

Walk to Well House Bastle

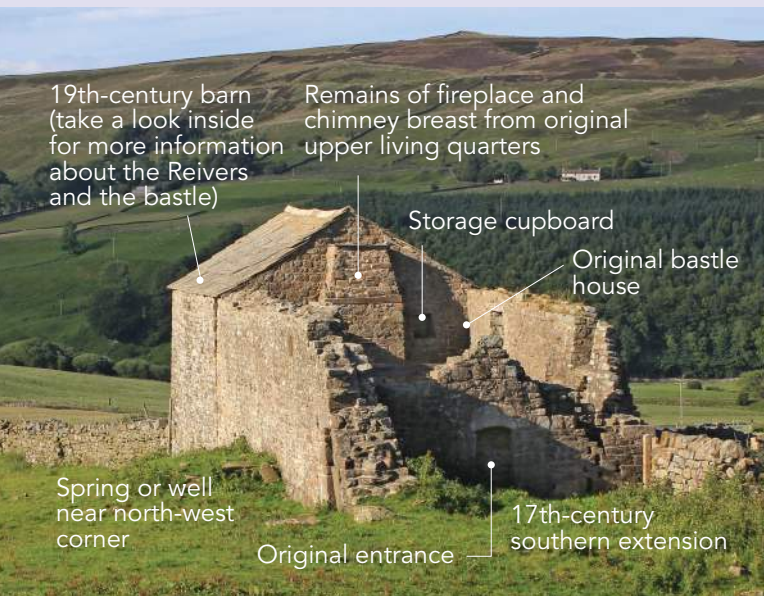
From * turn left and through the small gate. Walk diagonally right across the field, crossing a small stream by a small wooden bridge. Well House Bastle is at the top left corner of the field.

What to look out for

Approaching the bastle from the north you pass what is thought to be the site of a well that gives the bastle its name.

If you walk round the far end of the site you get a good view of the main features of the building, which has seen many changes over the years.

To the far side is a gate into the remains of the bastle. A door takes you into the 19th-century barn extension in which there is a display which tells you more about the history of the building and the lawless, violent age of the Border Reivers.



Retrace your steps to the top of the first field at *, and either turn left to explore the fort or go straight back down the track to the car park.

"...our lawles people...they are a people that wilbe Scottishe when they will, and Englishe at their pleasure"

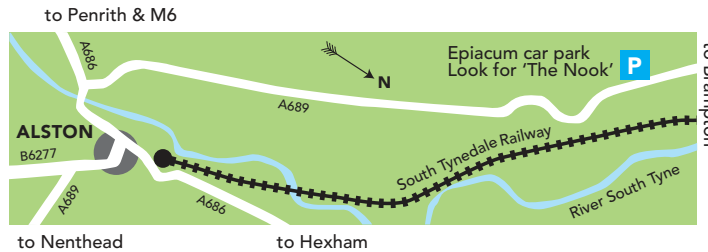
Thomas Musgrave, writing in 1583



How to find us

We're easy to find on the A689, 2 miles north of Alston. We have a large car park – look for the banner flags next to the entrance.

The Nook, Alston CA9 3BG
Tel: 07415 029398



Please help us look after Epilacum:

- This is part of a working farm – please keep your dog on a lead at all times
- Take your litter home
- There is permissive access around the fort:
Only cross walls using stiles and gates
Please leave gates as you find them
- Take care when exploring the fort as the ramparts can be muddy and slippery

The 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.



Follow us on social media!

Epilacum @epilacum

Trail produced with support from:

The Henfrey Charitable Trust



Discover EPIACUM ROMAN FORT & Well House Bastle



A 1¼ mile/2km trail takes you through and around the Roman fort looking at its most significant features.

Or a ⅔ mile/1km out-and-back route takes you to Well House Bastle where you can learn about the infamous Border Reivers.





Welcome to Castle Nook Farm

Follow the trails to explore the fascinating landscape here and learn about the thousands of years of human habitation from prehistoric times to the present day.

Two trails take you to either Epiacum Roman Fort or to Well House Bastle, where you can read about the Reivers, lawless clans who terrorised the area over 400 years ago. Or you can of course combine the trails as one longer walk through time...

For both trails, follow the track up from the cafe/farm shop car park. At the top of the field turn right for Romans and left for Reivers and follow the waymarkers.

