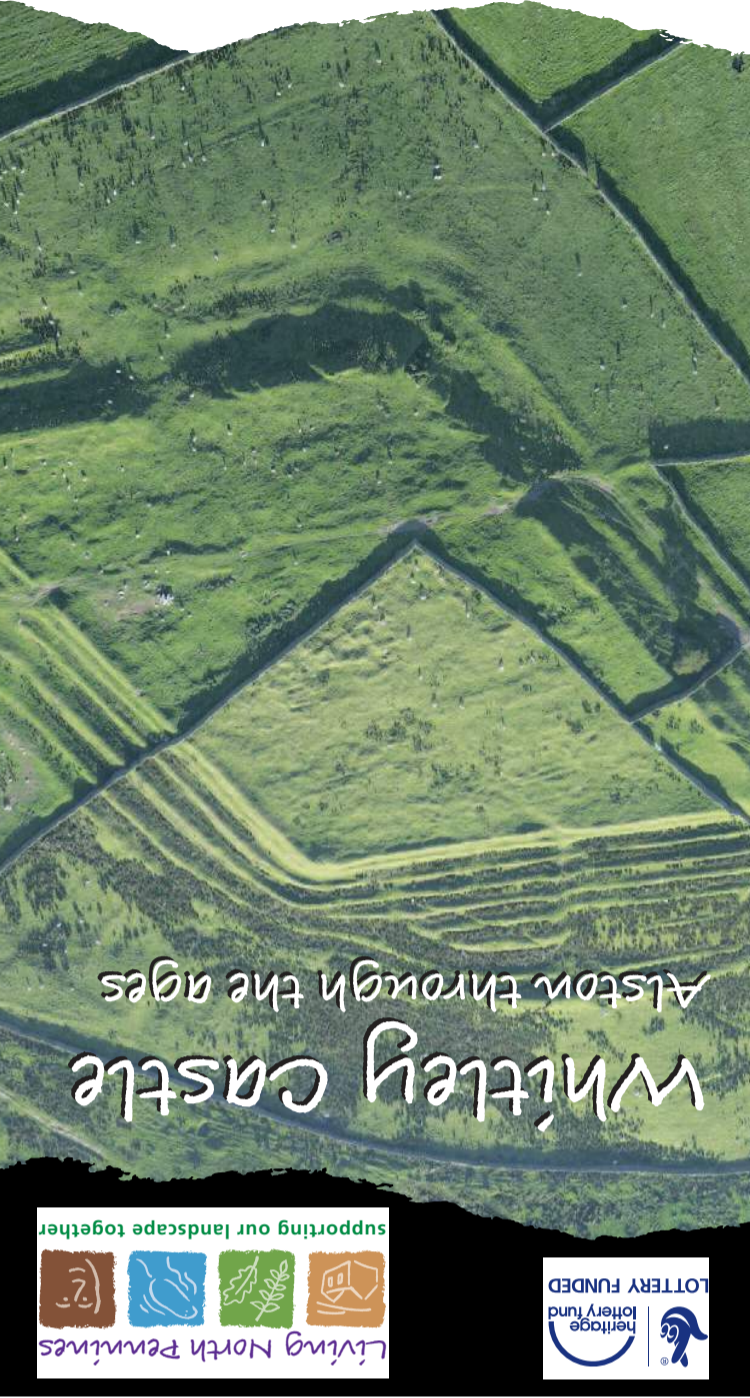




NORTH PENNINES
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Whitley Castle
Alston through the ages



© English Heritage, NMR 20677/02/6

NORTH PENNINES AONB PARTNERSHIP
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ENGLISH HERITAGE
NATURAL ENGLAND

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We can provide the information contained in this leaflet in large print, different formats and other languages on request. Please call 01388 528801.
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To find out more, contact:
This is one of a series of walks leaflets to help you discover the North Pennines AONB. Why not try one of the others?

How to get there

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Whitley Castle
Alston through the ages

This historic walk takes you from Alston along the Pennine Way up to the Roman Fort at Whitley Castle. If you are keen to walk and discover more, the route continues past Kirkaugh church to Alston. After the church you can: **A** Carry on the full route to Alston; **B** Go back to Kirkaugh station and walk back along the railway; **C** Have a cup of tea on board and ride the train to Alston. See below for further information.

Walk distance: Approx 12km (7½ miles) or 6km (3¾ miles) if returning by the railway.

Walk length: Allow 4 hours if walking whole route or 2 hours if catching the train back to Alston.

Walk grade: Moderate – Typically a country walk with some hills, stiles and muddy paths. Boots advisable.

