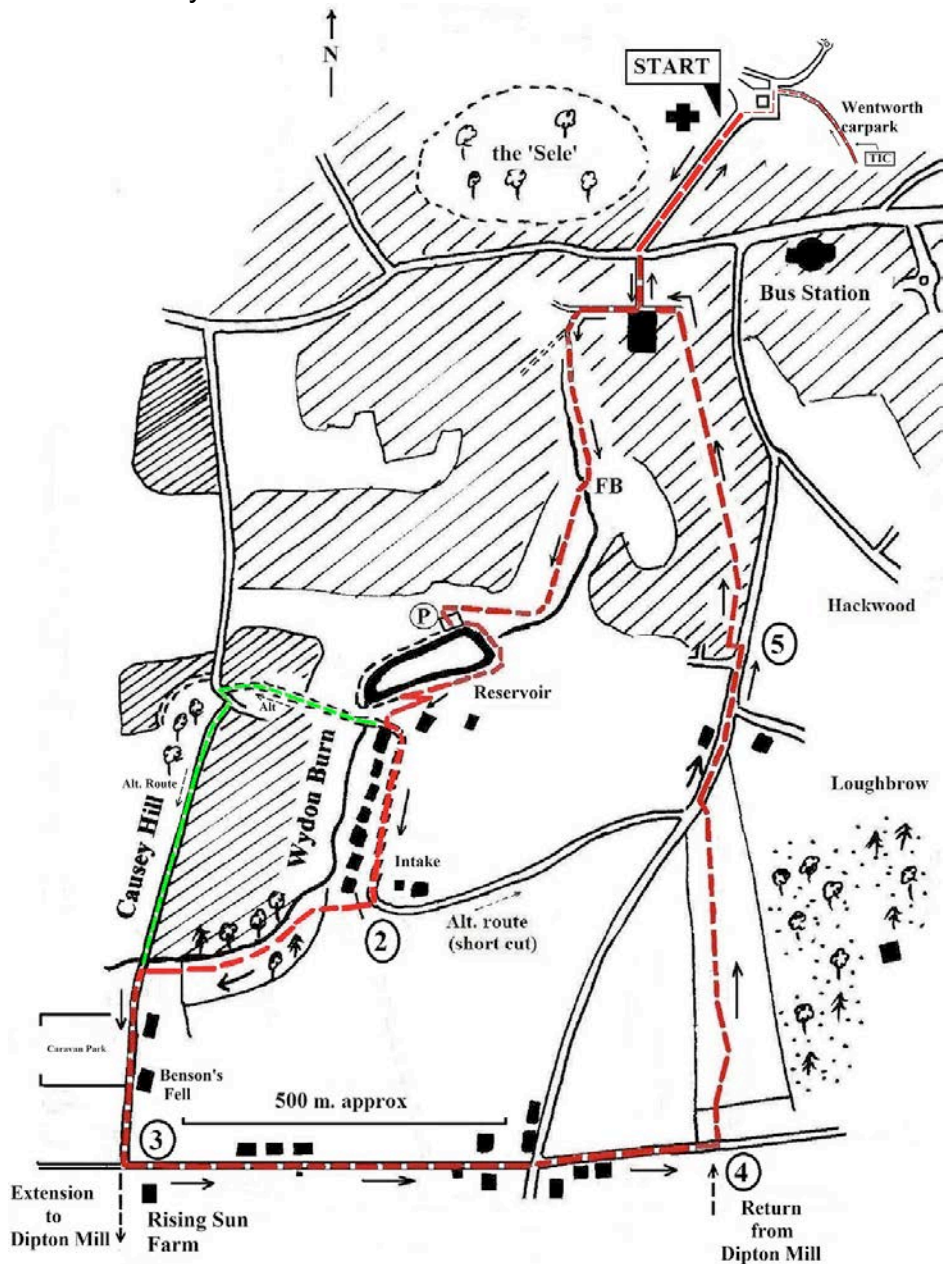


## Hexham Abbey to the Racecourse Road

The Yarridge, or 'Racecourse Road' as it is often known, runs along the ridge line to the south of Hexham and provides wonderful views of the river valley and fells to the north and south. The racecourse sits close to the very top of this ridge and, on race days, quite a few people walk up from Hexham to enjoy the races. This is a pleasant short walk from the centre of town, near the Abbey, through Wydon Burn on generally good paths up to the Yarridge Road, keeping the steep bit as short as possible.

Distance: 3 miles (5km). Time: Allow 2 hours. Ascent: 500ft (150m)

Start: Hexham Abbey



1. From Hexham's splendid Abbey, dating back in parts to the 7th century, walk up Beaumont Street to Battle Hill, the main road, passing the Queen's Hall on your left and the Abbey Grounds (the Sele) on your right.



