The Hadrian’s Wall Path National Trail (opened in 2003) avoids the actual line of Hadrian’s Wall through the urban areas of Tyneside, instead taking a riverside route for the 12 miles between the eastern end of the Wall at Wallsend and Heddon-on-the-Wall.

Visitors and residents with a real archaeological interest in the Wall will want to follow the actual route the Wall took, and there are good reasons for doing so. The Wall has left its legacy in the street plan of Newcastle, especially the straight West Road out of the city, and Shields Road in the eastern suburb of Byker. Although the Roman remains are mostly invisible beneath the modern streetscape, there are places where they can be seen, and there is much else of interest to see, including the historic centre of Newcastle upon Tyne. Even in the urban areas the walker can appreciate the landscape through which the Wall ran: in this area it had to traverse a number of steep river valleys. Many of the most important archaeological discoveries about the Wall in recent times have been made in excavations in urban Tyneside, and the area contains three of the major garrison forts of Hadrian’s Wall. This guide offers a safe and practical route which runs as close as possible to the sites of these discoveries and the actual line of the Wall.

The distance covered is around 12 miles (19km), just about walkable in a day, although most walkers will prefer to break the journey in Newcastle.
HADRIAN'S WALL

Three hundred years, until Rome lost control of Britain in the early fifth century.

Hadrian's Wall was originally inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1987. Today, Hadrian's Wall is part of the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, inscribed in 2005 and currently comprising Hadrian's Wall, the German Limes (frontier line) and the Antonine Wall in Scotland.

The Wall was started to a width of 10 Roman Feet (RF) (3m) and was originally some 20 feet (6m high), almost certainly with a walkway and battlements along the top. The 10 foot wide 'Broad Wall' only occurs W of Newcastle. Between Newcastle and Wallsend the Wall is narrow (2.4m wide) - this stretch was a slightly later addition. 6m (20RF) in front of the Wall ran a great V-shaped ditch, generally over 8m wide and up to 3m deep. The wide space between the Wall and its ditch was a deliberate measure to provide space for extra obstacles - sharpened branches set in pits - a previously unknown element of the Wall, seen for the first time in recent years in excavations on Tyneside.

At every Roman mile was a small fort which functioned as a fortified gateway through the Wall - a 'milecastle'. Between every two milecastles were two towers ('turrets'). Major garrison forts, for full Roman army units, also occur along the Wall, some 15 in all. In our stretch there are three: Wallsend, Newcastle and Batown, each of which had a civilian settlement (vici) outside its walls.

The milecastles are numbered from E to W, and the turrets in each Wall-mile have the number of the preceding Milecastle with the suffixes A and B. So, for example, between Milecastles 48 and 49, we find Turrets 48A and 48B. Note however that not all positions of milecastles in Tyneside are known with certainty; where the position is described as 'probable', it means that the actual structure has never been discovered. No turret has been reliably seen in the whole 7-mile stretch from Wallsend to Denton, W of Newcastle. In some areas, particularly in Newcastle city centre, the line taken by the Wall is still not known, and will only be discovered by future archaeological research.

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THE EASTERN 12 MILES OF HADRIAN’S WALL, BUILT ACROSS THE 73 MILES BETWEEN TYNE AND SOLWAY IN AD 122-4.

Wall-forts, milecastles and turrets. Along this corridor, between the Wall and the Vallum, there ran a Roman road, the main means of communication and supply, known as 'the Military Way'. Apart from a brief period in AD 140-60 when the Romans advanced to the Antonine Wall in Scotland, Hadrian's Wall was continuously held by the Roman army for three centuries, until Rome lost control of Britain in the early fifth century.

Traditionally the Wall is described from E to W. Many modern day Wall-walkers travel from W to E, so the guide is organised as a series of stages which can be read in reverse, from W to E, as well as from E to W. Sometimes more detailed directions are given where the route might be difficult to follow through the urban landscape: in these cases the directions are given twice, first E-W then W-E.

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The reconstructed baths are not on the site of the original Roman building, which was discovered by the WallQuest community archaeology project in 2014, 120m closer to the river. At the time of writing plans were being made to display the Roman baths to the public.

