



River Eden catchment area

Scottish Border



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Kirkby Stephen, Ewbank Scar and the Nine Standards

a walk with a small cathedral, a Viking god, exotic parrots, wild woods, a towering limestone cliff and nine mysterious cairns



04/07/2k

'Discover Eden' is a countryside recreation and interpretation programme being managed by East Cumbria Countryside Project in partnership with the Eden Rivers Trust supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Fourteen circuitual routes at dispersed locations throughout East Cumbria provide an opportunity to explore the great scenic diversity associated with the Eden catchment landscape.

Each route is well way-marked with arrows and the distinctive 'Discover Eden' kingfisher logo. Watch out for a series of small bronze panels etched with motifs depicting aspects of human and natural heritage. Rubbings can be taken from these using paper and crayon. By walking all the routes you can eventually collect rubbings of eighty four images.

Brief route details for main route:

Parking: free car park, Silver Street, Kirkby Stephen
Length: 4¾ miles 7.5 kilometres 2 – 3½ hours
Grade: moderate, some stiles and hills
 some steep slopes and muddy surfaces
Route: Kirkby Stephen – Frank's Bridge – river Eden – Ewbank Scar – Ladthwaite Beck – Hartley Quarry – Frank's Bridge – Kirkby Stephen
Clothing: boots and warm waterproof clothing

A longer walk with Nine Standards

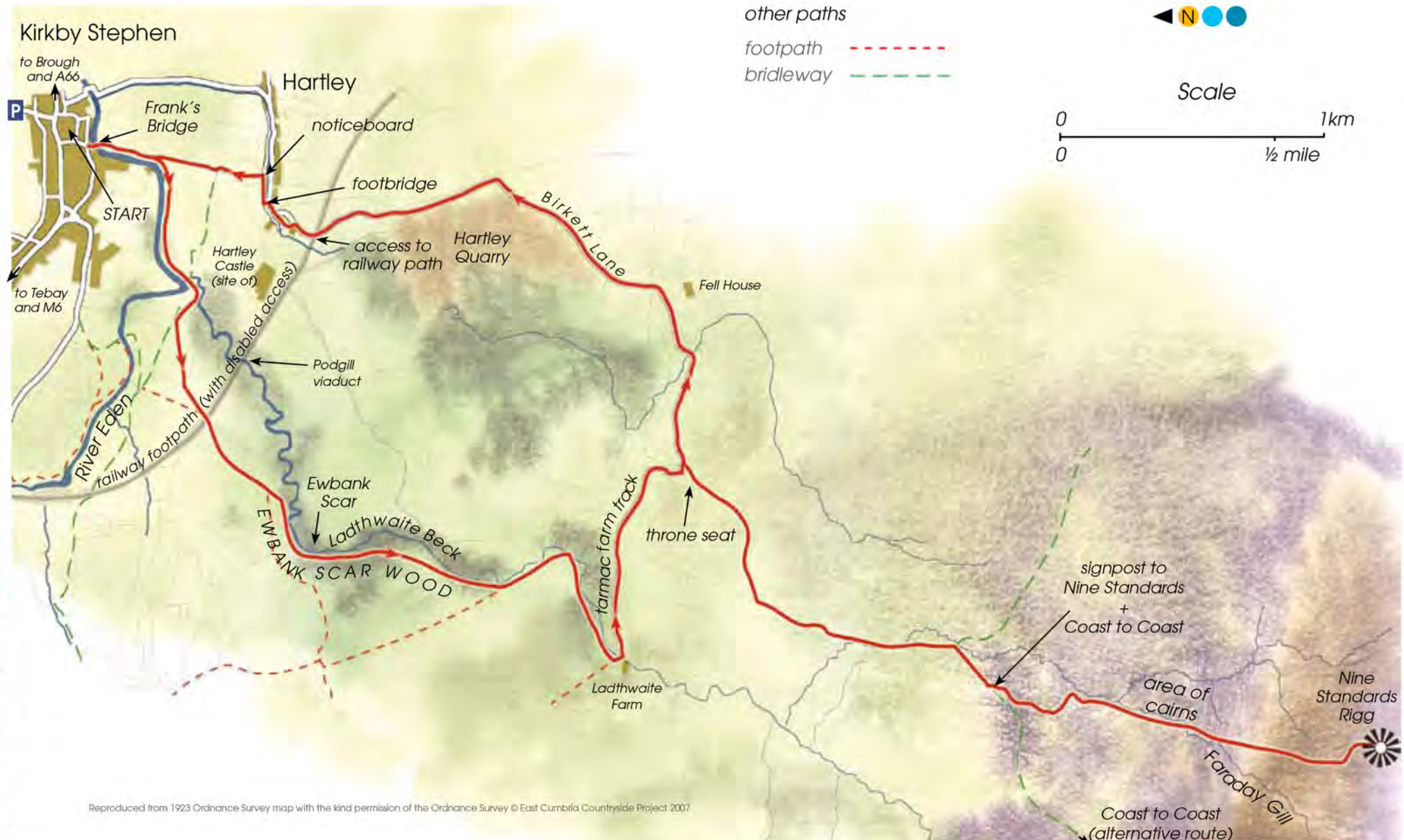
Length: 4½ miles 7 kilometres 2 hours (additional)

