

TRIED & TESTED

Hadrians

Michael Elcock and his dog, Dexter, walk the length of this Roman masterpiece

After walking the Pembrokeshire Coast Path last year, and writing about it in the magazine, I thought I'd set myself another challenge. I still hadn't made a decision when, in early July, I visited Alnwick in Northumberland on a singing holiday with a choir. On the way, we looked around Housesteads, one of the Roman forts on Hadrian's Wall. I was so inspired that I joined English Heritage and vowed to return and walk the whole length of the wall.

Planning the walk during August, I realised quite quickly that, at around 85 miles in length, it was short enough to base myself in one place – a good thing as it would save a lot of packing and unpacking. I also

found that a bus route follows the wall most of the way, the AD122 (which is the year that the Roman's started building the wall). Examining the timetable in more detail, I found I could drive to the start of each day's leg, walk it and get the bus back to the car, or drive to the end of the leg and get a bus to the start. There would be no more than an hour's drive each day before walking and, on a couple of days, I wouldn't need the car at all. And more importantly, I received my bus pass a week before I started!

I'm a member of Dogfriendly so used its website to draw up a shortlist of bed & breakfast accommodation. A few were already booked, but then I contacted Quarryside in Banks, which is run by David and

Elizabeth Harding. I wanted to complete the route in seven days which would mean staying there seven or eight nights. However, it was only available for the first six. I looked at my itinerary and realised I could walk the whole way in six days if I walked from east to west, and could then continue on to the Lake District, where I wanted to go afterwards, on the last night of our holiday.

A HOMELY PLACE

Quarryside is 'a spacious and quirky home' (in their words) and, built by the Hardings themselves, has three guest bedrooms, one ensuite and two with a shared bathroom. I had one of the latter, and found that, alongside the double bed, there was plenty of space and Dexter could sleep

happily without getting in my way. I had a full English breakfast every morning – locally sourced, tasty and substantial. Lunches are provided if required and you can get a lift to the local pub, the Belted Will in Hallbankgate, in the evening. And, a member of the pub's staff will give you a free lift back which is useful if you don't have any transport.

I can highly recommend Quarryside. It's conveniently located near the wall, so you can finish one leg and start the next there with ease. Dividing the walk into six makes it perfect for the night of the fourth leg, if you're going east to west.

GETTING OUR BEARINGS

I arrived at Quarryside on Wednesday night. It was pouring



Wall

FACT FILE

PRICE One night's bed and breakfast costs between £35 and £70 depending on single or double occupancy. The campsite costs £5 per person per night.
SUITS Anyone wanting a friendly base while exploring the region.
CONTACT Tel 01697 72538 or visit www.quarryside.co.uk



with rain and a drenched walker was booking in at the same time. We were both given a very welcome cup of tea then driven to the Belted Will where we had a lovely evening meal.

DAY 1 WALLSEND — HEDDON-ON-THE- WALL

I drove to Heddon-on-the-Wall and caught buses to Wallsend, then started our walk at the Swan Hunter Ship Yard, which is situated at the eastern end of the wall near the remains of the Roman fort, Segedunum.

Initially the route is quite urban, with Tarmac pathways and signs of past industry all around. Nevertheless, it was pleasant enough because many of the tracks are away from the

traffic — indeed a disused railway line has been converted into attractive walkways that follow the river Tyne and we enjoyed the lack of noise.

The route is well-signed as *The Roman Heritage Way* on this section. It led us right into the heart of Newcastle through areas of extensive regeneration and under many bridges including The Millennium Bridge. We walked several miles along the river and out into the suburbs, then on roadside pathways, across the main ring road and through Lemington to Newburn.

At this point, the route became much more rural and, as we entered The Tyne River Country Park, it narrowed before leading across a golf course and up a wooded pathway to Heddon-on-

the-Wall. Dexter loves swimming but I barred him from the river early on where it looked rather polluted. I relented later on when it was much clearer.

Having reached the end of that day's walk, we caught buses back to our lodgings and I ate at the Belted Will. Sadly, it doesn't welcome dogs, so I left Dexter at Quarryside but he was quite happy with the Hardings. He makes friends remarkably easily.

