

The Cheviot

Issue number 2 - Summer 2016

Contents

The Cheviot	2
The Alnmouth Skiff	4
Ba' Green	7
Longhorsley Village	8
From Goldsleugh Burn to Auchope Cairn	10
A Museum in Exile	14
Alnwick Stew	16
Warkworth Ford	18
A Marine Safari	19
Our Northumberland	23
Song for Northumberland	26
Taking it to Heart	27
The Schil from Hethpool	32
Belford Races	36
Otterburn Ranges	40
A Shrine to Cocius	44

Published by Wanney Books
www.wildsofwanney.co.uk
books@wildsofwanney.co.uk
Tel 07889 078417

© copyright for individual articles rests with the specific authors

Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this publication, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions. Neither is any liability assumed for damages resulting from the use of this information contained herein.

The Cheviot

Welcome to the second issue of The Cheviot, which I suppose can now properly be called a journal! I am grateful to all the people who continue to support this project. It would not be possible to continue without their enthusiasm and contributions. I hope that you will also be pleased to see an increase of 20% in the number of pages - 48, up from 40 in the first edition.

Even now, with only the second edition, my ideas about the direction of travel for The Cheviot are evolving. It will still be looking at the “off the beaten track” parts of our region, but, influenced by the ideas in Katrina Porteous’s article, I am excited by the concept of celebrating the “ordinary” - the things we often take for granted but which underpin our sense of a place.

It was with Katrina’s prompting that I bought a copy of “*England in Particular*” and have been enthused by its content and messages. Created by the charity “Common Ground”, its sub-title, *A celebration of the commonplace, the local, the vernacular and the distinctive* sums up much of its central theme. I will be using (with permission) some of the *Common Ground Rules for Local Distinctiveness* through the journal - I hope you find them as thought provoking as I do.

In creating each edition of The Cheviot, I am coming into contact with many people who are immersed in aspects of North Northumberland, and am continually learning from them. One such person is Andrew Craggs who is in charge of the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve. I thought I knew all about the “country code”, but an hour with Andrew made me realise how much I didn’t know about the efforts that are having to be made to protect the environment which we enjoy so much, and the part that we all need to play in helping.

I learned about the balances that must be maintained - helping the otter population grow is clearly a good thing, but this leads to having to protect the nests of waterfowl which, without help from us, can be decimated by these voracious predators. The various agencies that work with nature all contribute to maintaining the complex interactions that exist within nature.

I also learned that, while the countryside is important to many of us for our physical and mental well being, we need to better educate ourselves as to the damage we can inadvertently cause, especially to some of the more fragile spaces.

Being able to walk in quiet, unspoiled places is important to us, but we need to be aware of what we are walking through. The beach above the high water mark could be a nesting ground for terns. The grassland to the side of a path may have rare wildflowers which might be damaged by a wrongly placed boot.

Having the space to allow your dog to run off the lead is also important, but a dog running through a nesting site can cause untold damage.

The message that I am taking on is that I need to be more aware of the complexities of the places I visit and to take more time to learn about our natural world - and I guess that can surely only add to my enjoyment!

Like so much of life, this is all about the fine balance between rights and responsibilities. We have a right to access so much of our countryside, but with that right comes the responsibility to take proper care of the places we visit.

Thanks must go to all who have supported this edition - Rhoda Foote, Derek Knox, Geoff Holland, Nic Best, Kim Bibby-Wilson, Emma Nelson, Claire Hedley, Jo Hume, Keith Armstrong, Katrina Porteous, Brian Doyle, Jane Bowen, Major Frank O’Kane and Russel Wills - without them this wouldn’t happen.

If you have a story to tell, or ideas for future articles, please get in touch. I can’t promise to include everything but we’ll do our best!

And finally, if you like what you see, please consider subscribing - your support is the only thing that keeps the project going.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Dm' or similar, located at the bottom left of the page.

Champion the ordinary and the everyday

Courtesy of Common Ground

The Alnmouth Skiff

On a bright Sunday afternoon in March, on the long beautiful curve of Alnmouth Bay, a fleet of vessels lay drawn up on the sand prompting many a passer by to wonder if the Vikings were back again hundreds of years after their first invasion of Northumberland. It was in fact the first day of the 2016 season for the Alnmouth Community Rowing group and their skiff "Pride of Aln" now operating out of the old lifeboat house at Alnmouth.

Pride of Aln's story began in 2013 with the germ of an idea to build a St Ayles skiff.



"Pride of Aln" being launched into the surf at Alnmouth [Bryan Miller]

In turn the story of the St Ayles skiff began in 2009 when the Scottish Fisheries Museum decided to run a boat building programme for some students. Their discussions kindled memories of the miners' coastal rowing regattas which took place off the East Fife coalfields until the 1950s. Apparently the miners would surreptitiously redirect timbers from the mine shafts into their boats. The end result provided both recreation for the mining villages and a means of fishing to supplement meagre diets. The museum's vision ultimately led to collaboration with boat designer Ian Oughtred and Alec Jordan from Jordan Boats and a new class of

rowing boat came into being. It was named after St Ayles, a Celtic monk whose 15th century chapel still forms part of the Fisheries Museum building in Anstruther.