Cross over Battle Hill and continue up St. Wilfrids Road. Ahead of you is the entrance to a large house, Haining Croft, now apartments. Bear right here and pass the end of Elvaston and St. Andrews Road to follow a wide, walled pathway which curves round to the left and down into the Dene. Almost immediately, just before a small bridge, follow the path, which breaks left along the bank of the burn.

Continue up the pleasantly wooded dene to cross a small footbridge and then up a grassy area, keeping near the fence to the left of housing and playground until you approach the metal gates below the reservoir embankment. At this point, bear slightly right and a short distance ahead you will arrive at a parking area. Behind this is the Wydon Burn Reservoir, initially constructed in 1865, which has been redesigned and renovated to form a nature reserve and fishery. The reservoir is also an essential part of the Hexham flood defence scheme to ensure that, during periods of heavy rain, water from the Wydon Burn will be diverted here to reduce the risk of parts of Hexham flooding.

A trackway continues around the water, and on the far side a path leads up to the top right corner where a gate leads to a rough gravel lane. Follow this to the left, going around a large house on the right and then up a narrowing bridleway past a string of houses on the way up to Intake Farm. \* see note below



**Wydon Burn Reservoir from the west**

2. Opposite the farm buildings, a gate on the right gives entry to the bottom corner of a large field. Cross the corner and enter the dene via a stile. The path now bears left and down to Wydon Burn. Just prior to reaching the burn, however, the track branches off to the left. Follow this, usually mucky underfoot, on the same side, until you leave the dene on the upper Causey Road just below Benson's Fell Farm. Go up the hill, steep but short, to the Yarridge Road, passing the caravan park on your right.

\* Note: During periods of continuous rainfall the walk up the burn can be very slippery and it could be less unpleasant to take the alternative route up the roadway of Causey Hill after leaving the reservoir. In this case turn right when you get to the gravel lane and then up Causey Hill at the entrance to Beaumont Park. This joins up with the walk as you approach Benson's Fell Farm. Benson. This short alternate is marked in green on the sketch-map

3. The Yarridge Road is also known as the 'Racecourse Road' because of its location at High Yarridge, a short distance to the west. This has been at the centre of racing since 1793 and, apart from a period in the doldrums in the late 19th century has been one of the premier venues in Northumberland, being well known for its 'Heart of all England' Steeplechase.

This short walk turns left at the junction and you can then enjoy the splendid views of Tynedale as you follow the road along the ridge. Pass the Black House junction, a hairy crossing for pedestrians, which requires a keen lookout, and then up to a point on the road where stiles and signposts appear on both sides of the road, and, as a bonus, a bench seat to the side of the tree.



### **On the ridge descending towards Hexham**

#### **4. We turn left here.**

The way continues over the stile on the left, and then down the undulating fields. The ground in the left of the field can be boggy, so, unless you want to leave your boots in the mud after a rainy spell, pick your way carefully down the field and make your way through an area of bush and gorse near the bottom. This leads to the main road, which links Hexham with Dipton Mill.

5. Turn right, down hill, walking past the main road junction, and, just past Elvaston Road, look for a narrow gap in the wall on the left. This really is a long narrow nick, and it's easily missed, so look carefully. The footpath through the cut is walled or fenced on both sides and goes between houses and gardens all the way down to the side of Haining Croft.

After exiting this narrow alleyway, St. Wilfrids Road is just left of your twelve o'clock and it's an easy matter now to re-trace your earlier steps back to the Abbey. Alternatively, to see a different part of Hexham, a short variation would be to turn right after leaving the Cut.

In this case, go past the Telecom buildings towards some railings, behind which a short nick goes down a couple of dozen steps to Eastgate. At the bottom of the steps turn left down the hill to the main road known as Battle Hill, the clue to the origin could be in the name, or not! Possibly another English/Scottish event, which seems to have been a regular occurrence in Hexham's history.

If you cross Battle Hill, going slightly left into an old street called St. Mary's Chare, a few cafes lie in wait. This is an interesting old street, refurbished in recent years, and leads through a short tunnel to the Market Square and Abbey. Traditionally a market for centuries, and also a place of execution and the scene of the **Hexham riots**. In 1761 over fifty people died when the North Yorkshire Militia opened fire on protesters who wished to voice their opinion against forced conscription into the militia.



## **The Old Gaol**

**Not as fierce a place as it once was!**

**It's now the home of the Museum,  
although for some time was also the  
base for the Tourist Information  
Centre which moved to the  
Wentworth a few years ago.**

If you go through the archway of the Moot Hall at the side of the market square you will see another interesting building - the old jail. This was built in the 1330's, an answer to the local disturbances, which increased after the continuous warfare, visited on the town by Robert the Bruce and friends came to an end. Good use was made of the building for the next five hundred years.