



THE HALTWHISTLE RINGS



WALK 18

‘Legions, Legends and Lawlessness’

Length: 6 mls/10 km

Grade: 2 Moderate

Ascent/descent: 700 ft/ 215 m

OS explorer OL 43 Hadrian’s Wall

A walk with the dramatic scenery and architecture of Hadrian’s Wall, the openness of the land beyond and the legends of other times.

Start Point: By car, bus,

For bus timetable: for AD122: www.gonortheast.co.uk

Start: Housesteads Roman Fort visitor centre carpark (post code: NE47 6NN; **Grid Reference: NY793684**)

Bus users: Stop at Housesteads

Car users: From Haltwhistle town centre take Main Street east. At the bottom of the hill turn left up the road for 1ml/1km to reach the B6318, next to the Milecastle Inn. Turn right along the road, following the signs to Housesteads. Parking charges apply and there is a vehicle registration plate recognition system in place. Facilities here include a shop, café, and toilets. Additional admission charges apply to visit Housesteads Fort.

1. Pass through the arch between the visitor centre and toilets. Take the track up towards the Fort. Go up the field to the left of the Fort and right of the museum, keeping close to the Fort wall until you reach a gate at the top of the hill.

Did you know?

Approaching from the south, a big earthwork, misnamed the ‘vallum’ (which means ‘mound’ in Latin), can be seen. It is a big ditch, measuring 20 ft/6 m wide at the top, with sloping sides 10ft/3 m deep. There are continuous mounds on either side. Adjacent to the vallum is a 20 ft/6 m wide road. This was the Military Way, used for moving troops and supplies along the Wall. Beyond, is the Wall itself. In its prime, it would have stood 15-20 ft/4.5-6 m high and stretched as far as the eye could see. Every Roman mile there was a small fort (a milecastle) with its own garrison guarding a gateway. In between each of these milecastles stood two small turrets, just to keep an eye on things. There were 15 full-size forts (similar to the one at Housesteads), along the length of the Wall, which held a total garrison of 10000 men. North of the wall is another ditch, 25-30ft wide, to make it difficult for anyone to creep up unseen.

Once through the gate, turn left onto the path. Continue on the trail, over Housestead Crags to Cuddy’s Crags.

Did you know?

Milecastle 37 is reached on Housesteads Crags and on closer inspection, evidence of recesses where the doors were fitted can be seen in the stones.

When the Roman Army left in about 380 CE, the community surrounding it soon disappeared and the frontier land became a wasteland. It was not until the 16th century that some settler sought to return to the cultivation terraces you passed on your way up to the Fort and built his bastle. Bastles were basically defensible houses and were the only protection for local people against the Scottish and English raiders. Animals were sheltered in the lower level and the family lived on the first floor.

At the top of Cuddy's Crag, look back at a famous view of Hadrian's Wall.

Continue to Hotbank Crags. (GR: NY773684)

Did you know?

On a clear day you should be able to see four counties from here: Northumberland in the north; Scotland (Dumfries and Galloway) in the northwest; Durham in the south and Cumbria in the south west.

2.You descend to Hotbank Farm on your right, with Crag Lough beyond. Turn right just before the farm (Milecastle 38 on gate) and take the path through the farmyard, to the right of the farm buildings. Go across the field to a farm gate, after which bear right and continue to look for marker posts along the route. The first marker post is short and not obvious until you are close to it.

Did you know?

Looking back, you can see Crag Lough (photo) with the whinsill of Highshield Crags, a popular site for rock climbing, behind it.

3.The route continues east and climbs to a fingerpost at the corner of a small plantation. Following the fingerposts in an easterly direction, you pass a limestone quarry and lime kiln. At the next wall, the route continues over Ridley Common, crossing the Pennine Way, and heads towards a plantation. Broomlee Lough is on your left; Housestead Crag on your right.

Did you know?

Broomlee Lough is a natural lake, formed by water collected in depressions left by glacial erosions during the last Ice Age. It is one of many in this area, with Greenlee Lough being the largest.

There is a legend that a Lord of Sewingshields sank a huge box of treasure in Broomlee Lough and cast a spell that it could only be recovered using 'two twin yands (horses), two twin oxen, two twin lads and a chain forged by a smith of kind' (being of the seventh generation of a family of smiths). Centuries later, Ridley, a smith from generations of smiths, attempted to recover the box. Having located it, the chain was attached, and the horses and oxen were driven forward by twin lads. As the box emerged, a link in the chain snapped and the box sank once again into the muds of the lough. It was said that Ridley was not too good at counting!

4.Enter the plantation by a gate and then walk diagonally right through the plantation to a gate at the far side. The path bears right, over some drainage ditches, to return to the Hadrian's Wall Path at Kings Wicket. (GR: NY798693)

Did you know?

This is Busy Gap, so called as it was a passing point for raiders and thieves (the Reivers) through the Wall in the Middle Ages. Extracts from a letter by William Ratcliffe to his son, written during the 16th century, indicate the problems of cross border reiving: "Ye shall perceive that on Saint James' even, the 24 day of July, came Liddisdale men to the barony of Langley to the number of six score, and laid them at the 'Buisse Yappe'; and sent forth 7 men and seized six oxen." Local gentry in Haydon Bridge and twenty-six men set off in pursuit of the seven raiders, unaware of the larger force waiting for them at Busy Gap. (Cont...)

“And our men wist the Scots brake upon them, and took them all both horse & man saving 2 persons: so the Scots rode in all haste with their prisoners. Son, if there be no remedy for Liddesdale the country is in a schroved point, and true men that is oppressed for fear of their life and losing of their goods say plainly that they will leave the country.”

Once through the gate, turn left to climb Sewingshields Crag.

Did you know?

There are extensive views from the trig point. (GR: NY800701)

The regal sounding names on the map of this area are said to be linked to the legends of King Arthur. King's Crag and Queen's Crag refer to Arthur and Guinevere. As with most legends, there are many versions of the tales. One version is that the huge sandstone block at Queen's Crag was thrown in a fit of rage by King Arthur from King's Crag to Guinevere who was on Queen's Crag, busily combing her hair and ignoring her King. Because of the long distance between the two points, she saw the boulder coming and deflected it with her comb. Marks caused by the comb's teeth can still be seen on the surface of the rock.

Legends of Haltwhistle and South Tynedale, R and S Sim)

5. Retrace your steps downhill and continue up to Kings Hill and Clews Hill. From the fir plantation at Kennel Crag, the route crosses a wall stile. With the wall on your right, go downhill to the gate at Knag Burn gate. Once through the gate, follow the north wall of Housesteads Fort uphill to the gate. Retrace your steps to the carpark.