*“Pride of Aln” (left) and Amble’s “Coquet Spirit” (right) on the River Aln
[Rhoda Foote]*

The Alnmouth boat was to be built, and then rowed and enjoyed, by the local community. Over a period of many months a group of people gathered every weekend in a chilly farm shed in Embleton to share in a project which would be demanding but exciting and ultimately hugely rewarding. A few people already had woodworking skills while others didn't know one end of a chisel from the other, but through a combination of dedication, training and teamwork a boat was born.

Pride of Aln began to take shape when a kit of marine plywood arrived from Jordan Boats and the basic hull could be formed over a series of moulds. After much chin scratching a lot of other timber, mainly larch, was added for the keel, stems, gunwales, seats and oars. A very special inclusion was some genuine deck timber from HMS Victory which added a little magic to the cox's seat. The end result is an extremely sea worthy clinker built vessel. She is 22 feet long with a 5 foot 8 inch beam, pointed at both ends and powered by four rowers each with one oar. In the stern sits the cox who steers, gives all commands and is responsible for the safety of the crew.

Launch days for new skiffs are always special occasions and attract crowds of locals as well as providing a colourful spectacle for the ever present holiday makers. Ours was no exception and we were delighted to welcome the Duchess of Northumberland for our maiden voyage in March 2015.

2016 has already seen the launch of a beautiful new skiff at Amble, their second boat, and we look forward to welcoming Craster into the growing world of coastal rowing later in the year. Beyond these shores the world wide fleet has grown enormously with skiffs taking to the water in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and The Netherlands.

But returning to that day in March when our season began it is perhaps not surprising that such a powerful image was conjured up. It is very easy to look back to the time of the Vikings. On a recent trip to Norway and Sweden it was a delight to see boats of a similar design still in use today, coping with the coastal conditions around the fjords as they have done for centuries. A trip to the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo cannot be recommended highly enough where the world's two best preserved Viking ships are on display. The beauty of their craft is truly awe inspiring but it really doesn't take a huge leap of imagination to see the connection between them and our little rowing skiff.

War mongering and pillaging are no longer on the agenda of course. The aim now is to enjoy the sport of coastal rowing and to make it fun for as many people as possible. This may well involve serious training for racing but on the other hand we just as often take great pleasure in rowing gently in the company of other skiffs. Sometimes we take to the sea, at other times we row more sedately on rivers or lakes. Beach parties, BBQs, shanty singing and a wonderfully friendly spirit within the 'skiffie' community add to the attraction of this new phenomenon sweeping up and down the Northumberland coast.

Rhoda Foote

For more information about Alnmouth Community Rowing, see the website www.alnmouthrowing.org or contact the chairman, Richard Wilson, on 01665 577811.

Ba' Green

In the UK we are blessed with probably the finest maps in the world - the Ordnance Survey. Originally born out of military needs - firstly to map the Highlands of Scotland, following the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, and later for the whole of Britain when threatened with invasion by Napoleon - OS maps are now widely available for leisure use.

Time spent studying a map of your local area can open up a vast amount of detail about the landscape. In the area around Coldstream the border between England and Scotland follows the centre of the River Tweed - but just to the east of Wark the map reveals a small bit of Scotland on the southern bank of the river.

What is this about? Alistair Moffat, in his book *"The Borders"*, recounts an old tale about an annual handball match between Wark and Coldstream, with the winners holding a piece of the opposing team's land for the following year. With the decline in the size of Wark, and the rise in importance of Coldstream, the latter came to dominate in this contest. Eventually the game was abandoned with Coldstream (and Scotland) holding onto this playing field - known as Ba' Green (circled in red on the map) - in perpetuity.

Today, there is nothing to see on the ground which would indicate that this is a small piece of Scotland.



Then and Now

Longhorsley Village



Looking north along South Road in Longhorsley in 1930 (above) and today (below)



These photographs show how much has changed, while at the same time how much remains the same.

The first house on the left is where Be-Ro flour first came into being. A few years later Emily Davison`s mother lived here, and it is from where Emily left before heading down to Epsom and her death.

The next set of four houses are called Coronation Terrace as they were built in 1911 in the year of George V`s coronation.

The Blacksmiths shop is on the left at top of road and is now a holiday home/cottage.

The farm house on top right was knocked down to make way for the road widening and straightening. Prior to it being a farm house, it was the Black Bull Inn.

The old photographs are courtesy of Longhorsley History Society, which holds more than a thousand similar old images as well many pages of written material.

Derek Knox



The landlord of the Shoulder of Mutton, Andrew Jeffreys, in 1922.

From Goldsleugh Burn to Auchope Cairn

Standing 815 metres above sea level The Cheviot is the highest and most frequently climbed hill in Northumberland yet, despite its popularity with walkers, very few ever venture much beyond the weather-beaten triangulation pillar that marks the top of the vast, peat-pooled summit plateau. But for those with a keen eye and an inquisitive nature there is so much more to discover on this big brute of a hill including perhaps the wildest and loneliest stretch of high-level country in the whole of Northumberland. So, let us take a peep.

We begin our journey beside the Goldsleugh Burn which rises high on the Cheviot plateau and flows north through one of the finest v-shaped valleys in the area caught between Woolhope Crag and the triple humps of Bellyside Hill. It is a highly visible and important feature of the county's premier hill yet, strangely enough, it is not named on the current edition of the Ordnance Survey map. No wonder it is one of the least known of all the Cheviot valleys.



