

Planning and preparation

Planning to walk this route involves several major decisions: which direction, when to go and how long to allow. Of these, the latter is perhaps the most important, because so many people underestimate this route. Not only is progress likely to be slower than expected on rough terrain, but also there are so many points of interest that shouldn't be rushed. Please read page 7 carefully before deciding how long you need.

Established as a National Trail in 2003, the Path is managed by Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd (HWHL). The thrill of walking so close to a fragile ancient monument brings with it special responsibility for its care. New finds are still being discovered, and in places excavations may continue for at least 150 years. Avoid walking on the Wall or its structures, thus helping to conserve its archaeology for future generations. Please read and respect all HWHL requests: they are summarised on page 11.

Which direction?

The Wall joins the Irish Sea (at the Solway Firth) with the North Sea at Wallsend (near Newcastle). Opinions differ as to whether it is better walked from west to east or *vice versa*. Some believe that, as on Wainwright's *Coast to Coast*, it's better to have the prevailing wind behind you. Others wish to complete the long trudge between Chollerford and Heddon beside the B6318 early on, or feel that it's an anticlimax to end the walk on the tarmac of urban Newcastle. They prefer to walk westward, away from the city and towards the wilds.

Until recently, guidebooks and maps have tended to assume an east-west itinerary although the Trail Manager estimates that in 2010 at least 35% of walkers reversed this. As more walkers return to repeat their walk in reverse, west-east may become more popular despite the lack of official encouragement.

Summit of Winshield Crags



Whichever starting-point you favour, the finest remnants of the Wall, as well as the wildest scenery, are in the central parts of this route. No matter where you begin, you will reach its glories mid-walk: Walltown and Cawfield Crags, the summit at Winshield Crags, and Sycamore Gap with Crag Lough. Both ends have attractions that can be seen as a fitting climax, whether it's your arrival at Segedunum (see page 58), or the tidal mudflats of the Solway Firth, rich in sea birds.

Many walkers opt for the services of a holiday company to book accommodation, transfer baggage and simplify transport. Some of these will presume you want to walk east to west, but most will reverse this on request: read on before deciding.

Having tried both directions, we favour west-east: it seems easier to pick up early clues of the Wall's remains at its western end, free of the urban intrusions of Newcastle. As you progress easterly towards the more ambitious Wall sections (which were built first, using harder stone) the Wall becomes more impressive and recognisable. We provide notes for those who prefer east-west on pages 59-60.

What is the best time of year?

HWHL asks that you walk between May and October, thus minimising damage to the grassy surface which is more vulnerable when it's waterlogged (November to April). Although this request has no legal force, it is sensible and reasonable to comply with it if at all possible. In summer, you're likely to enjoy better weather, more visitor centres will be open, you'll have a greater choice of hostels and bunkhouses and longer hours of daylight are a certainty. This is important not merely for covering the distances safely, but also for having the flexibility to visit the forts and museums that will make your experience more meaningful. All but the larger, more popular forts are closed in winter: see Table 2, page 8 for websites.

Public transport is also better in summer, with the AD122 bus service operating daily from April to October: see page 61 which gives details of other transport providers. For those that like souvenirs, note also that the *Summer Passport* scheme operates only from 1 May to 31 October. Collect stamps from all seven heritage points from Bowness to Segedunum to qualify for a badge and certificate. Stamping locations and times are shown on the Passport itself, which in 2011 cost £2 from HWHL: see page 61.

Sunrise from Walltown Crags



How long will it take?

Part 3 is divided into six sections, each a feasible day's walk, and we recommend that you allow six or seven days to cover the distance (86 miles/138 km). The Path is blessed with plenty of accommodation that is on or very close to the route. However, you will inevitably walk much further than 86 miles in the course of reaching food, drink, accommodation and visiting forts. You also need to allow travelling time at either end; and you may wish to add a spare day for bad weather, for a break from walking, or for visits to forts: see Table 2.

Unless you are an experienced walker, avoid committing yourself to long daily distances. You risk turning your holiday into a test of stamina, rather than a pleasure. Worse still, time pressure may make you skip visits that would have helped you to understand this unique ancient monument. And although the Path never rises above 345 m (1130 ft) at Winshield Crags, be aware of the more challenging gradients in the central section of the route: see the altitude profile on page 8. The tougher terrain makes for slow going, especially in poor weather.