The Roman fort and supply base at the mouth of the Tyne at South Shields, on the other side of the river (www.arbeiaromanfort.org.uk) can be visited from Wallsend by taking the Metro from the Wallsend Metro station to North Shields and taking the pedestrian ferry to South Shields (approximately 1 hour from site to site).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION GO TO: www.segedunumromanfort.org.uk
Immediately W of WallSEND fort, in an area of the Roman fort park just N of Buddle Street, is an excavated stretch of Hadrian’s Wall 33m long and, set just to the S of it, a reconstructed length of the Wall giving a good impression of its probable original appearance. A further 50m of the Wall excavated in 1998-9, showing impressive evidence of collapse and rebuilding in the Roman period, was being prepared for display at the time of writing.

From E to W the walking route goes straight on at the roundabouts and follows: Buddle St (A186) - Neptune Rd (A186) - Maurice Rd (A186) - Fossway (A187). For a mile W of WallSEND fort the Wall runs under buildings to the N of this route, converging with the Fossway just W of Miller’s Dene recreation ground, probable site of Milecastle 1. Just W of the Turbinia pub (S side) the Wall-line is indicated in the pavement on N side as it converges with Fossway.

Milecastle 2 was probably in the vicinity of Tunstall Avenue, W of the Brough Park dog racing track (S side). The N face of the Wall has been seen under the fence just S of the pavement between Brough Park and Tunstall Avenue. At the W end of Fossway and the E end of Shields Road the big roundabout at Byker Hill is the probable site of Turret 2A. Cross via the Shell petrol station.

From E of UNION Rd (E end of Shields Rd) the piece of Hadrian’s Wall displayed outside the E wall of the cycle shop is not real and is about 20m N of the true line. Follow S side of Shields Road (B1312). The Wall runs under the shops on the S side of Shields Rd - see a displayed section of the Wall foundation excavated in 2000 at the Library/Pool forecourt. The discs in the pavement to the N mark the positions of a defensive system of timber obstacles in the space between the Wall and Ditch found here for the first time in 2000.

The next major feature is the OUSEBURN Valley (where the Wall crossed the burn near the OUSEBURN Farm). Milecastle 3 lay in the vicinity of the BP station on the E side of the valley at E end of Shields Road, and appears in a drawing of 1723 by the antiquary Stukeley.

GETTING THROUGH THE OUSEBURN VALLEY

OUSEBURN VALLEY E TO W: turn L at Morrisons Superstore, cross A193 by Kentucky Fried Chicken (pedestrian crossing), and then follow A193 W, turn L at E end of Byker Bridge to descend via the Cumberland Arms into the OUSEBURN Valley. Cross the river just S of the farm. From the Ship Pub, leave the valley by Stepney Bank.

OUSEBURN VALLEY W TO E descend Stepney Bank into the OUSEBURN valley. Pass the Ship pub on L and cross the river just R of the farm. Climb up via the Cumberland Arms on E side of Valley to cross over the main A193 (pedestrian crossing near Kentucky Fried Chicken. Bear to the R of the BP station to Morrisons Superstore at W end of Shields Road.
E TO W: At top of Stepney Bank turn L along Crawhall Rd. On the opposite (W) side see a plaque and cross-section of the Wall on the side of a building bearing the street sign ‘Red Bams’, where the Wall was found in 1981. At ‘Quayside Pharmacy’ turn R along Howard Street. Cross Gibson Street, where the route becomes Buxton St, then Melbourne St. Under the Staybridge Suites building to the R the Wall was found in 2004. Turn L along Jubilee Rd and then R along Garth Heads, where the Wall was found under the building to the R in 1992, parallel to the frontage. The Keelman’s Hospital lies to the L. At the Salford Tower descend L by steps to City Rd and bear R. Cross City Rd at the pedestrian crossing to site of Town Hall Corner Tower. From here the Wall might have continued to follow the railway viaduct, keeping to high ground. An alternative route lies to the S, based on supposed sightings of the Wall ditch in Silver St in 1928. To get to Silver St descend via the steps to Trinity Square and on R ascend Silver St, which deglaze past the N entrance to All Saints Churchyard. At the top follow the blue railings under a viaduct arch to find the entrance to the subway to cross Pilgrim Street, the busy elevated road that runs on to the Tyne bridge. At the end of the subway turn L up a ramp and then sharp R along an alley (Painterheugh) which follows the side of the railway viaduct. The Wall ditch was seen at the E end of Painterheugh in 1929. Emerge on to Dean Street and cross to ascend the Dog Leap stairs (immediately R of overhead viaduct) to the site of Newcastle fort (Pons Aelius).