Looking over the Lambden Valley from Bellyside Crag

Once over the undulations of Bellyside Hill and high above the isolated Lambden Valley we continue westwards to the highest crag in Northumberland from where we can look out across a vast landscape of rolling hills and distant fields. This is Bellyside Crag, where arguably there is no greater sense of the vastness of land and sky and of a solitary walker's total insignificance in the hugeness of time and space anywhere else in Northumberland.



Bellyside Crag

On we walk, hugging the head of the Bizzle, a vast Ice Age bowl of steep cliffs and near-vertical screes, a lonely and rugged amphitheatre where climbing routes with evocative names such as, `Spitfire`, `Flying Fortress`, `Devious Flightpath`, `Where the Hills Meet the Sky` and `Lost World` reflect both the history and location of this special place. This is, quite simply, a Cheviot gem.

Continuing in the same direction we soon reach the rocky fist of Braydon Crag standing on the north western corner of The Cheviot. This is the place where, during a late afternoon blizzard in December 1944, a U.S. Army Air Force B17 Flying Fortress crashed killing two members of the nine man crew. The events of that afternoon are relatively well known, not least for the actions of two local shepherds who, guided by sheepdog Sheila, rescued four crew members who were found sheltering in a peat hole. As a result of their actions both shepherds received the British Empire Medal whilst Sheila received the Dickin Medal, the animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross. The ashes of the pilot, who survived the crash, were, in



Looking along the College Valley from Braydon Crag

October 2006, scattered across the site of the crash where there are still remnants of the fated aircraft.

Now turning southwards, with the beautiful and peaceful linear College Valley to our right and the peat line to our left, we pick our way across the steep slopes of West Hill towards the Hen Hole, a secluded hanging valley where the infant College



Burn cascades down a series of delightful waterfalls beneath dark, towering crags. Here, at the south western tip of West Hill, are two large and impressively constructed stone cairns surrounded by scattered slabs of cold, grey rock with near-vertical views across a ninety degree turn in this the most impressive ravine in Northumberland. It is truly magical with a view that stretches across the open jaws of the Hen Hole to our next and final port-of-call.

So, on we go contouring The Cheviot's steep western slopes until, after 1.5 kilometres, we cross the narrow College Burn above a superb waterfall (left) which



Auchope Cairn, with the view to the north west, over the Hen Hole

appears out of the blue, a tiny fracture in the ground bounded on both sides by grass-covered, rock-dotted slopes as it turns 90 degrees, drops and then tumbles in three distinct steps.

Then, after navigating a short stretch of rough heather- and peat-carpeted ground, we arrive at Auchope Cairn, up close and personal with the Scottish border. The view to the north and west from this elemental spot has been described as one of the most extensive in Great Britain; the perfect place to end our tastebud-tickling journey over Cheviot's hidden side.

Geoff Holland

Geoff has contributed to a variety of magazines and has written four books of self-guided walks, 'The Hills of Upper Coquetdale', 'The Cheviot Hills', 'Walks from Wooler' and 'Walks on the Wild Side: The Cheviot Hills'. All books can be purchased online from www.trailguides.co.uk. He also operates the award-winning website www.cheviotwalks.co.uk and his poems have appeared in a number of publications.

A Museum in Exile

Surprisingly perhaps, Morpeth is one of the few towns that doesn't have its own museum. There is the Chantry Bagpipe Museum of course, but this needs to be viewed at least as a regional museum, if not an international one. There is not a museum of what we might call “social history” anywhere in the town.

There is a collection of artefacts relating to the town, collected and maintained by the Morpeth Antiquarian Society (MAS) - but it has no permanent home. The collection has been housed in both the Chantry and the Town Hall in the past, but has had to move when these buildings were each redeveloped and the spaces that had been used as a museum were reallocated to other uses.

The “museum” now resides in an old council building at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea where the artefacts are protected, but are largely invisible. There are some small MAS display cases in the entrance of Morpeth Town Hall, but these cannot do justice to the whole collection that is available.

The MAS is active in its Newbiggin home, preserving and cataloguing the town's relics. All the artefacts can be located to the correct storage box in a remarkably quick time, but what is really needed is a home where all of the collection can be displayed.

An organisation was established in the early 2000s - the Friends of Morpeth Museum (FOMM) - with the aim of creating and maintaining a museum in the centre of Morpeth to display the history of the town. Some feasibility studies have been carried out for a combined arts and history centre so hopefully some solution will be found in the not too distant future, though the size of the task within the current economic climate is not being underestimated by anyone involved.

Contact details for both FOMM and MAS can be found at:

www.northumbriana.org.uk

In an attempt to expose a very small part of the collection, two particular artefacts are shown here. They are from the Whale Bone Inn which opened in 1789, not closing until 1960! It was in the building now occupied by Costa on Newgate Street.

The glass mirror (top), though sadly cracked, is perhaps self explanatory. The “whale bone” itself, with its iron bracket, (bottom) hung outside the hostelry, dating from the times when whaling was part of the Northumbrian fishing industry.

Thanks to Kim Bibby-Wilson (MAS) and Nic Best (FOMM) for providing access to the collection.



Alnwick Stew

This is a layered winter dish from north Northumberland, which supposedly originated at Alnwick Castle. According to Sainsbury's research (2007), it is officially on the endangered list of regional recipes with only 2.7% of Britons having tried the dish.