EPIACUM ROMAN FORT was probably built at the same time as Hadrian's Wall in the AD120s, to control lead and silver mining in the surrounding hills.

Largely forgotten for centuries, its unusual diamond-shaped layout and well-preserved ramparts make it unique among Roman forts throughout the Roman Empire.

The Maiden Way Roman road connects Epiacum with Bravoniacum Roman Fort at Kirkby Thore 16 miles to the south and Carvoran Roman Fort on Hadrian's Wall, 11 miles to the north. You cross the route of the Maiden Way at the top of the farm track.

Well House Bastle was built in around 1600. It is typical of many fortified farmhouses dating from a long period of conflict and insecurity either side of the English-Scottish Border. A display in the 19th-century barn attached to the bastle tells you more about the Border Reivers.

Epiacum Heritage is a small charity that seeks to enhance and promote this unique site and its surroundings. We rely on grants, donations from the public and our volunteers. We hope you enjoy your visit and will share your memories with others.

Please consider supporting our work by becoming a Friend of Epiacum.

For more information on the site, details of upcoming events and how to become a Friend please see the links below.

www.epiacumheritage.org
twitter.com/epiacum
facebook.com/Epiacum
info@epiacumheritage.com



Above: Epiacum volunteers helping remove the stone wall that had split the fort since Victorian times.



Left: volunteers surveying the fort as part of a Landscape Archaeology event.

Meet the Nervians

Epiacum was manned by the Second Cohort of Nervians, auxiliary troops recruited from the warlike Nervii tribe of the Lower Rhine in what is now Belgium. Imagine what it must have been like to travel from Belgium to the highest stone-built Roman fort in England! Perhaps they wondered if they were being punished when they arrived here and experienced the weather!

Signs of life

Many artefacts have been discovered at the fort over the years, but often they were found by chance and sadly have since been lost.



THOMAS BASSOAL, WHITLEY COTTAGE

One of several leather shoes discovered in a midden pit in 1825.



Altar of Hercules, discovered in 1808 and now in Bedford Museum.

The head, a hand and feet of a 'colossal statue' found with it have been lost.



This altar to Apollo, dedicated to the Nervians, was found in 1837 and is now in the Great North Museum in Newcastle in the 'Hadrian's Wall' Gallery.

A RAMBLE WITH THE ROMANS

Start next to the 'Centurion's hut' in the car park **I**.

EPIACUM Roman Fort is a designated heritage landscape site, and has been managed by Epiacum Heritage (a registered charity) since 2010. The aim of Epiacum Heritage is to help visitors access, enjoy and understand the site and the long-held secrets still to be discovered.

The area around the fort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, protected by law, and it is illegal to remove anything from the site – even little finds you may see in the molehills. The site is also part of a working hill farm, so please keep dogs on leads and leave gates as you find them.

Enjoy your walk and finding out more about the locals from years ago! Look for the engraved stones that mark the stopping points.

Leave the car park by the small metal gate and turn right to follow the track uphill. Pause at the gate and fingerpost at the top of the field **II**.

You are standing on the Maiden Way. This is the remains of a Roman road, which ran from Carvoran Fort on Hadrian's Wall to Bravoniacum Fort near Kirkby Thore in the Eden Valley. It would have been a busy route, used for the transportation of goods, including lead and silver mined in the North Pennines. The road is hard to make out on the ground, but goes diagonally from here, across the next field and down to Castle Nook Farm.

The Roman fort is at the heart of the landscape and survives as an impressive earthwork monument, but it represents just one period in the thousands of years that people have lived and worked in this landscape.

Over 400 years ago these were lawless lands. This was the time of the 'Border Reivers' when people experienced periods of hostility and the ongoing threat from rival family clans. They built fortified farmhouses called bastles to protect themselves and their livestock. The semi-derelict building in front of you is Holymire, a former bastle house and one of six bastles on the farm.

Turn right for the Romans or left for the Reivers! If you decide to turn right follow the directions below from *.



Turning left takes you on a short walk to Well House Bastle where you can find out more about the Reivers (on the other side of this leaflet).