W TO E: From the Castle Garth descend Dog Leap Stairs (immediately on N side of the viaduct arches) to Dean Street. Pick up the alley, Painterheugh, which follows the side of the viaduct on the other side of Dean Street. The Wall ditch was seen at the E end of Painterheugh in 1929. At the end of Painterheugh turn sharp L and R into subway to cross Pilgrim Street, the busy elevated road that runs on to the Tyne bridge. From here the Wall might have continued to follow the railway viaduct, keeping to high ground. An alternative route lies to the S, based on supposed sightings of the Wall ditch in Silver St in 1928. To get to Silver St emerge from the subway and follow the blue railings under a viaduct arch S towards the N entrance of All Saints Churchyard. Descend Silver St to Trinity Square. Ascend the steps to L to the Town Wall Corner Tower. Cross City Rd at the pedestrian crossing, keep to the higher route to the L and after 200m take a sharp L back track up steps at Causey Bank to the Salsport Tower. Turn R along Garth Heads, where the Wall was found under the building to the L in 1992, parallel to the frontage. The Keelman’s Hospital lies to the R. Turn L along Jubilee Rd and R along Melbourne St, which becomes Buxton St then, after crossing Gibson St, becomes Howard St. Under the Staybridge Suites building to the L the Wall was found in 2004. At ‘Quayside Pharmacy’ turn L up Crawhall Rd. On the L (W) side towards the top see a plaque and cross-section of the Wall on the side of a building bearing the street sign ‘Red Barns’, where the Wall was found in 1981. Opposite here find Stepney Bank for the descent into the Ouseburn.
The best view of the layout of Roman Newcastle is obtained from the top of the Norman castle keep of c.1175. Both the Norman Castle and the Roman fort beneath it stood on a tongue of land high above the river. The Roman bridge across the Tyne, the Pons Aelius, ‘Hadrian’s Bridge’, which gives Newcastle its Roman name, lay on the site of the small Swing Bridge, just W of the elevated Tyne Bridge. There was no Roman fort at Newcastle when the Wall was first built. Possibly the Tyne crossing was guarded by a pre-existing fort at Gateshead on the south side of the river; there was certainly Roman settlement there, found in the 1990s on the site of the Hilton Hotel which dominates the view on the Gateshead side. A small fort was added on the Newcastle side in the late-second or early-third century. This lies directly beneath the Castle Garth and has been partly excavated, but its plan is only known in disconnected fragments.

In the paving around the keep the outlines of some of the Roman buildings (headquarters building, commanding officer’s house and granaries) have been marked out in cobble stones. The unit attested at Newcastle in AD 213 was the First Cohort of Cugerni (originally recruited in northern Germany). The fort was occupied into the early years of the fifth century.

Wall-walkers visiting Newcastle should not miss the Great North Museum: Hancock, one mile N of the Castle Garth, in the University area (nearest Metro station: Haymarket). Admission is free and the museum contains the most important collection of inscribed and sculptured stones and other finds from Hadrian’s Wall www.greatnorthmuseum.org.uk

Newcastle was the original starting point for Hadrian’s Wall (the length of narrower wall running E to Wallsend being an addition). All the way from Newcastle W to Heddon-on-the-Wall, the Wall, where its width has been measured, is to the original 10-foot broad width. Presumably the Broad Wall originally started at the Roman bridge, but the route by which it descended from the high ground where the Castle stands to the river below is unknown. The nearest sighting of the Wall has been at Cooper’s Studios, 140m W of the Castle Keep.
The Wall itself always lies beneath or very close to the busy modern road W of Newcastle (the A186), a legacy of the construction of a new military road between Newcastle and Carlisle in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, which utilised the line of the Wall and levelled it for hardcore.