Ingredients:

800g gammon

3 onions, halved and then sliced into half moons

Knob of butter

Approx 500g potatoes, peeled and sliced the thickness of a £1 coin

2 bay leaves

1 litre hot vegetable stock

2 tsp mustard powder

Handful of parsley, chopped (optional)

Recipe:

1. Place the gammon in a large pan of cold water and bring to the boil. Remove the gammon and discard the water.
2. Heat the oven to 190C.
3. When the gammon is cool enough to handle, cut into 2cm cubes.
4. Grease a large casserole dish with the butter.
5. Spread out half the sliced onions on the bottom of the greased dish and season with black pepper. Sprinkle over 1tsp of the mustard powder.
6. Layer half the gammon on top, season with black pepper, top with half the potatoes and a bay leaf.

7. Repeat the layers with the remaining ingredients: onions, mustard and black pepper, then gammon, finishing with potatoes and the bay leaf.

8. Pour in enough stock to reach just below the top layer of potatoes - you might not need all of it.



9. Cook in oven for one hour with lid on. Remove lid and cook for a further 30 mins or until potatoes are golden.

10. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve with crusty bread.

Emma Nelson

Emma is a native Northumbrian, currently living in the south of England. A regular visitor to her home town of Alnwick, she is passionate about cooking, and is interested in the local recipes of the region.



Buy things that are locally distinctive and locally made - such as food and souvenirs. Resist the things that can be found anywhere.

Courtesy of Common Ground

Warkworth Ford

Fords are special places with a romance that evokes a past age. Our landscape has been shaped by fords, with so many of our settlements springing up at these river crossing points. Now mostly replaced by bridges, there are still a number of fords along some of our quieter roads.



This ford, running across a weir on the Coquet at the end of Watershaugh Road in Warkworth, is probably the longest in the county.

The bed is fairly smooth, and with care and under normal river conditions is crossable by a car, though people have got their vehicle stuck when the water is deeper - for example, by dropping a wheel into the salmon run, which is concealed. The depth gauge gives a good indication of how much water is in the river but if you can't see the bottom, it might be best to give it a miss! And you use it at your own risk.

Thanks go to Derek Knox for highlighting this ford. Derek collects information on our local fords and is a contributor to the Wetroads project (wetroads.co.uk) which seeks to record all of England's fords.

A Marine Safari

Northumberland's dramatic coastline and shallow waters contain a mosaic of habitats that provide a home to some of the most important marine ecosystems in the world, a status which is recognised through multiple international, European and UK nature conservation designations. Special management measures are in place within these sites to ensure that human interaction occurs at sustainable levels that minimises damage and disturbance. Across Berwickshire and Northumberland, the various management organisations have come together to form a management partnership known as the *Berwickshire and Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership*. Building on a scheme that has been in place for more than 16 years, the partnership aims to develop a single management framework for all of the local sites.

Our rocky shores are one of the most fascinating and complex environments on Earth. Twice a day, as the tide rises and falls, plants and animals living in the intertidal zone are exposed to extreme ranges of temperature, moisture, salinity and oxygen levels. The creatures here have evolved many special abilities to help them survive in these hostile conditions.

Plants and animals living on the upper shore are only covered by seawater at high tide and spend most of their time exposed. They are the real pioneers of the shore. The upper shore is often covered with thousands of tiny barnacles. Although these little white spots look a lot like molluscs, they are actually more closely related to crabs and lobsters. When covered by seawater the top of the shell opens up and the animal waves its small hairy



Barnacles

legs through the current to push food particles into its mouth inside the shell. When the tide falls, it can shut itself safely away in its shell to protect it from exposure until the tide rises again.



Beadlet anemone



Ascidian



Sea Lemon, a type of sea slug

Some plants and animals live in the middle of the shore, spending roughly equal amounts of time underwater and exposed to the air. The Beadlet anemone is a fascinating relative of the jellyfish. With its tentacles displayed when submerged, it looks like a small flower. It uses its tentacles to sting, capture and eat small fish, shrimps and crabs as they swim past. When the tide falls it can retract its tentacles into its body to prevent it from drying out and it can survive for many hours exposed to the air. You might spot them attached to rocks appearing as small jelly-like mounds in shades of red and brown.

Other creatures prefer to live close to the low water mark where they spend most of their day underwater and are less vulnerable to exposure.

Rock pools provide natural aquariums where small fish and hermit crabs take shelter until the tide envelops the shore again. Boulders and cobbles provide cool and damp shelter for a huge variety of life. Soft ascidians, sea squirts and sea slugs can be found clinging to the underside of boulders and

rocks, taking shelter from the pounding waves.

There are many sea caves within Northumberland's reefs, some of which extend for hundreds of meters into the bedrock. Conditions inside the caves change dramatically compared to the cave entrances. Seaweeds can colonise the entrance where there is light, but as you go deeper into the cave the light fades until only



Hermit crab

animals can survive. Shallow water caves are affected by waves and the tide, and these currents bring a feast of food particles for the brightly coloured filter feeders that encrust the cave walls. Deeper caves are less affected by waves and more delicate animals, such as soft corals, solitary sea squirts, and jellyfish larvae, can survive here.