Table 1: Spread the total distance (85.7 mi/138 km) over 5 to 7 days

	Bowness	Carlisle	Walton	Gilsland	Once Brewed*	Chollerford	Heddon	Wallsend
5-day	15 24	19½ 31½	20 32	16 26	16 26	15 24		
6-day	15 24	11½ 18½	16 26	12 19½	16 26	15 24		
7-day	15 24	11½ 18½	8 13	8 13	12 19½	16 26	15 24	

* Leave the Path at Steel Rigg to reach Once Brewed (< 1 km)

The table shows distances in miles (red) and km (blue) and suggests how to split the route into five, six or seven days. If in doubt, we advise you to give yourself the blessing of an extra day. The five-day option suffers from two overlong days: however fit you are, it's a shame to rush the glorious section between Gilsland and Housesteads as part of a 20-mile day. Even the six-day option has two 16-mile days which leave little time for sightseeing unless you set out early. And the Path is unusually rich in sights worth seeing – not only forts, but also churches and monuments. Unless you are experienced and have severe time constraints, we recommend the seven-day option which gives a relaxed pace in the central section where you'll benefit most. For general advice on long-distance walking, please refer to our *Notes for Novices*: see page 62.

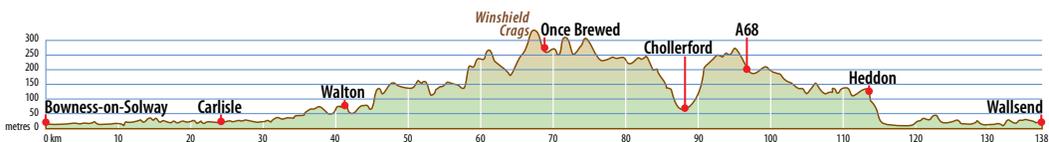
Table 2: Index of principal Roman sites to visit

	<i>location</i>	<i>distance off Path</i>	<i>features</i>	<i>website: www followed by</i>	<i>page</i>
Birdoswald (Banna)	2 mi west of Gilsland	0	original turf Wall with replica in visitor centre	<i>english-heritage.org.uk/birdoswald</i>	40
Roman Army Museum	1 mi east of Greenhead	0	treasures from Carvoran to Vindolanda section; Eagle's Eye film (aerial view)	<i>vindolanda.com</i>	42
Vindolanda	south-east of Once Brewed	2 mi 3 km	site of live excavations in season; houses the famous lists and letters	<i>vindolanda.com</i>	43
Housesteads (Vercovicium)	2.5 mi east of Steel Rigg	0	best-preserved fort, complete with latrines and hospital	<i>english-heritage.org.uk/housesteads</i>	46
Chesters (Cilurnum)	0.6 mi west of Chollerford	0	best-preserved cavalry fort, with museum	<i>english-heritage.org.uk/chestersromanfort</i>	47
Segedunum	Wallsend	0	most excavated fort, with viewing tower	<i>twmuseums.org.uk/segedunum</i>	58
Arbeia	South Shields (0.8 mi from metro)	[about 7 miles]	reconstructions of military life, showing how soldiers lived and died	<i>twmuseums.org.uk/arbeia</i>	58

Other options, more appealing to those who live within easy reach of the Wall, include splitting the walk over several long weekends, or completing it in a series of day-trip loops with visits to forts. The AD122 service is a major help for those wishing to walk shorter sections. Loop walks are encouraged by HWWL, which points out that out-and-back walks along the same stretch of Path double the mileage and hence wear-and-tear on the Path. Visit www.rucsacs.com/links/hwp to download *Walking in Hadrian's Wall Country*, a leaflet with circular and linear walks:

Terrain and gradients

The going underfoot varies from riverside and field paths to tracks and minor roads, with roadside verges and some tarmac and paved sections. In places, it can be muddy and, after heavy rainfall, extremely so: waterproof boots are essential. Gradients vary, generally being gentler near the coasts and with steeper climbs in the central sections. This altitude profile shows the wide variation.



The Solway Firth tides

Between Bowness and Dykesfield, high tides can affect the Path, especially the coastal road sections and the salt-marsh path out of Port Carlisle. There are two high tides daily, about 12.5 hours apart, and the height of the tide varies during the lunar month and year. Notices at Bowness (east end of the village) and Dykesfield (cattle grid) show tide prediction tables, but they are for Silloth, away to the west. (To obtain this data online, see page 62.) To estimate high tide at the Path, add two hours to the Silloth time during British Summer Time (last Saturday in March to last Saturday in October); otherwise, with Greenwich Mean Time in force, add one hour.