Westgate Road (A186) begins or ends (depending on direction of walk) immediately in front the Black Gate, the thirteenth-century castle gatehouse. Follow the row of railway viaduct arches (now converted to small business use) on the S side of the road. Remains of Roman civilian settlement and a cemetery have been found S of here.

The Wall was found beneath Cooper’s Studios (R side in 2004. The S face of the Wall (found here in 1952) is marked in concrete in front of the Mining Institute (S side): there is a plaque on the wall of the building.

At the monument to George Stephenson, ‘the Father of Railways’, walkers from E–W take the R fork at the Stephenson Monument to follow Westgate Road out of town; walkers from W–E take the R fork at the Stephenson Monument to follow Westgate Road to the Castle and site of Newcastle Roman Fort.

In the city centre a few remnants may be seen of Milecastle 4, found in 1985 at the Arts Centre at 67-75 Westgate Road (S side of the road); go through the arch and turn R into the courtyard.
Benwell Fort is three miles from Newcastle, where the road (known here as West Road) reaches its highest point. The Roman name for Benwell was Conderecum, which means ‘the place with a fine view’. The fort was built about AD 124 and occupied until the end of the Roman period, in the early AD 400s. For over 200 years of that time it was the home of a cavalry regiment of Asturians, originally recruited in Spain. The part of the fort which projected N of the Wall is obliterated by a reservoir (a radio mast stands at the NW corner of the fort). A locksmith’s business, the entrance to the residential street Denhill Park, and a Jobcentre now occupy the central part of the fort. The southern part was covered by houses in 1937, when a hurried but brilliant rescue excavation recovered something of the fort plan.

Two excavated Roman structures are on display at Benwell: the gated crossing of the Vallum (the Roman earthwork running parallel to and S of the Wall), 60m S of the fort (walk down from West Road to the bottom of Denhill Park and obtain key from nearby house), found in 1933, and the Temple of Antenocius, SE of the fort in Broomridge Avenue (turn S into Weidner Road, sharp R into Spring Hill Gardens, and sharp L into Broomridge Avenue; the temple is on the L).

This little temple (found in 1862) was dedicated to an otherwise unknown Celtic deity; parts of whose cult structure (see cover) can be seen in the Great North Museum: Hancock at Newcastle. It attracted a high class of worshippers: one of the altar inscriptions (these are casts, the originals are in the Great North Museum) records the gratitude of a cavalry commander, Tineus Longus, for his promotion to the rank of senator.

The ground falls steeply away from Benwell fort to the W. Just near the roundabout E of the Fox & Hounds pub the antiquary Robert Shafto recorded the remains of a turret. The position of Milecastle 7 is unknown. The modern road here runs slightly N of the Wall. There is a fake piece of Wall in forecourt of Jet petrol station (again E gable end of Solomons Indian Restaurant), and substantial fragment of real Broad Wall, W of this fragment.

The Wall fragment by Kwikfit garage, as it looked in 1802.
Between Turret 7B and Milecastle 9 the line of the eighteenth century Military Road and the remains of the Wall were heavily disturbed by the E-W A69 dual carriageway, built in the 1970s. Just W of Turret 7B the line of the Wall is also crossed by the A1 Newcastle bypass, opened in 1990. Although the bypass destroyed a length of the Wall and the Vallum, these were recorded in a rescue excavation and fully published.

E TO W: From Turret 7B walk W towards the A1 bypass roundabout and negate the subway/bridge to cross the A1. Take the R fork at the end of the bridge to emerge on the S side of the A69 heading W, where a further stretch of Broad Wall is displayed. From here the course of the Wall runs obliquely across the A69, reaching the other side at the W end of the two footbridges. Milecastle 8 lay halfway between the two footbridges, its site now under the S track of the dual carriageway. It guarded the Sugely Burn, which the Wall crossed by means of a stone culvert.

At ‘the Ramparts’, a detour S along Southway leads to Wallington Drive (second R) where there is a preserved stretch of the Vallum, with crossings, inserted later in the Roman period, visible.

