mill, to the south east. Cross Fell is to the south west. Standing at 2930 ft/893 m it is the highest hill in England, outside the Lake District.*

*Vindolanda dates from 85 AD and was an important garrison base on the Stanegate, both prior to and during construction of the Wall. Excavations show that it was a fort in its own right and, even after the Roman army occupation was abandoned, it remained in use for a further 400 years. Excavations are on-going and have revealed many fascinating insights. A visit is well worthwhile. (Admission charges apply.)*

*It is said that the shaft of the Lone Stone was erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a memorial to nine miners who died in the colliery at Chainley Burn below, but the base is older and may have been part of a cross dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. ([www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=49967](http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=49967))*

From the Long Stone, turn right (east) along the grassy track (staying on top of the ridge) to reach an Ordnance Survey trig point on Barcombe Hill. (GR: NY782666)

**Did you know?**

*Barcombe Hill was the site of a Roman signalling system, one of the many dotted on high points along the line of Hadrian's Wall which enabled very speedy communications.*

*Crindledykes lime kiln lies below to the north. Lime was the universal remedy for sour, acid soil and, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, farmers were encouraged to build their own lime kilns. The kilns had fires at the bottom and alternate layers of limestone and coal were fed in through the top and left to smoulder. The powdered lime was raked out of the bottom and scattered over the land to enrich the soil.*

*Bradley Hall, which lies 0.6 mls/1 km below to the north-north west, once housed the court of King Edward I in 1306.*

3. From the trig point, go downhill in a northerly direction for 218 yds/200 m and then turn right (east) on a grassy track running alongside a Celtic hillfort which is on your left. At GR: NY785669, bear left around the hill fort and then keep left on a grassy track.

**Did you know?**

*Predating Roman occupation, the ramparts, circular dwellings and enclosures of this Celtic hillfort can still be made out in the heather. It probably gave the Common and the village below its name as 'Thors graf' or dyke. As you approach the road, the path runs alongside both an old wagonway and, more importantly, crosses the route of the 'Stanegate'. The Stanegate (Old English, 'Stone Road') was built as the Roman Army pushed north around AD 60-84, and so predates the building of Hadrian's Wall. The Romans' name for this road is lost. It connects the Roman fort of Corstopitum at Corbridge in the east to the Roman fort of Luguvalium at Carlisle in the west. It is different from most Roman roads as it follows the easiest gradients.*

Leave the track and keep straight ahead over tussocky grass to reach a wicket gate opening onto the road. (GR: NY782669) If you wish to visit Crindledyke lime kiln, go right and then left. Retrace your steps to this point.

Turn left along the road and then take the first right to turn downhill to reach the entrance to Vindolanda Roman Fort.

***Did you know?***

*If you continue past the entrance for about 110 yds/100m, behind a field gate on the right is a tall cylindrical stone. This is an original Roman milestone and is in its original position on the Stanegate.*

4. Turn left into Vindolanda (signposted, 'Bardon Mill') and after the first building on your left, take the way-marked path up left. Fork down right to pass on the left of the museum buildings. Cross the footbridge, turn left, following the Chainley Burn, and through a 'V' stile. Take the planked walkway beneath the south walls of the fort and over a step stile in a fence. The path goes up a grassy bank, passes a clearing and footbridge down to your left by the burn and on up to a small gate. Go straight on, through a metal five-bar-gate, descend past Low Fogrigg on your right and continue on the track, with the remains of the colliery across the burn on your left. Ascend to the parking area at Cragside Stables and go right down to the road.

***Did you know?***

*At this point you will have a lovely view of the South Tyne Valley, with Willimoteswick Castle on the south side of the valley.*

5. Turn right along the road for 218 yds/200 m and then turn left through a metal gate to follow the farm track down to pass the farm buildings of Parkside on your right. At a wooden wicket gate, with a metal five-bar-gate beyond it and with the farmhouse to your right, turn right (not way marked) to pass a marker post on a narrow path between hedges to a metal gate between two buildings. Go through the gate, across the courtyard and left through a five-bar-gate to follow the track down to the road.

6. Cross the road, go straight on through a five-bar-gate (signposted, 'Bardon Mill') and over a cattle grid. As you near the white gate of 'Bankhead', turn right up to a kissing gate. Go through the gate and turn left alongside the wall to through another gate, and down to the busy A69.  Cross – WITH CARE - and follow the track down past the back of the pottery.

***Did you know?***

*Bardon Mill Pottery was founded in 1878 by William Reay and Robert Errington, on the site of an old woollen mill. It originally specialised in drainage and sewage pipes but when plastic pipes took over in the 1970s, it began to produce clay garden pots. It is the last commercial pottery in Britain still producing salt glaze pots. It is well worth a visit.*

Hexham Courant, 12.03.18

Go through the gate at the bottom and out onto the road by The Bowes Hotel.