Wide sweeping bays lie between the rocky headlands. The coarse sediments of Budle Bay, Embleton Bay and Boulmer Haven support thousands of animals such as razor shells, Venus shells and, in places, extensive lugworm beds. The heart urchin, sometime known as the sea potato, burrows in sediments beneath the low water mark, but dried and brittle shells of



Heart Urchin

dead individuals can often be found washed up on the strandline. The sediments provide an abundance of food for wading birds, such as sanderling which can be found running along the water mark

Great expanses of sand and mud flats can be found between the mainland and Holy Island. Looking across their flat surfaces, they might first appear as marine



Common Brittlestar (and a sea slug hiding in the centre)



Kelp and soft coral

deserts. Beneath their surface, however, thousands of animals burrow in the soft sediments. These creatures provide a rich food source for thousands of wading birds. Budle Bay and Fenham Flats are also home to the largest seagrass meadows on the east coast of Britain. The seagrass is an important part of the diet of over-wintering geese, such as the light-bellied brent goose. These amazing birds make a staggering migration every year from their breeding grounds in Svalbard, Franz Josef Land or northeast Greenland to the shores of Holy Island.

The rocky reefs continue offshore where large kelp forests provide a safe haven for juvenile fish, crabs and lobsters that shelter in the swaying marine canopy. As the reefs plunge deeper and as the light begins to fade, the kelps give way to a dense carpet of animals such as brittle stars and soft corals like Dead Man's Fingers.

Claire Hedley; Implementation Officer for the Berwickshire and Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership

Claire.Hedley@northumberland.gov.uk

Our Northumberland

On the next pages are two different interpretations of Northumberland.

The painting *Wild Northumberland* (overleaf) is by artist Jo Hume. It summons up a scene that will be familiar to all, with the rain sweeping across the heather and grass clad hills. Jo describes her work below.

Wild Northumberland is one of many paintings produced as a result of walking, often trying to stay upright, in the Cheviot Hills. We moved here over thirty years ago and gradually over the years the mystery, spirituality and wild loneliness of these beautiful Northern hills has grown into a deep love for their familiar shapes and profiles. My artistic life began at the tender age of nine as I began to explore colour through using fabrics. This was replaced by paint as I grew older which in turn led to a long career in art education. Now that I am retired I have much more time to pursue my own art. Each painting emerges some time after a direct experience. Paint is poured onto the canvas and moved around until it becomes a visual memory of fleeting moments.

More of Jo's work, as well as her contact details, can be found on her website:

www.johume.co.uk

The poem, *Song for Northumberland* was written by Dr Keith Armstrong. Again, it evokes familiar images from across the county. Keith is the coordinator of the Northern Voices Community Projects creative writing and community publishing enterprise. His poetry has been extensively published in magazines such as *New Statesman* and *Poetry Review* as well as in the collections *Splinters* (2011) and *The Month of the Asparagus* (2011) and broadcast on radio & TV.

Jettison your car whenever you can. Places are for people and nature. Cars detach us from places and unwittingly cause their destruction.

Courtesy of Common Ground





Song for Northumberland

Drifting in moonlight,
the dunes sing their songs.
Wings of old battles
fly all night long.
Cry of the seagulls,
curse of the ghosts;
aches of dead warriors
scar this old coast.

Hover the kestrel,
sing out the lark,
we will be free in our time.
This air is our breath,
this sea is our thirst
and our dreams are sailing home.

Wandering through castles,
their walls are our lungs.
Searching for freedom
in country homes.
Forbears and old cares
blown in the wind;
pull of loved harbours
draws our boats in.

Surge of the salmon
and urge of the sea
leaps in our local blood.
Peal of the bluebells
and ring of bold tunes
reel in all those grey years.

Slopes of the Cheviots,
caress of the waves.
Shipwrecks and driftwood
float in our heads.
Pele stones and carved bones
hide in these hills,
roots of new stories
in ancient tales.

Dew on our lips
and beer on the breath,
drinking the countryside in.
Bread of the landscape
and wine of this earth,
flows on these river beds.

Drifting in moonlight,
the dunes sing their songs.
Wings of old battles
fly all night long.
Cry of the seagulls,
curse of the ghosts;
aches of dead warriors
scar this old coast.

Hover the kestrel,
sing out the lark,
we will be free in our time.
This air is our breath,
this sea is our thirst
and our dreams are sailing home.

Keith Armstrong

Taking it to Heart

What makes North Northumberland special? 'Land of Far Horizons'; 'Cradle of Christianity'; 'County of Castles, Grand Gardens and Stately Homes'. The tourist slogans are incontestable. But let us not allow the 'official' narrative to obscure the personal, particular answers to that question. These are different for everyone - and, I would argue, matter more.

Here are some of my own: I deeply love the coastal village of Beadnell, where I have lived for nearly 30 years. I love its harbour, because it is a living, working place, a fishing harbour, not a marina. I love its sandy bay, where my father (a visitor) first learnt to sail before World War II, where he taught me, and where children learn to this day. I especially love the haunted place a mile along the bay, where the fresh water of the Long Nanny Burn meets the sea.



