

Rowley Burn and Devil's Water

This little gem is hidden away in the Shire and yet, being close to Hexham and the A69, can be very popular at weekends. The start point is only 40 minutes drive from the centre of Newcastle, but the walk could not be more rural as it wanders between the Rowley Burn and the Devil's Water, taking in the hamlets of Whitley Chapel and Juniper.

Distance 4 miles (6½ km)

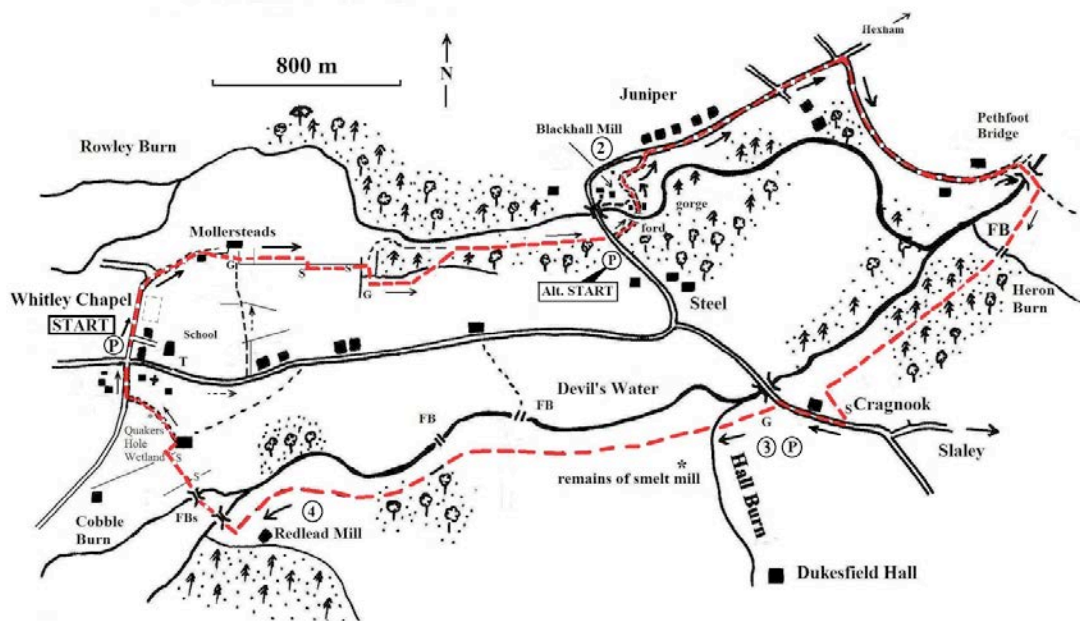
Time Allow 2½ hrs walking time

Ascent 100 ft. (30m)

Maps O.S. Landranger 87, Pathfinder 560, Outdoor Leisure 43

Caution Exercise care if crossing the ford at Blackhall Mill

Start Whitley Chapel, five miles south of Hexham. Roadside parking areas next to Community Centre near the crossroads. Alternative start point at layby next to the bridge between Steel and Juniper, GR. NY938585



Rowley Burn and Devil's Water

1. From the Whitley Chapel crossroads follow the lane towards Whitley Mill, going past the Parish Community Centre and Shire Play Area. The lane descends towards a tight hairpin bend at which point the route takes a right turn towards the farmhouse at Mollersteads. On approaching the buildings, just after a small cottage, the footpath follows the directions towards Steel Farmhouse. Don't be tempted to follow the signpost directions to the Fox and Hounds Inn * because it's been closed for many years. Follow the path in front of the farmhouse until it goes through a small pasture, gated at both ends, and then follow a fence/hedge. Initially the path keeps to the left of this, but, halfway down the field, a stile on the right enables you to cross over into the adjacent field. Follow the opposite side to a field corner at

which point a stile and gate take you zig-zag fashion, right then left, along the next field edge until you can cross into the woods. This track descends towards the Rowley Burn and then on through the middle of the woods, or along the riverside, to the road between Steel and Juniper.

2. Cross the road to go down a tiny lane to the ford across the Rowley Burn at Blackhall Mill. This will take you to the most tranquil of settings where the stream has cut its way through the rock leaving the present day miniature gorge.