Useful maps:
OS Landranger Sheet 86 *Haltwhistle and Brampton*
OS Explorer Sheet 31 *North Pennines, Teesdale and Weardale*
Start/finish: South Tyndale Railway car park, Alston
Grid Reference NY717 468 NB Car park closes at 5pm

Public transport: For journey and timetable information call Traveline on 0871 200 2233

Facilities: Alston has public toilets, a Post Office, a transport museum (The Hub) and shops, several hotels and tea rooms.

Please follow the Countryside Code: leave gates as you find them and keep your dog under close control (on a lead when signs specify this).

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Whitley Castle

At 330m (1050ft) above sea level, Epiacum (Whitley Castle) is the highest stone-built Roman fort in Britain. It housed a garrison of about 500 men, and was probably built to control mining for lead and silver. Although we have yet to discover evidence for Roman mining in the North Pennines, archaeologists agree that it must have taken place here. The Roman road known as the Maiden Way (between the forts at Kirkby Thore, in the Eden Valley, and Carvoran, on Hadrian's Wall) passes close by the fort. Free guided walks for groups of 6+ can be arranged by contacting Elaine Edgar: elaine.edgar@btinternet.com telephone 01434 381773



Whitley Castle from above Randalholme

© Marcus Byron



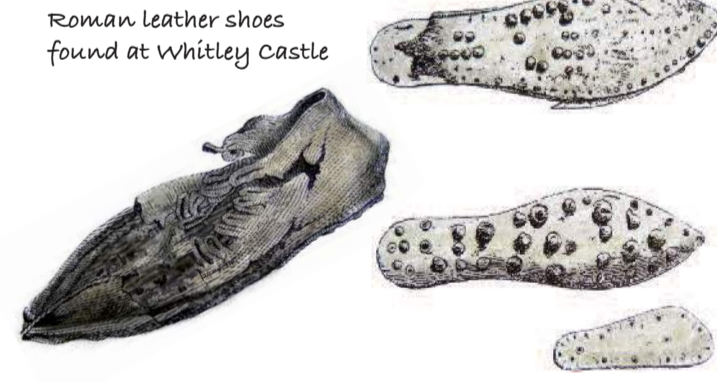
Roman altars found at the fort



Aerial view of Whitley Castle Roman Fort

Epiacum's unique rhomboidal form (most Roman forts were more rectangular in plan) is due to the shape of the gently sloping knoll on which it is built. The fort defences consisted of a stone wall surrounded by earthen banks and ditches which survive today as some of the best-preserved fort ramparts in the entire Roman Empire. Large stone towers stood at the corners of the fort. Access to the interior was typically through four massive stone gateways, one in each side. Turf-covered foundations of buildings, including the headquarters building and barrack blocks, can still be seen on the ground within the fort.

Historically, little archaeological research has taken place at Epiacum, but many artefacts including altars, inscribed stones, coins, pottery and objects of glass and jet have been found here over the centuries. An excavation of the bath house, at the north-east corner of the fort, took place in 1810, and in 1825 a Roman rubbish tip was discovered from which several leather shoes were recovered along with a wooden comb, pottery and other objects. Some of this Roman rubbish was spread on local fields as manure, apparently to great effect!



Roman leather shoes found at Whitley Castle

Pottery from a small excavation in the 1950s suggests that the fort was built at about the same time as Hadrian's Wall, in the year 122. It was rebuilt on at least two occasions before apparently being abandoned in the later fourth century.

The archaeological survey in 2009 has revealed the fort in great detail, along with the remains of a civilian settlement ('vicus') north and west of the fort ramparts. Further research, conservation and interpretation work is planned over the next few years and results will be posted on the AONB website.



© Marcus Byron

Please note that Whitley Castle Roman Fort is legally protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and it is against the law to damage it, remove anything from it, or disturb the ground within it in any way.

Whitley Castle walk

Key

- Walk route
- Pennine Way (on walk route)
- Pennine Way (off walk route)
- Permitted access area to fort - please use stiles or gates

The walk

- 1** Start at the South Tynedale railway car park. Walk back over the level crossing, turn right and walk up the road, turning right at the top. Continue along the street, pass the turning to the left towards the town centre.

Alston is reputedly the highest market town in England. Recorded in twelfth-century documents, it stands at the crossroads of the North Pennines, with roads following ancient routes north into Tynedale, east to Weardale, south-east to Teesdale and south-west to the Eden Valley. The ancient medieval church was demolished and a new one built in 1769, to be replaced in turn by the present church in 1869. Its medieval and post-medieval history is closely linked to the local lead industry and many of the town's buildings date from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when this industry was at its height.



Alston © Marcus Byron

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Old carriage way to Harbut Lodge

About the railway

The railway from Haltwhistle to Alston was opened in 1852 to serve the local lead industry. It closed in 1976 and the track bed is now followed by a narrow-gauge railway managed by the South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society. For more information on the railway visit www.strps.org.uk. For timetable information telephone 01434 382828.