***Follow the top of the field to a small gate in the field corner. Turn left and then slightly uphill to join a grassy track and follow this to a metal field gate. Through the gate keep straight on for 20 metres then climb the bank to a grassy knoll III.**

SOUTH WEST TOWER

One of four corner towers, this one is on the south-west corner. With panoramic views across the landscape, approaching enemies could be spotted far away.

Look down to Holymire bastle. It is thought that it stands on the site of a Roman parade ground. Look to the far side of the field in front of you. The remains of roundhouses have been found here, suggesting that there was a native Romano-British settlement alongside the fort.



A Romano-British settlement

In the hills beyond are the sites of lead and silver mines, exploited, coveted and defended for hundreds of years until the Victorian age.

Turn round and go through a metal field gate ahead to the left. Keep slightly left to meet the top of the fort ramparts IV.

WESTERN RAMPARTS

You're standing above the fort's most impressive ramparts. Epiacum is known for having the best-preserved defences in the Roman Empire, but there is much still unknown about them. The number and style of the ramparts are not typical of Roman forts (three ridges are more common).

As you walk across the ramparts to leave the fort, take a look at the way the ramparts have been built. Are they straight? Compare them to the other ramparts around the fort later on. We still have more questions than answers about the ramparts here – there's lots still to discover!

Head straight down through the ramparts, then bear left towards a ladder stile. Cross the stile and climb up to two panels and a bench (this is the Pennine Way National Trail) V.

This is a fine vantage point for looking down over the fort into the South Tyne Valley. The panels here tell you more about what you can see.

This section of the Pennine Way was once the main road to Carlisle. Many a traveller would have passed by before and after the fort was occupied. For the Romans the passing traffic was both a threat and an opportunity!

Follow the Pennine Way north on a grassy track, with the fort below on your right. At a track junction keep right. The track soon goes downhill, becoming stonier as it does so.

Note how the fort is built on a slope, almost on different terraces. Surrounding the fort would have been a busy vicus (settlement), where the soldiers lived with their families when not on duty. There would have been shops and businesses within the settlement. Around 450 soldiers were stationed here at Epiacum – imagine the noise and vibrancy of this landscape at that time

Where the track goes through a gate cross the ladder stile. Head down to a field gate in a wire fence. Go through the gate and head straight on for 50m, then turn left to an obvious hollow VI.

THE BATH HOUSE

You can see how the ramparts end abruptly here, evidence that the bath house was a later addition to the fort. If the Romans were happy to remove part of the ramparts to build the bath house it suggests that any perceived threat of attack had diminished by this time.

Climb back up into the fort. Turn right and follow the top of the ramparts to the next marker VII.

This is the point where the most recent excavation was carried out, back in 1957. An enthusiastic amateur, Noel Shaw, convinced two archaeologists to oversee the excavation. The exterior walls were found to be perfectly preserved. Over two summer seasons, a trench was dug across the ramparts and into the interior of the fort, revealing a granary building. Look inside the fort walls and you can see the rectangular shape of the granary.

Bear slightly right, crossing the foundations of a stone wall, to a hummocky area and the next marker VIII.

You crossed the remains of a Victorian stone wall that was built right across the fort. In 2018 we were able to remove the wall, opening up the fort again. This had to be done very carefully to preserve any stones in the wall that could be of archaeological interest (we found quite a few!) and protect the fort itself.



Roman quern stones (for grinding corn) found in the Victorian wall

PRINCIPIA (FORT HEADQUARTERS)

The headquarters building was at the heart of the fort and was the centre of operations. You can just about make out the outlines of some of the rooms and the largest lumps and bumps are evidence of its size. It would have certainly dominated the interior of the fort.

Turn to look across the valley. Walk in the direction of the distant white house to a gap in the fort ramparts IX.

PORTA PRAETORIA – THE MAIN GATE

This was the main entrance into the fort from the Maiden Way. Double gateways would have stood between two guard towers, with soldiers keeping watch on all who approached.

The landscape in front of you has changed since the fort was occupied, but some things would have been similar. The angular forest plantations, drystone walls, railway and modern road would all be gone, but the hills would be much the same and there were still farmsteads, woodlands and fields.

After the Romans left, the fort was a handy source of building stone. Most of the dressed Roman stones from the fort would have been put to good use in rebuilding – perhaps in some of the walls and buildings you can see around you.

Drop down the ramparts to leave the fort, turn right to go through the gate you came in earlier, and retrace your steps back to the car park.