Beadnell Harbour

I love the remoteness of the Long Nanny, far from roads and electronic traffic. I love its broken World War II remains, blockhouses and cars sinking into mud, rust, green weed; the human dissolving into nature. I love the skylarks singing on its links in April, more beautiful to me than the scrollwork of the Lindisfarne Gospels. I love the sea-trout, common marram grass and snails, and the sparrow and meadow-pipit in the hawthorn. They are as precious to me as the protected Arctic and Little



The Long Nanny Burn



World War Two Relics

Terns at the burn's mouth. I love it that the sand martins, brent geese and terns connect the Long Nanny to Africa, the Arctic and Antarctic, their annual return a miraculous, regular tide - Earth's deep breath. I love that the Long Nanny should be called 'burn', an Anglo Saxon word, rather than the later Norman word 'river'. I love it that 'Nanny' is an older name still, derived from a Celtic language spoken here before the Romans arrived. I love it that the sweep of history should be as long as the terns' migration, as wide as the bay and as deep as the sky, and embedded in the language as much as in any castle.

It is not always the spectacular, the grand or the rare that we love. As much as Bamburgh Castle looming on its volcanic crag, symbolizing the mighty authority of the Anglo Saxon kingdom, I love the tar-blistered remains of the black huts where Beadnell fishermen mended 'creeves' (lobster pots), argued, joked and retold their stories in a language and culture as old as that castle. I love the path of crushed fragments of mussel and limpet shells which leads down from their huts to Beadnell Haven. It is testimony to the generations of women who worked endless hours 'skeynin' (shelling) bait for the long lines. Each line carried 1,400 'heuks', and each woman baited her man's line daily. Who were they? Their names are lost to history, but the path is as much a monument to their endurance as Grace Darling's memorial in Bamburgh is to hers; and if I love the huts and the path more than Bamburgh Castle and Grace Darling's monument, it is because they are ephemeral, vulnerable, overlooked.



A fisherman's 'black hut'

The things that we value most are often those which have little economic value, and are hard to pin down. That makes them easy to lose. As much as the ragged ruins of Dunstanburgh, visible across the water from Beadnell harbour, I love the less prominent remains of St Ebba's chapel on Beadnell Point, levelled during World War II and stitched back together by scurvy grass, yellow ragwort, cinnabar moth and thrift. They are now a protected monument. But who will protect the last clinker-built wooden coble tugging at its moorings in the harbour? That boat, with its lovely sinuous curves and its named parts - 'scowbel', 'gudgeon', 'inwaver', 'thoft' - is the last successor to a fleet which has fished from beaches here since medieval times. Like the name Long Nanny Burn, it embodies succeeding archaeological strata: Viking, Anglo Saxon, even Celtic. It tells as much in its way about Northumbrian history as St Bede. No new working coble has been built in Northumberland for 25 years. One day, probably quite soon, it will be gone.



Sea Pinks at St Ebba's Chapel

Great conservation initiatives like the National Park and National Trust were established to protect precious landscapes, and they continue to do vital work. But the precious is often least obvious, precisely because it is ordinary, subtle. The things that we value in a place - things that make one place different from another - reside in complex, delicate relationship: each of us to history, to nature, to one another. They are small, familiar, uncelebrated things: a field name, a street corner, a duck pond, a dry-stone wall. One remarkable example which I've written about elsewhere is the relation each fisherman of this coast had with the invisible underwater landscape he fished: he carried in his head a map, not just of its geography and wildlife, but of its human stories. Think about this: even in our



The Last Coble?

post-industrial world, we too - every one of us, in town or in country - build such imaginative maps of the places we love. These story-maps are simultaneously communal and personal, and in them the human and natural are deeply interwoven.

'Secret Kingdom' - that's another marketing slogan. Authenticity cannot be marketed; and 'secret' suggests something exclusive, when love of place, however personal, belongs to us all. But in another sense, 'secret' is right for north Northumberland: it implies intimacy, a relationship rooted in granular detail, not one mediated by interpretation boards or 'heritage' tourism. True ecology includes this human intimacy, as much part of the breathing fabric of a place as the birds that come and go, the mycelium

beneath the fungus ring or the limpet that holds fast to the rock. Our human interactions with wildness and place are in the truest sense our 'culture'. So let us celebrate the unsung places: engage our senses, 'listen' to them, take them to heart.

Katrina Porteous

Katrina was Northumberland correspondent for Common Ground's encyclopaedia of local distinctiveness, 'England in Particular' (ed. Sue Clifford and Angela King, Hodder and Stoughton, 2006). Her poems are published in 'Two Countries' (Bloodaxe, 2014).

All the photographs in this article are from Katrina's collection.

Brian's Walk

The Schil from Hethpool

This walk starts from the car park at Hethpool (NT894280) that marks the furthest point you can drive up the College valley without a permit. To get there, take the signposted turning off the B6351 at Westnewton and follow the single track road for nearly two miles.

As you near the car park you will pass two woods with naval connections. The oldest of these are the Collingwood Oaks whose twisted and contorted shapes can be seen on the slopes of Hethpool Bell. Collingwood was the Admiral who took command following the death of Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar. He recognised the importance of oak wood to the future of the British navy and used to carry acorns in his pockets to plant when the opportunity arose. After his death his wife Sarah, who inherited the Hethpool estate, planted the Collingwood Oaks. The poor growing conditions have led to the stunted trees you see today.

In 2005 in remembrance of the bicentenary of the naval battle a new oak wood was planted on the opposite side of the road.