Mostly you can walk these sections even at high tide. But the Solway Firth has legendary high tides which can exceed 10 m (33 ft), and which can outrun a galloping horse. Water levels can be up to 3 m (10 ft) higher than predicted, and can persist for 2-3 hours longer, depending on local conditions (wind strength, river levels and barometric pressure). If high tide is predicted at 9 m (30 ft) or more, or local conditions are adverse, reduce the risk:

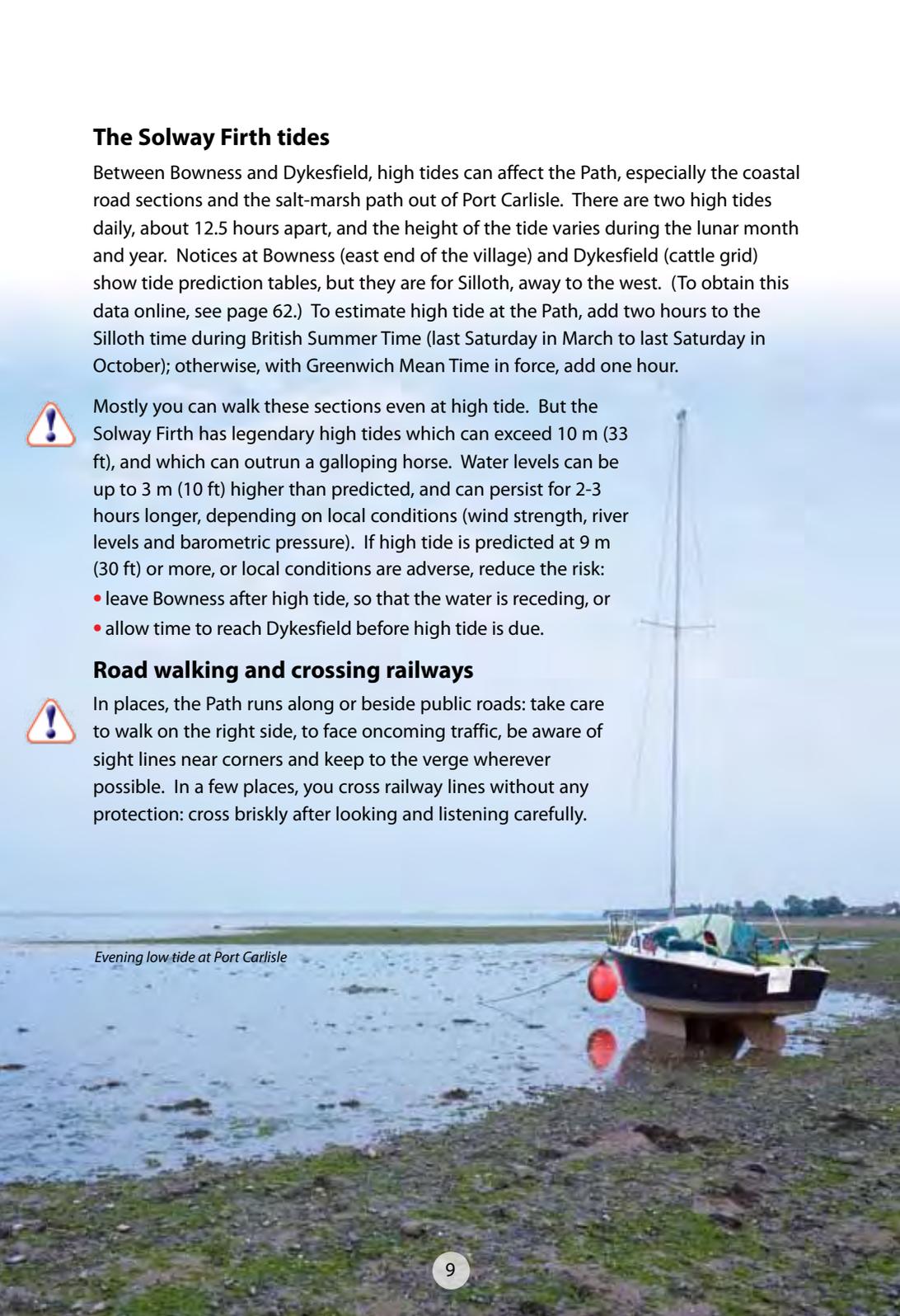
- leave Bowness after high tide, so that the water is receding, or
- allow time to reach Dykesfield before high tide is due.

Road walking and crossing railways



In places, the Path runs along or beside public roads: take care to walk on the right side, to face oncoming traffic, be aware of sight lines near corners and keep to the verge wherever possible. In a few places, you cross railway lines without any protection: cross briskly after looking and listening carefully.

Evening low tide at Port Carlisle





Waymarking

For most of its length, the route is clearly waymarked as 'Hadrian's Wall Path'. National Trail signs show an acorn, but note the following:

- The Path intersects with many other footpaths and cycleways: follow their signs *only* if the sign is also consistent with our route description.
- The route is shared for 9 miles with the Pennine Way National Trail: see pages 42-5. It's also shared with some regional routes, notably the Cumbria Coastal Way for 11 miles from east of Bowness to Carlisle: you'll see CCW on marker posts in places.
- In its eastern section, from west of Newburn, through Newcastle and all the way to Wallsend, the route is known and signposted as 'Hadrian's Way' (also with an acorn).