Grade: strenuous

Route: If you have the inclination and energy, you may like to include a visit to the Nine Standards on the top of Hartley Fell, which is 7 kilometres there and back. These large stone cairns, which are visible from all over the upper Eden Valley, are well worth a closer look and the view you will see, on a clear day, across the beautiful Eden valley, is even better!

Please leave gates as you find them, leave no litter and keep dogs under close control.

bronze motifs
by Pip Hall




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inside flap

1. River Eamont 2. Mayburgh Henge 3. 'Red River' Benchmark near Temple Sowerby
4. Mosedale near Caldbeck 5. Haaf netting in Solway 6. Ravenstonedale
7. Appleby horse fair 8. River Eden near Wetheral 9. Pendragon Castle

A photograph of a misty, green landscape. The scene is dominated by a thick layer of white mist or low clouds that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. Below the mist, the dark green, silhouetted tops of hills and trees are visible, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall tone is atmospheric and somewhat somber due to the muted colors and obscured details.

From both a safety and a scenic point of view it is best to choose a bright, clear day and bear in mind that the weather on the hills can be subject to dramatic changes. Misty conditions, particularly, should be avoided as it is very easy to get lost and the fells can be dangerous when you can't see where you are going.



Kirkby Stephen church

Kirkby Stephen, Ewbank Scar and the Nine Standards

*"There, where the Eden leisures through
its sandstone valley, is my view
of green and civil life that dwells
below a cliff of savage fells"*

W.H Auden

Kirkby Stephen is a town where the ancient church is a prominent feature, as its name indicates – 'Kirk' meaning Church and 'by' meaning settlement. The church is an impressive building with its long nave and stately proportions reminiscent of a small cathedral, and it is known locally as the Cathedral of the Dales. It is generally assumed that the 'Stephen' part of the town's name relates to the church and a possible association with an early Abbot called Stephen or its dedication to St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. It is more likely, however, that it may have derived from the Old Norse 'Vest Idun' meaning west of the Eden.

Many names and words in the local dialect still reflect the Viking influence, as does the carved 'Loki Stone', which is kept in the church and is thought to depict the Norse god Loki in chains, perhaps adapted by early Christians to represent the vanquished Devil.

