

Hadrian's Wall: A walk through history in Britain's idyllic countryside

ITM correspondent

Aydon castle



Little remains of Hadrian's wall built in AD122 by order of the Emperor Hadrian following his visit to Britain. But a walk to see what remains of this ingenious feat of Roman engineering and architecture is a marvellous way to explore the idyllic countryside of Northumberland with its quaint villages and historic churches. The villages along the wall are easily accessible by public transport or car.



Statue of the 7th Earl of Carlisle



Woodland

Contours organises tailor-made walking tours with nightly accommodation in local hotels. Walkers only need to take a back pack. Their luggage is transported to the hotel while they can take a leisurely stroll through woodland, farmland, hills and valleys.

Emperor Hadrian planned a continuous wall with a mile castle every Roman mile (1.48kms) and two turrets equally spaced between each mile castle. The wall with its defensive ditches and large forts stretched from coast to coast a distance of 120 kms or 75 miles. It

formed the northern most part of the Roman empire and spans England's peninsula between Wallsend, near Newcastle upon Tyne in the east, and Bowness-on-Solway on the west coast. The wall was once 15 feet high and up to 10 feet thick. Today, the surviving masonry is only a small part of the visible archaeology.

Despite popular stories Hadrian's Wall was not built to keep out the Scots. Historians believe that it actually acted as a form of border or customs post so that the Romans could keep track of

Brampton town centre





population flow between the north and south of Britain.

A four day walking tour 'Hadrians Wall highlights' covering around ten miles begins in the peaceful charming town of Corbridge. The town had a troubled past. In the eight century Ethelred, King of Northumbria was killed here and later the Scots sacked and burned down the village three times. The stone pele towers are reminders of this turbulent history. Parts of St Andrew's Church date back to

796. It contains some fascinating relics – a Roman arch in the tower and a gravestone that has a set of shears carved on it, signifying that it was a woman's burial place.

Close to the village is the Roman garrison town of Corstopitum. Built in 80AD on the intersection of Dere Street (the Roman road linking York and Edinburgh) and the Stanegate (the Roman road linking Carlisle and Newcastle) as the supply base for the Roman advance into Scotland, it is the

oldest site in the region.

Aydon Castle, one of the finest and most unaltered examples of a 13th century English manor house standing in secluded woodland setting, is the highlight of the first day's walk.

The second day's walk ends at Gibbs Farm, run by the charming Mrs Gibson and her son who provide information on the working hill sheep farm dating back to before the 17th century.

Enroute is the Vindolanda Fort

and Museum, an award-winning site showing the remains of the fort and civilian settlement together with a full-size reconstruction of Hadrian's Wall. The superb museum contains rare Roman writing tablets, leathers, textiles, pottery and wooden objects.

After traversing farmland and making their way past friendly sheep and cattle visitors spend their third day climbing to the highest point of the walk – Winshields Wall, in rugged country



Statue of the emperor
Hadrian near St Martin's
church Brampton





with spectacular views.

The final day of the walk ending in Brampton brings walkers to the Augustian priory of Lanercost which was much involved in the Anglo-Scottish wars. During his last campaign in 1306 -7, the mortally sick Edward 1 rested here for six months before dying at Burgh-by-Sands as he prepared to enter Scotland. The abbey suffered terribly from Scottish raids, being sacked four times. It was finally dissolved by Henry VII

in 1537 but today its beautiful 13th century church remains remarkably well preserved, standing to its full height: part is now in use as the parish church. There are unique 16 century wall paintings in Darce Hall.

Next to the priory is a village hall with delightful local crafts sold by the craftsmen and women themselves. There are also mouth watering cream teas and home-made cakes.

In Brampton the Oakwood Park

Hotel provides a majestic end to a magnificent walk. It is a large Victorian House standing in its own ten acres of ground. The house is tastefully furnished in Victorian style with elegant china figurines.

The small village is centred around the square. Brampton, with a population of some 4000, is built of local sandstone, and situated in a hollow formed by glacial action which took place during the ice-age. In the centre of the town is the octagonal Moot Hall, built in 1817, with an external staircase to its upper entrance, pointed

windows and a square turret. The building now houses the Tourist Information Centre. East of the town is an exceptionally large motte, about 135 feet high. On it is a statue of the 7th Earl of Carlisle. St Martin's Church is famous as the only church designed by the Pre-Raphaelite architect Philip Webb, and contains one of the most exquisite sets of stained glass windows designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and executed in the William Morris studio. The Old Parish Church, on the outskirts of the town, was built from stone from Hadrian's Wall, and was in use until 1878, when



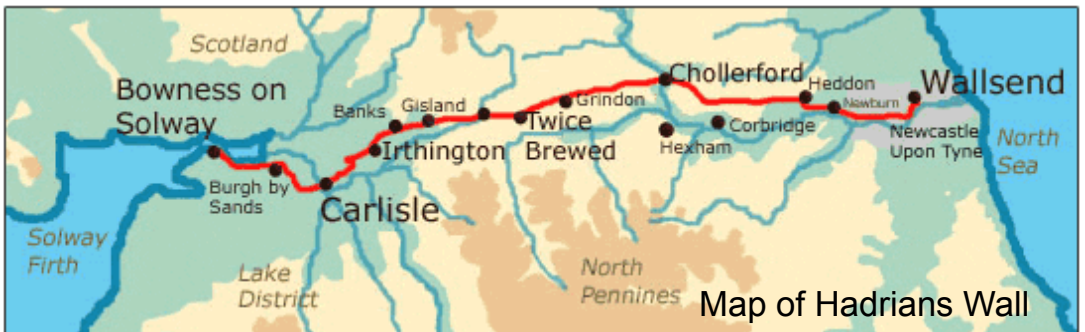


Lacercost priory

the new church replaced it. Only the Chancel now remains.

Talkin Tarn Country Park lies two miles south-east of Brampton on the B6413 Castle Carrock road. There is a 65 acre lake set amid

120 acres of farmland and woodland. The tarn is an ideal place for active recreation or a quiet stroll through the mature woodlands – a fitting end to a walking holiday.



Map of Hadrian's Wall