During a dry spell, crossing the ford should be straightforward, but don't underestimate the power of the torrent after heavy rain. If in doubt why not take the pleasant easy option? Just a stone's throw away from the layby, but on the other side of the road bridge, a gap in the wall on the right leads to a pathway, which, after crossing a field diagonally left, leads down to the cottages on the far side of the ford. Follow the driveway to the left and zig-zag steeply up towards the roadway at Low Juniper. If you had crossed the ford and walked through the hamlet it would bring you to the same point.

Turn right along the road, leaving the picturesque gorge over on your right. Soon you pass the converted Finechambers Chapel, set back in the trees on the right, and then you will arrive at a crossroads. The junction may not be very obvious, but the turn to the right is just before the three way road-sign. Go down the lane to the bridge at Pethfoot, passing a couple of houses on the way.



The footbridge leads into the woods of Shield Hall, and, after crossing the stream, our path takes a right turn to parallel the river bank, just below the confluence of the Rowley Burn and Devil's Water. Soon the small bridge over Heron Burn is crossed and, when conditions are right with sufficient water flowing, which is often, we can see the miniature waterfalls splashing over the strata.

This section of the route quickly leaves behind the mixed woodland and moves into an area of tall straight pines. Near Cragnook, the path starts to leave the woods and eventually bears left up a rough grassy lane. This appears to go in the wrong direction, but not to worry, we join the main road shortly and then turn downhill (right).

3. Just below the cottage at Cragnook, a gate behind the layby on the opposite side of the road leads into the woods. The track is wide and firm, following the bank of the Devils Water through a charming mixture of woodland and pasture, never straying far from the bankside and always within earshot of the tumbling waters. A few minutes on from the gate, Hall Burn, the first of several tiny rivulets, rushes down into the main stream.



Close by, just where a side track goes up to Dukesfield Hall, two renovated arches of the long gone flue system stand proudly as remnants of the old Dukesfield Smelt Mill, which operated here until mid 19th Century. Apart from producing lead, Dukesfield was also involved in the extraction of silver from lead ore brought in from Rookhope and Allendale.

Continue along the river, passing a couple of footbridges off on the right, and a pasture, which fills the shape of the elbow in the river. Where the pasture narrows, the second footbridge gives views up and down the river. The path does not cross here, but it does at the next port of call, which is the solitary house with the unusual name of Redlead Mill.

Cross the footbridge which is diagonally right of the house and, ignoring the tracks left and right, go straight ahead through the woods, over the crest, and down into a tiny valley created by the much convoluted Cobble Burn, an ideal spot on damp summer evenings for midges to lurk and walkers to avoid.



Clambering up the other side brings you to a stile in the fence, and open green fields ahead. From here, two farmhouses, Mire and Moss, appear at the far corners of the

field. Cross the field towards Moss House, the right hand of the two, and, if the clue is not in the names, the provision of a thoughtfully placed, and at times essential, wooden walkway near the house might confirm the likelihood of a waterlogged crossing. Passing the edge of the house into the access lane will bring into view the church of St. Helen's, sitting on its own little hill-top, overlooking the house on the slope just ahead of you.

On the left, a low-lying stretch of peaty mire which covers nine hectares between Moss House and the nearby bend in the lane has been set aside as a nature reserve. At this point a notice board gives details of this semi-natural wetland project named, appropriately enough, as Quakers Hole, a name passed on over the generations possibly because of the meetings held by the Quakers on the church hill in years gone by. Very soon, after a short steep uphill stretch, the tarmac is reached and a right hand turn will take you to the crossroads, and, in passing will give a better view of the lovely little church here.

** The Fox and Hounds closed its doors to business some years ago. To locals and visitors alike it went by the unusual nick-name of the 'Click-Em-In' which was possibly taken from the call of the drovers clicking an extra horse or two into the team for the climb up the bank into the Shire, most likely en-route to Allenheads, or simply a farming term counting or checking animals through.*

Notes:

Terms and Conditions

Please read the walks section of terms and conditions: www.visithexham.net/terms-conditions.htm

Advisable

Before starting a walk, it is always advisable to check the local weather forecast, take a full map and know how to use it. The Ordnance Survey continually updates its maps. The recent Explorer and Outdoor Leisure series are much bulkier than the Pathfinder and older first series, but they do have a considerable amount of fine detail and have the advantage of covering a greater area. Although these maps are not absolutely necessary for walks suggested on or downloadable from this website it is always wise to carry at least a copy of the Landranger 87 map which has a scale of 1:50,000 and covers the Hexham and Haltwhistle areas.

Map Copyright

The route maps included in the walk guides are reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO, Crown Copyright 2010. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100015575.