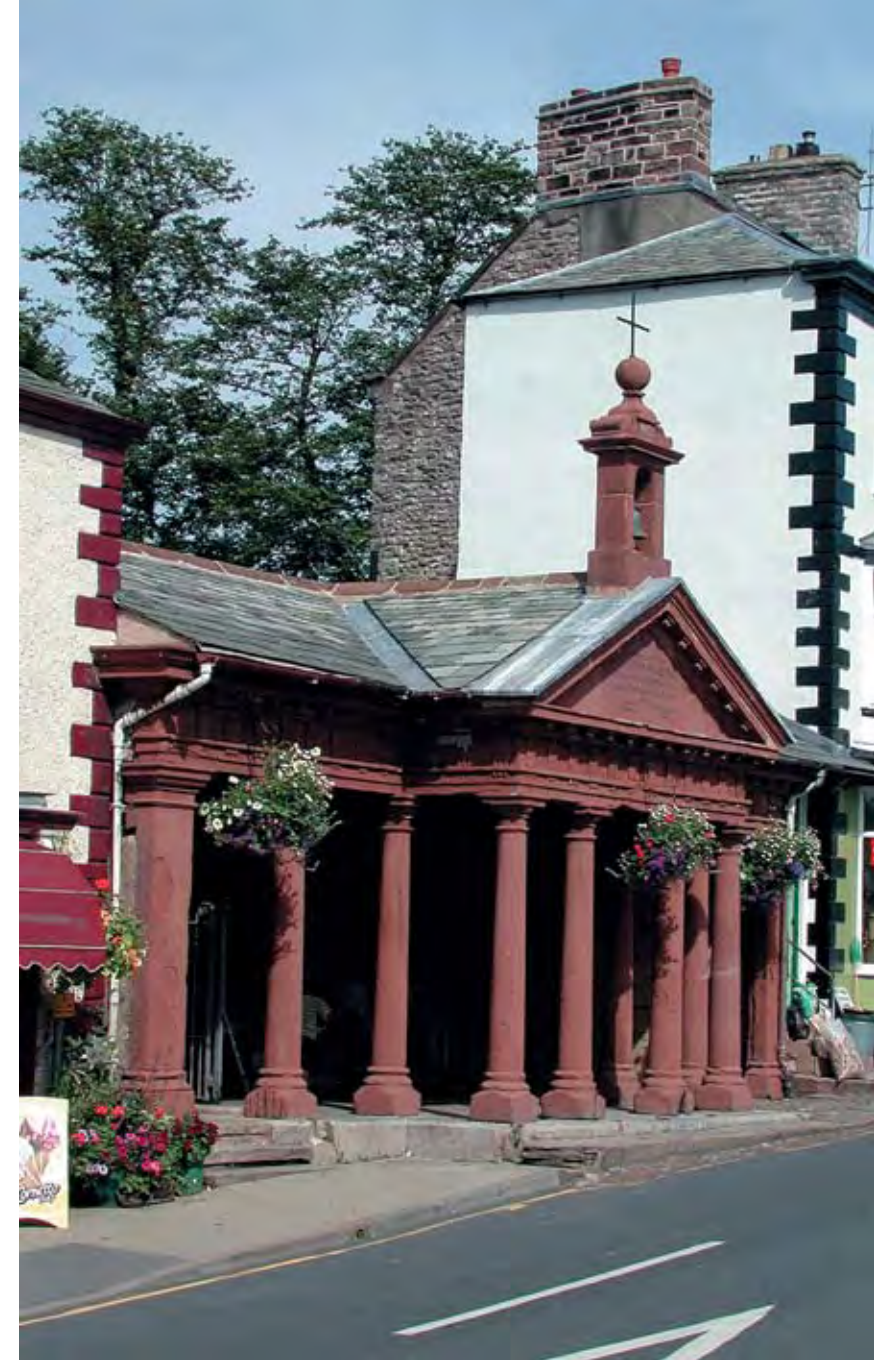


All around Kirkby Stephen there is abundant evidence of historic human occupation, from the Stone Age and Bronze Age earth mounds and terraced field systems to the more recent, mostly disused, railway lines and viaducts.

The cloisters, in front of the church, were built in 1810 and once served as a butter-market, but there has been a regular market in the square since the royal granting of a market charter, in 1353.