There was only one occasion when the bus timetable wasn't suitable and I thought I might have difficulty getting back from Carlisle but the Hardings offered to give me a lift back from Brampton, the local town, from where there was a frequent bus service to Carlisle.

DAY 2 HEDDON-ON-THE-WALL — CHOLLERFORD

It was a lovely day, weather-wise, starting misty and overcast, but becoming clear, warm and sunny. We left Heddon-on-the-Wall, taking the road that follows the line of the wall (straight thanks to its Roman origins). *The Way* runs beside the B6318 through open countryside but, even though it's only a minor road, I found quite a few heavy lorries trundling past.

The Way continues in an easterly direction until it crosses the A68, where it follows the line of the old Roman road Dere Street. It eventually passes



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through woodland before crossing to the north side of the B6318. It then leaves the line of Hadrian's Wall for a short distance but rejoins it at Brunton Turret. There we crossed the line of the wall before continuing to the five-arched bridge at Chollerford.

The wall crosses the river at Chesters Bridge, which is only a mile from the Roman fort of Cilurnum, often called Chesters after the surrounding estate.

Dexter wanted to splash around in the water but I refused because I didn't want a wet dog on the bus. We walked to the entrance of Chesters and caught the bus, which arrived early (it has a tendency to do this out of season), so it was a good job we were in time. Dexter entertained the passengers so much that one thought he must be the world's happiest dog. In the evening, I had fish and chips in Brampton which is quite pleasant, if rather busy on a Friday night.

DAY 3 CHOLLERFORD — ONCE BREWED AND VINDOLANDA

The weather started overcast and cool but improved during the day. I started the day by looking around Chesters Roman Fort and Museum which I thought rather impressive, especially the Bath House. It's owned by English Heritage so is free to members and dogs are welcome in the grounds. Overall, I thought it was one of the best places on the whole walk.

After investigating the extensive ruins, we rejoined The Way and headed along the road to Walwick where it leaves the line of the wall temporarily before following the route of the ditch towards Black Cart, which boasts a very well-preserved section of wall.

We climbed alongside the wall until we reached Limestone Corner where it changes direction — the views there are wonderful. *The Way* led us across rough moorland and over the

B6138 at Brocolitia Fort. A kiosk was a welcome sight and we had a warming drink.

The Roman temple of Mithraeum is just a short walk away and worth a visit. We continued along The Way, which runs along the north side of the road enjoying the sight of Sewingshield Crag and the wall's turrets and milecastles.

We headed through some woods and around a farm then up on to the ridge. At this point, the wall is built on rocky crags, creating a natural defence from the north. We continued all the way to the summit where we enjoyed picturesque views of Broomlee Lough then descended to King's Wicket before tackling several more crags on the way to the ruins at Housesteads.

If you fancy exploring Housesteads, stay on the south side of the wall, otherwise cross over to the north side and head down into the woods at Housestead Crag — you can walk on the wall itself if you want. We then descended Cuddy's Crag and Hotbank Crag before heading up through more woodland. Emerging above the crags again, we headed up Steel Rigg but left the wall when we

Despite the problems, most of the walking is amazing



reached Once Brewed. Dexter has an inbuilt water-diviner and knows where all the ponds are, even those behind stone walls and takes a dip whenever he can. He particularly liked the vallum, the ditch running alongside the south side of the wall, and all the other ponds.

At the end of the walk, there was plenty of time until the bus arrived, so we walked a short distance to Vindolanda, where the bus also goes. Sadly, it was closed when we visited and dogs aren't allowed inside which is a shame as it's supposed to be a very interesting place.

I ate at The George Hotel that evening and wasn't impressed as the staff members weren't very welcoming to non-residents. The meal was pleasant but Dexter had to stay in the car.