Passing some Arts and Crafts style cottages, dating from the mid 1920s, (above) you arrive at your starting point. Leaving your car, continue down the road. On your right in the meadow are the remains of a stone circle. Although it has mainly

been ploughed away, the remains of 23 stones have been identified. Why our Neolithic ancestors built this monument is something you can ruminate over as you continue on your way but one thing is for certain, they knew a great spot to build it. As you marvel at the stonework of the ancients take a moment to look your left and imagine the effort taken in more recent times to build the stone wall that climbs straight up the flank of Wester Tor (below).



After a mile of walking on the road there is a fingerpost that points to Trowupburn and the Border Ridge. Take this path through the forest between Sinkside Hill and Great Hetha to the farm at Trowupburn. Cross the stream below the farm and turning away from the buildings take the path that climbs the hillside in front of you. The path passes some unusual sheep pens - they are rectangular rather than the more familiar circular stell. Continue following the path, enjoying the views down into the Trowup Burn and Wide Open, until you reach Wideopen Head. Keeping to your left at this point carry on to White Law where you join the Pennine Way and the English-Scottish border. The Pennine Way will now be your companion until the summit of The Schil.

Turning left follow the path over the contours of the land taking in the vast views into Scotland. The path you are on is known as the high level Pennine Way and below Corbie Crags it joins with the low level path. I will leave it to the reader to decide which one they would take to Kirk Yetholm if they were completing the 267 mile journey.



Ahead is the summit (above) of The Schil (NT869223). Standing at 601 meters, just nine metres short of being a mountain, it takes a little effort to climb to the summit especially as the start can be very wet and boggy. However, as you ascend towards the rocky outcrops, the ground dries out and the way becomes a little easier underfoot as it becomes steeper. Thankfully it is not long before you reach the top of the hill. To reach the summit you leave the path, cross the fence into Scotland



using the stile, and approach the rocky summit. From here there are great views further into Scotland and also Cheviot and the Hen Hole.

From the summit there are a number of ways down the hill. You can carry on the Pennine Way and take the path at Red Cribbs down to the valley bottom. In good weather it is possible to pick a path from the summit down to the farm at Fleehope making sure to stay away from the rocky crags or you can retrace your steps and take the path to Fleehope and Mounthooly.

As you make your way back you will pass Cuddystone Hall and the memorial to airmen who lost their lives on the Cheviots hills (left). The hall was built in 1961 replacing an earlier hall. It was named the Sutherland Memorial Hall but it is now known by the colloquial name after a large stone used as a mounting block near by (cuddy is a local name for a horse). The memorial was commissioned by RAF Boulmer and dedicated in 1995.

Normally, roads do not make for pleasant walking routes, but the College Valley road, which will now take you back to your car, is perhaps the one exception. Enjoy the changing view as you walk down the valley.

Brian Doyle



Belford Races

Horse racing, the sport of kings, had taken place in and around Newcastle from the seventeenth century, and began in Morpeth in 1820. Further north one had to cross the border to enjoy racing either at Lamberton or Kelso. Then at the end of the eighteenth century a group of landowners decided to hold a race meeting in the vicinity of Belford. This article describes the outcomes of this decision.

An entry for Belford in Pigot's 1822 Northumberland Directory records:

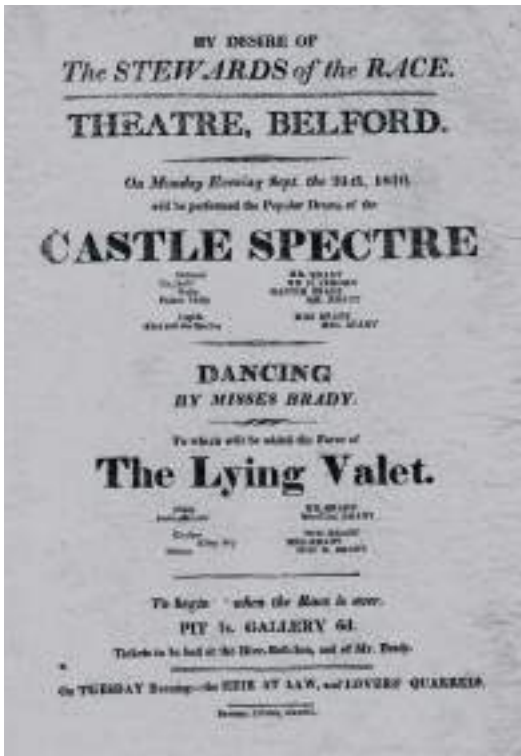
Races are for the future to be held here, and a judicious spot of ground has been selected, and nearly completed under the superintendence of several gentlemen of distinction.

Greenwood's 1828 map corroborates this, showing a 'One Mile Course' to the south west of Belford, on Belford Moor. Like many grand plans, there was some slippage in the completion as it was not until April 1831 that the Berwick Advertiser recorded the first races on the new course.

Belford Races, however, had been in existence from about the beginning of the century. An 1803 Handbill describes the races which took place on Belford Feast Day, with prizes of a silver cup, a saddle, a cart trapping and a pony bridle, and which concluded with a Ball. In her Diary, Eleanor Weatherly talks of Feast Day Races in 1804 and 1805, with no suggestion that these were something unusual. It is not clear where these races took place. The Handbill describes a Mail Coach trying to overtake the merry throng returning home from the races who filled the Turnpike Road (A1) for half a mile from Belford, and so blocking its path. From the timing, the coach and so the merrymakers were coming from the south. It is possible they were returning from Beadnell Sands where 1789, the local gentry organised Easter races for their own horses. It seems possible that the Belford races in the 1800s were a continuation of this tradition. The owners too were local men, and there were few entries in each class.