Loki Stone

Loki Stone motif, lino print for bronze panel



cloisters



Frank's Bridge

Start your walk from the cloisters with the Market Square in front of you, turn immediately left and proceed along the lane to Stoneshot, just past a sign saying River Eden and Frank's Bridge.

This narrow passage, with its high curved walls, was designed so that it could be easily barricaded against Scottish invasion during the centuries of conflict between England and Scotland. The wall on the right is made from a local stone called 'brockram', a natural conglomerate of limestone fragments in highly compressed sandstone.

At the bottom, turn left down the steps and bear left again over the river Eden, on the 17th century stone bridge known as Frank's Bridge.



female mallard

As you come onto Frank's Bridge, you will see the Nine Standards up on the distant horizon ahead - unless they are shrouded in clouds.

As well as the tame mallard ducks and the possibility of seeing a kingfisher or grey wagtail, Frank's Bridge is also a good place to spot parrots! Kept in a private aviary on the outskirts of the town, many are allowed to fly free and can frequently be observed swooping and squawking over the town and sitting on the roofs of buildings.



male mallard

Follow the path to the right along Hill's Bottom, with the river on your right.

Watch out for three slabs of stone set into the ground, which were once used to stand horses on whilst measuring their height.

At the end, go through a kissing-gate and turn right along the riverbank. Follow the river upstream to the end of the field.

The river is very much in its infancy here, being only 16 kilometres from its source above Mallerstang.

Hartley Castle Farm, across the fields up to the left, stands on a site where there was once a castle. Demolished in 1735, it was originally the home of Sir Andrew de Harcla, Sheriff of Cumberland, who led many battles with the Scots, culminating in the English defeat at Bannockburn, in 1314. He was executed for treason following some questionable but possibly well-meaning negotiations with Robert the Bruce in 1325. Subsequently, his estate was sold to the Musgrave family and the castle was described in 1677 as "an Elizabethan building consisting of an inner quadrangle, surrounded by buildings and an outer courtyard to the north protected by a high and thick curtain wall. The south end was occupied by the chapel and withdrawing rooms, whilst on the western side, a large oriel window lit a long gallery facing the quadrangle".



site of Hartley Castle (now farm)



Ladthwaite Beck

It should be noted that Hartley Castle Farm is a private residence and there is no public access to the property.

Cross the timber footbridge.

This is where Ladthwaite Beck, which starts high up on Hartley Fell, joins the river Eden.

Proceed along the path through the trees.

The gully on the right is the original path, worn deep by centuries of horse traffic going between Kirkby Stephen and Nateby. The woodland, which consists mainly of beech, oak, elm, sycamore and hazel, accommodates a rich diversity of wildlife. This currently includes red squirrels, but grey squirrels are also increasingly evident which, sadly, will almost certainly lead to the demise of the red squirrel population in the next few years. The more robust grey squirrels eat most of the available food and also carry a poxvirus, which, although harmless to themselves, is fatal to the red squirrels.

red squirrel





Podgill viaduct

Walk on to just before the point where the path begins to narrow between a hedge and a fence and bear left over the wall-stile beside the field gate. Walk diagonally up through the field, heading for the corner of the top boundary wall and, just beyond, cross the red brick and stone bridge over the disused railway line.

The railway line is now owned by the Northern Viaduct Trust and has been transformed into a path accessible to wheelchair-users. It links with this and other public paths to provide shorter circuitual routes in both directions back to Kirkby Stephen. Access to the railway path from here is available through the pedestrian gate to the right. Podgill viaduct along the railway to the left provides magnificent views of Lathwaite Gill or to the right you can visit Stenkrith Park, with its dramatic rocky ravine and a section of the Poetry Path.

The South Durham and Lancashire Union Railway Company constructed the original railway between 1857 and 1860, to carry coke from Durham to the iron works at Barrow in Furness and iron ore back to Cleveland. It was closed in 1962.