DAY	ROUTE	DISTANCE (MILES)	TIME (HOURS)	DETAILS
1	Wallsend – Heddon-on-the-Wall	15	6	I drove to Heddon-on-the-Wall and caught a couple of buses to Wallsend.
2	Heddon-on-the-Wall – Chollerford	17	8	I drove to Heddon-on-the-Wall and caught a bus back at the end of the walk.
3	Chollerford – Once Brewed (and Vindolanda)	14½	7	I drove to Chollerford and parked at the George Hotel. Caught a bus back from Vindolanda.
4	Once Brewed – Banks	13½	8	I caught a bus from Quameyways to Once Brewed and walked back.
5	Banks – Carlisle	15	7	I walked from Banks to Carlisle, caught a bus to Brampton then had a lift back to Quarryside.
6	Carlisle – Bowness-on-Solway	15	6	I drove to Bowness-on-Solway and caught a bus to Carlisle.

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DAY 4
ONCE BREWED – BANKS

It was a perfect day with plenty of sunshine and excellent views. We retraced our steps and rejoined the wall where we'd left it and headed up Winshields Crag, which is the highest point of the whole walk. The wall between Gilsland and Birdoswald is amazing and I enjoyed walking this section, before continuing up the hill to Banks. Lucky old Dexter received even more accolades from people we met and lapped up the attention.

I had another meal at the Belted Will in the evening.

DAY 5
BANKS – CARLISLE

Although there are fewer remains and the route is at a lower level, it was still very picturesque, especially around

Gilsland. We headed along the River Eden into Carlisle and saw several groups of walkers going the other way, including American scouts on their way to Quarryside where they were camping overnight. I also saw several stalls of refreshments each with an honesty box. A couple even had huts with kettles so walkers could make themselves a drink in chilly weather. How very thoughtful.

The river was very popular with Dexter, but I didn't let him splash around for long because wet dogs aren't popular when you're sharing transport. When we eventually reached Carlisle, I asked a bus driver where to catch the Brampton bus and she gave us a lift to the bus station. Once again Dexter was loved everywhere we went, inspiring

many a conversation with friendly strangers. David collected us from Brampton and drove back to Quarryside. On the way, I asked him if Lanercost Priory was open. Since it's just a mile from Banks, he suggested we find out. Luckily, a few people were still being shown round and I enjoyed a flying visit and a potted history. Apparently Edward I instructed his son, the Prince of Wales, to boil his bones when he died and take them with him when he battled the Scots. He ignored his father's request and buried him in Westminster Abbey and was then promptly beaten at the Battle of Bannockburn.

That evening, I ate the Belted Will one more time. I was never disappointed with the food there, but think it a shame that dogs aren't welcome.

DAY 6
CARLISLE – BOWNESS-ON-SOLENT

We continued walking along the river through Burgh by Sands and on to Port Carlisle. I found this leg disappointing because there were few signs of the wall, just straight roads and ditches. It was very muddy in places and extremely flat, and there was a diversion around a landslide. I was also rather annoyed when the route led us off the road and into the fields for no obvious reason. Having said that, it's an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and I enjoyed the views.

The Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail runs a passport season between May and October where walkers can use their passport to collect stamps from stamping stations to prove



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that they've walked the whole route. You can collect these stamps in one go or over a period of time. There's an exclusive Completion Badge & Certificate when you've collected all seven. You can order your passport at www.hadriansonline.co.uk

Overall, it was a great adventure and I loved the Roman remains, especially those between Chollerford and Carlisle. However, I have a few words of warning –

- There's a lot of road-walking where your dog needs to be on a lead. Even when you can walk beside the road, the roads are unfenced or have open gateways so it's important you keep your dog in sight and under control.
- There are a lot of farm animals in fields and open access land, so your dog needs to be under control.
- The route was muddy after the wet summer so the right clothing is essential.

- There are cliff edges along the middle section, so make sure your dog's under control.

- The stiles aren't dog-friendly. Most are ladder-like rather than kissing gates and I had to lift Dexter over several.

Hadrian's Wall is extremely popular with walkers but there are farm animals along the whole route. After several incidents where dogs have worried sheep and horses, the managers of the UK's national trails, have decided not to promote Hadrian's Wall Way to dog-owners (I didn't

realise this until afterwards). Nevertheless, it is open to walkers and their dogs – just make sure you aren't irresponsible by keeping an eye on your dog at all times.

Despite these problems, most of the route is amazing, with picturesque views, miles of open country, woods and rivers, and an abundance of Roman remains that surpassed my expectations. It's little wonder that it's designated a World Heritage Site.

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