Cross the A69 by the second footbridge and turn W along Roman Way. Having made a slight change of alignment at the footbridge the Wall lay under the S verge of Roman Way but has probably been entirely destroyed by the insertion of the dual carriageway. Reaching the roundabout at the top of the hill continue straight on across Hillhead Road and along Westlands. At the end of Westlands (with ‘The Chesters’ to the R) turn L onto the footbridge across the A69. This comes out opposite a bus stop. Cross the road and turn R to find the site of Milecastle 9, a faint mound in the field just short of Blucher village. You now rejoin the line of the 18th-century Military Road on top of the Wall which can be followed all the way to Haddon-on-the-Wall.

GETTING BETWEEN BENWELL AND MILECASTLE 9

W TO E: Walking E from Milecastle 9, take the steps on the N side of the road immediately after the bus shelter on the R. The steps lead to a footbridge crossing the A69 and rejoining the line of the Wall at ‘the Chesters’. Turn R to follow the line of the Wall along Westlands, and at the roundabout cross Hillhead Rd and continue straight on along ‘Roman Way’. The Wall lay under the S verge of Westlands/Roman Way but has probably been entirely destroyed by the insertion of the dual carriageway. At the first footbridge the Wall made a slight change of alignment to run obliquely across the A69, reaching the S side at the E of the two footbridges. Milecastle 8 lay halfway between the two footbridges, its site now under the S track of the dual carriageway. It guarded the Sugely Burn, which the Wall crossed by means of a stone culvert. Cross the W footbridge and head E along the S side of the A69. After the E footbridge a stretch of Broad Wall is displayed.

At ‘the Ramparts’, a detour S along Southway leads to Wallington Drive (second R) where there is a preserved stretch of the Vallum, with crossings, inserted later in the Roman period, visible.

At the A1 bypass roundabout negotiate the subway/bridge to cross the A1. Take the R fork at the end of the bridge to emerge on the S side of the A69 heading E, where you will immediately find a well-preserved stretch of Broad Wall and Turret 7B.

Denton Turret 7B

Site of Milecastle 9 (Blucher village)
GETTING BETWEEN MILECASTLE 9 (BLUCHER VILLAGE) AND HEDDON-ON-THE-WALL

The Wall lies beneath the B6528 all the way. W of Blucher village the Vallum is clearly visible in the fields to the S. Milecastle 10 is at Dene House, on the E side of the steep valley of Wallbottle Dene.

Milecastle 11 has not been precisely located but stood at Throckley Bank Top (see the Working Men’s Club on S side of road).

Between Throckley and Heddon the Vallum is often visible in the fields S of the road, and the ditch on the N side. Immediately E of Heddon-on-the-Wall a splendid length of Broad Wall is avoided by the road and stands 1.52m (5’) high. Milecastle 12 (not visible) lies just W at Town Farm.
The village of Heddon is the point where walkers from W-E decide whether to follow the Hadrian’s Wall National Trail down to the river Tyne or whether to follow the route along the actual line of the Wall through the urban areas offered in this guide.

Walkers from E to W should turn L onto Towne Gate from the W end of the displayed Wall, turn R just before the Women’s Institute and follow a track down to where Towne Gate meets the Hexham Road. Take the B6138 running behind the Three Tuns (signposted Harlow Hill) to follow the National Trail westwards.

This booklet is intended as a simple guide to a walking route and to point out the main visible and buried Roman remains along the way. For more background and information on individual sites, see the following list.

**GUIDE TO FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING**


David Breeze, Handbook to the Roman Wall (14th edn, Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2006)

David Breeze and Brian Dobson, Hadrian’s Wall (4th edn, London, 2000)


G.R.B. Spain, F.G. Simpson, and R.C. Bosanquet, ‘The Roman Frontier from Wallsend to Rudchester Burn’, in Northumberland County History vol. XII, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1930) 484-564

An Archaeological Map of Hadrian’s Wall (English Heritage, revised edition, 2014)

Remains of Vallum running behind Wall at Heddon looking W.
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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

If you want to get involved in the archaeology of Hadrian’s Wall or the north-east in general, consider joining the Arbeia Society or the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Information can be found at:
www.newcastle-antiquaries.org.uk
www.arbsoc.co.uk
www.hadrianswallquest.co.uk

Download the Walking Hadrian’s Wall on Tyneside App. Available for both Mac and Android.

To show what Roman Newcastle looked like an Explore Hadrian’s Wall App is also available.