Continue up the next field, over a wooden stile into a lonning with a tree-lined wall on your left and a scrubby hedge on your right.

You get a good view to the left from here of Podgill viaduct and Hartley Castle Farm.

Go over a stone wall-stile and, a bit further on, turn left over another stone stile and then a wooden stile on your left into Ewbank Scar wood. Keep straight ahead, down some stone steps, and then bear right.

Dry stone walls

The recent repair of the Nine Standards cairns, by master craftsman Steve Allen, provides us with an impressive demonstration of the skills involved in building a dry stone structure. Constructed without cement or mortar of any kind, a dry stone wall is put together like a jigsaw puzzle with the shape of each stone fitting into the next.

Many of the walls in East Cumbria, which are so characteristic of rocky hill country, were built over 200 years ago and stand as a magnificent testimony to the people who shaped the upper Eden landscape.

Features of a dry stone wall



Usually about 1.5 metres high, a dry stone wall is built on a foundation of large 'footing' stones laid in two parallel lines within a shallow trench. The space in between is packed with small stone fillings. Subsequent courses of stones are then placed so that they sit across the joint of the two stones below. Each side of the wall is gradually tapered inwards, constantly packed with fillings, and long 'through' stones are inserted at regular intervals which hold the two sides together. Finally a single row of stones is put along the top of the finished wall, usually at an angle and leaning in one direction to deflect rain and discourage sheep from jumping over them.

For more information contact the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain at Lane Farm, Crooklands, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7NH. Tel. 015395 67953. Email. Information@dswa.org.uk Website. www.dswa.org.uk

wallers working on the Nine Standards

northern brown argus

Ewbank Scar wood is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest officially designated by Natural England. The great importance of the site relates to the species-rich limestone grassland and ancient, semi-natural woodland that has survived over many hundreds of years. The flora includes five nationally uncommon plant species and supports a breeding population of the rare northern brown argus butterfly. There is also a thriving mammal population including red squirrels, roe deer and hares, and a variety of birds such as redstart, spotted flycatcher and great spotted woodpecker.



Here we encounter Ladthwaite Beck again.