© Natural England/Charlie Hedley

- 15** Continue to Randalholme, the ancient seat of the de Veterponts, Lords of Alston Moor. A tower is recorded here in the fourteenth century and the house, though much altered over subsequent centuries, was probably built in the sixteenth century.

Head up the hill away from Randalholme and continue until you reach a fingerpost to Alston on the right. Follow it! This path takes you down through woods and along fields next to the river. Pass through a gateway on to a track. Follow this, turning right at a crossroads. Carefully cross the railway and join the South Tyne Way, to Alston station car park. Please note the the car park closes at 5pm.



Randalholme, with Whitley Castle in distance

© NPAP/Abi Wylde

- 14** A 4000 year-old Bronze Age burial cairn, one of three in this area, was excavated in 1935 and found to contain a pottery beaker, some flint tools and a very rare gold earring of a type known from only two other sites in England. The earrings and other finds are on display at the Great North Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne.



© University of Newcastle upon Tyne

- 13** Turn right to visit Kirkhaugh church. The cross outside the church here dates from the 10th or 11th century. The church, uniquely dedicated to 'The Holy Paraclete', dates back to the thirteenth century but was largely rebuilt in 1869, its design apparently inspired by churches in the Black Forest. Now return to the railway station or back at the road turn right, passing Underbank Farm.



Ancient cross outside Kirkhaugh Church

Kirkhaugh Church, before its rebuilding in 1869

- 12** After passing through the gateway, either turn right to get to Kirkhaugh station, where you can catch the train or walk along the path beside the railway to Alston; or continue down towards the river, following 'Isaac's Tea Trail' over a footbridge. Turn left and follow the path to meet a public bridleway. Follow this to a road and turn right.



- 2** Continue, past a garage, round a bend and over the bridge. Turn right on (the road to Brampton), then immediately right again onto a track (signed Pennine Way). This bridge over the South Tyne was built in 1836 to replace an 'ill formed and narrow' one of 1770. In the 19th century there was a brewery adjacent to the bridge; this closed in about 1880 but the buildings here are still known locally as 'The Brewery'.

- 3** Keep to the track as it bears left, through trees. Go through a gate, then stay on the track to a small gate to the left of a house. In the early 19th century 'Tower Hill' had a 56ft high lead shot tower over a 50ft shaft, down which molten lead ore was poured, cooling as it dropped, to form round pellets. The tower has now gone, but the factory became a house, and the name survives. Follow the narrow path, between a wall on your left and a fence and hedge on your right.

- 4** Go through a stone squeeze stile and continue beside a wall. Looking down towards the river you will see a substantial earthwork, beyond which a hollow way leads to a former ford.

- 5** You come to a gateway with grand stone pillars. This is the old carriage way to Harbut Lodge, built in 1838. Go through the gate and bear left up the field following Pennine Way waymarkers. Go through a field gate and follow the track past a house on your right. Turn right and walk across the field to a stile. Cross the stile and turn left onto a stony track.

- 6** Follow the track up to the road Turn right and walk along the road for about 50m and (taking care) cross to a kissing gate.

- 7** Climb the field ahead, following Pennine Way markers, through several kissing gates and over two stone stiles. The Enclosure Act for Alston Moor was passed by Parliament in 1803, following which much previously open moorland was transformed into enclosed fields by the construction of many miles of drystone walls. Many of the fields were then improved through drainage and the application of lime and fertiliser.

- 8** Drop down to Gilderdale Burn. Cross the footbridge and keep to the path, climbing then contouring round a hillock and following the track straight on. A Roman bridge carrying the Maiden Way over the burn must have stood close to this footbridge, but no sign of it has yet been found.

- 9** The farm buildings at Whitlow and Holymire incorporate bastles, defensible farmhouses dating from about 1600, which had byres on the ground floor with living quarters above. Such structures were necessary to protect people and stock during the turbulent era of the border reivers (cattle/sheep thieves who raided across the border from both sides).

- 10** You have now reached the great Roman fort of Epiacum (Whitley Castle). It must have dominated the landscape during the second, third and fourth centuries. Feel free to explore the fort more closely. Enter the area through the gate in the bottom right corner (as seen from the path). Continue along the Pennine Way through a kissing gate to the left of Castle Nook Farm.

- 11** Keep following the Pennine Way, down to the left of the farm buildings and through trees to the road. Taking care, cross over the road and cross fields to Dyke House. The farm buildings here date originally from about 1700. They stand exactly on the line of the Maiden Way, the route of which you can see in the fields to the north. Follow the path through several gates, then diagonally right down to Kirkhaugh railway bridge.

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