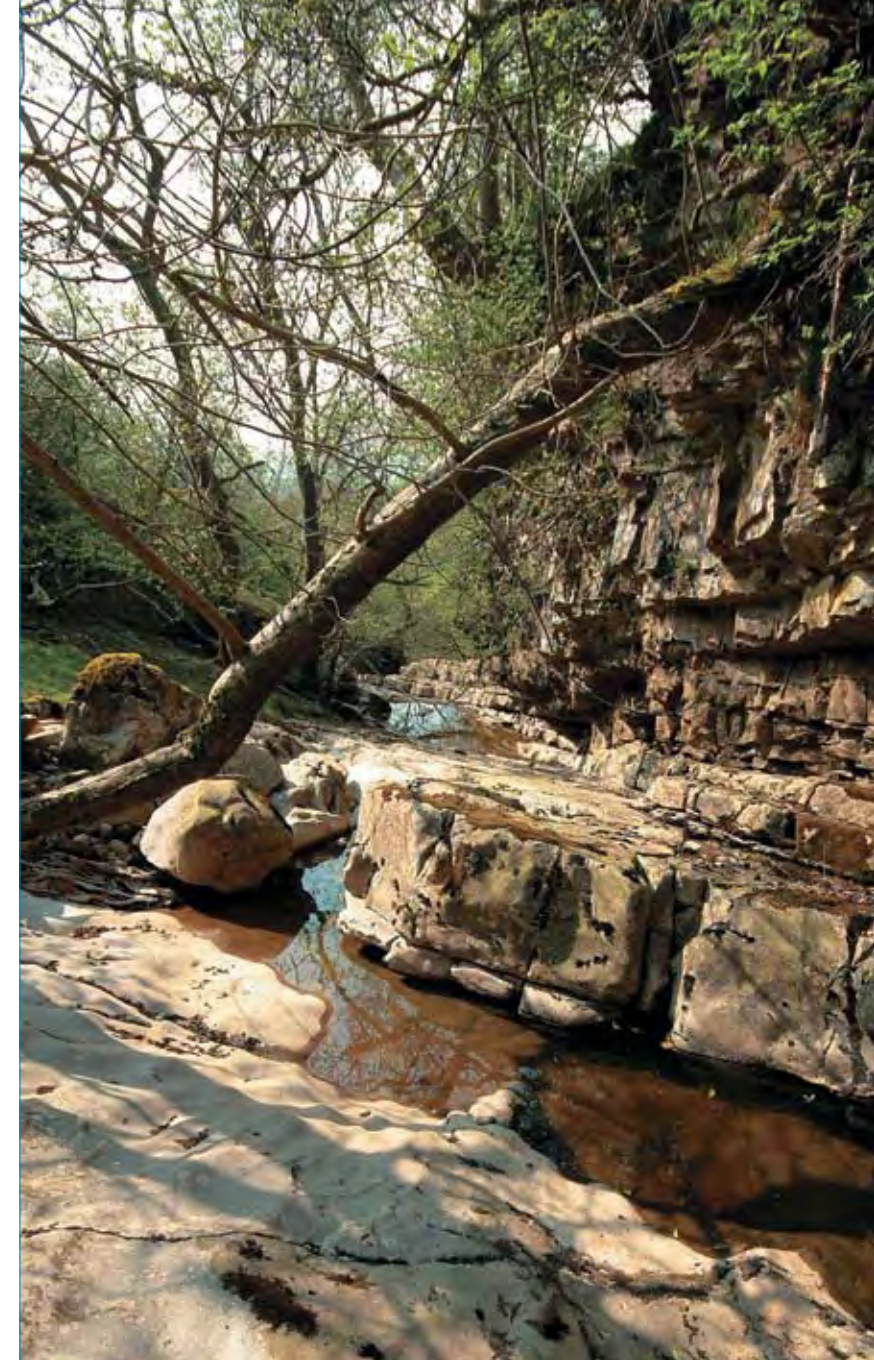
Follow the way-marked posts through the woods parallel with the beck below. The path starts to climb again opposite the towering stone cliff of Ewbank Scar.

The beck runs along a narrow course of rock at its base. Millions of years ago, the intense vertical movement of the earth's crust fractured the carboniferous limestone along a deep fault, and wrenched one side high above the other.



redstart

Illustration based on © image
Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)



Ewbank Scar



Ladthwaite Beck and farmstead

The path emerges from the woods over a wooden stile into an open field on higher ground. Turn left through a field gate and follow a line along the top edge of the woods, until you get to another wooden stile and then descend again to follow Ladthwaite Beck upstream. Continue on the path alongside the beck, where it veers sharply to the right, and then climb over a stone wall-stile towards Ladthwaite Farmstead.

Watch out for dippers and herons along here. The owners of Ladthwaite Farm have signed up to a part-Government, part-EU funded Stewardship Scheme which helps them manage their land for nature conservation.



grey heron

Many wildlife habitats in Britain are diminishing and therefore many species of our flora and fauna are under threat of extinction. To a large extent, allowing marginal parts of a farm to revert to marsh, with some standing water, and finding room for a few trees and rough pasture, will make all the difference to the healthy survival of wildlife, without compromising agricultural efficiency.

Cross left over the wide, flat bridge, then immediately right and walk towards the farm buildings. Go through the field gate and then turn sharp left away from the buildings, along the farm track.

There is an old entrance to a lead mine on your right. Although the hills exude a sense of peaceful wilderness now, they have been exploited and changed by human activity over thousands of years. Extensive natural woodland was long ago removed and minerals, including coal and copper, have been extracted from the surrounding fells for many centuries. The lead ore was smelted at a smelt-mill in Hartley, built by Sir Philip Musgrave in 1750.

Follow the track to where it joins the top of the tarmac road. This is where you either turn right to go up onto Hartley Fell and visit the Nine Standards, or turn left down Birkett Lane and back to Kirkby Stephen via Hartley village.

Route to Nine Standards

The walk up to the Nine Standards is quite strenuous and not advisable in bad weather. As you will see, there is room to park a car or two here so you may wish to do this walk separately on another day.

To visit the Nine Standards, follow the track signposted 'Public Bridleway Rollinson Hags'.

This is an old miner's road, which actually terminates high on the fell where coal used to be dug out of the peat. It is part of the route that Alfred Wainwright followed on his famous Coast to Coast walk, but, because of very severe erosion on Rollinson Hags, the top section is better avoided. A permissive route provides an easier way to the Nine Standards. At the second gate, you will catch a glimpse of the Standards before they disappear again beyond the horizon.

Keep going along the clearly defined stony track.



You can see Wild Boar Fell and the Howgills in the distance over to your right. Wild Boar Fell is reputedly where Sir Richard de Musgrave, who lived at Hartley Castle, killed the last wild boar in England. A boar's tusk was found in his tomb, which is situated in Kirkby Stephen church.

At the top of the rise, you will be able to see the Standards again.

*wild boar
lino print for bronze panel*



Wild Boar Fell

Follow the wall, cross the beck with a shale bank on the left, and continue up the track to a signpost indicating 'Permissive Path'. Coast to Coast and direct route to Nine Standards'.

Although you are not quite in the Yorkshire Dales National Park here, the National Park Authority has introduced a 'rotational access scheme' for the Coast to Coast route which it hopes walkers will use according to the time of year.

Bear left here and follow the curving grassy route, way-marked with small cairns, through a cleft in the hill to Faraday Gill. With the gill on your left, follow the top of its bank where first a single, bigger cairn comes into view and then a second, and then, in between the two, the Nine Standards themselves.



Nine Standards

Note the large sheepfold on the other side of the gill. This is a washfold where sheep were once gathered and cleaned in the beck. The beck flows down into Rollinson Gill and feeds into Ladthwaite Beck.

The heaps of stone at the top of the gill are the remains of a Hunting Lodge that used to provide shelter for shooting parties. The fells here are still managed for grouse shooting, which can make a valuable contribution to the rural economy.

The track over the footbridge takes you straight up to the Nine Standards, although they disappear at this point and come into view again as you get nearer.

The actual summit of the hill is 400 metres to the south and is 662 metres above sea level. There is a viewfinder cairn further along the summit ridge, which identifies the places you can see in your panoramic view of the valley below, and the Lake District and Pennine Fells.

Nothing much is known about the Nine Standards. The nine dry stone cairns in their present form, give or take some restoration work over the years including major repairs recently, financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, are probably not much more than two hundred years old. There is some evidence to suggest the existence, before that, of nine marker-stones and the name Nine Standards appears on several maps from over four hundred years ago, but otherwise their origin is a mystery.

Whatever their historic significance, they are to this day a much-loved landmark in the Kirkby Stephen area and were the inspiration for Andy Goldsworthy's 'Pinfold Cones', which can be found in several Eden Valley villages.

The return journey follows the same route in reverse. If visibility is poor, take care to retrace your steps back to the small cairn just below the Nine Standards, which marks the top of the path you came up. Stay on the path all the way down to the tarmac lane.

Direct route to Kirkby Stephen

Follow the tarmac lane down past Hartley Quarry.

As is evident from the spectacular size of the quarry, limestone has been extracted from here for 80 years, providing lime for industry and stone for road construction. It is currently owned by CEMEX.

Pass the railway viaduct footpath and a nearby house. Then take a narrow track immediately to the left to avoid the bend in the road. The track comes out on the road and within a few metres you turn left over a stone footbridge to a back lane. Turn right and then left onto the footpath at the parish noticeboard. This path takes you back to Kirkby Stephen to conclude your walk.



Hartley Quarry