The races continued throughout the 1800s and the 1810s. A poster from 1810 advertises two nights of plays performed by Mr. Brady's Company to begin when the race is over. Theatre and assemblies are also advertised on the 1815 poster for what are described as 'Festival Races'. Clearly it was now a significant social occasion.

With the new Racecourse, reports suggest that the races became a more upper class event:



A poster from 1810, advertising the post-race entertainment

the attendance of gentry more numerous than we ever remember to have seen it. In consequence of most of the farmers being at present engaged with the harvest, not many of that class were present, and this also caused the absence of a great many of the working classes.

(There followed a list of all the notables and gentry of the neighbourhood most of whom also attended the evening Ball. Berwick Advertiser September 1838)

Arrangements hiccupped in 1841, when the Stewards decided to move the Autumn races from its previous Feast Day timing to later in October. It was not a success. The Belford people objected and a day of popular sports and races was unofficially organised in their place - these included blindfold

wheelbarrow races and a Donkey Derby. In October, the official races received few entries and were poorly attended. The stand-off between fun and official races continued until 1847, when the Feast Day Races were reinstated. The Fun races were now held on the next day.

With the opening of the railway in 1850, the races received an additional boost. Spectators now came from Berwick, Alnwick and Newcastle, and the races themselves were followed by an Ordinary for the Stewards, the Committee and some of the competitors at the Blue Bell. In the evening, the long established Ball, was held in the Assembly Rooms.

A description of the joys of race day was given in the Berwick Advertiser for 1863:

The course lies literally amongst the heather, and the somewhat novel sight of grouse on the wing at a race meeting is one of the common features at

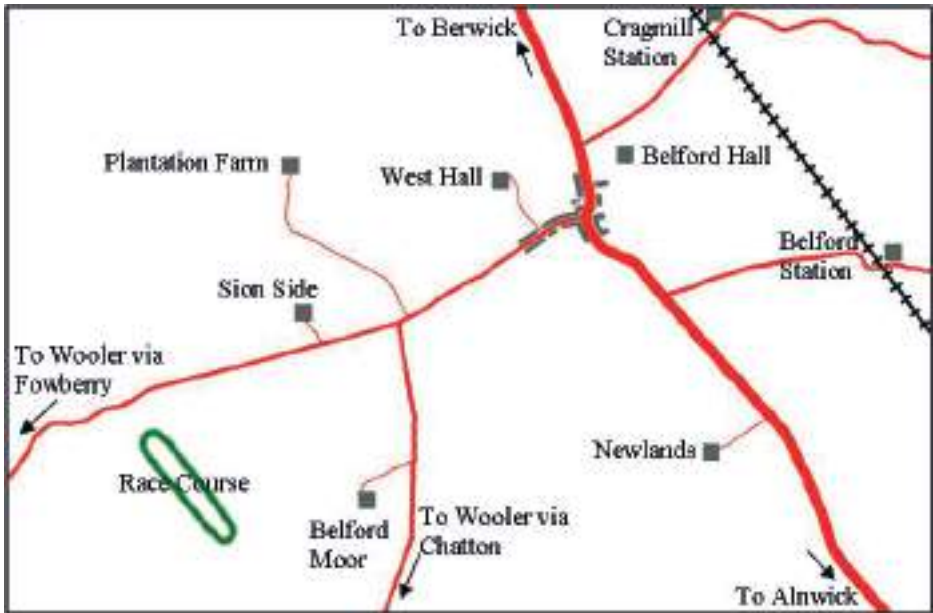
Belford. The company present numbered some hundreds of country people. The fair sex were especially conspicuous not merely in numbers but also in extent, for nowhere is crinoline more general, nowhere is its amplitude more vast. The gentry of the district were very adequately represented, and a few gentlemen from Newcastle rusticating in the neighbourhood enjoyed the pleasures of the races. Over and above the running of the horses there were the stalls for the juveniles, booths for those of older growth, exhibitions for all, mountebanks galore, and music for the million.



A poster from 1841 (reused from 1835) advertising the 'alternative' races

The early 1850s seem to have been the high point of the races. By the second half of the decade reports mention decline in attendance and, in 1858, the need for extra fundraising to keep the races going. In 1864, they had to be postponed as there were insufficient entries. The last newspaper reference I can find is to a race date being set in 1867.

Today, one can just discern the shape of the racecourse amidst the rough grazing at the brow of the hill leading to Fowberry. Horse racing and its accompanying events had been a significant feature of Belford life for about 70 years. The site of



The location of the old Belford race course

the course, although providing magnificent views of Holy Island and the Farnes, was very exposed, particularly in bad weather, and in the days before motor transport, a very steep climb. It is perhaps not surprising that when the opportunities to travel more widely by railway were fully understood, people chose to visit more accessible race courses.

Jane Bowen

Jane Bowen is a local historian who has published a history of Belford Workhouse, *"A Poor Little House"*, and edited three books on the history of Belford for the Belford and District Local History Society. After a number of years as Secretary of the Local History Society, currently she is on the management committee for the village Museum, Belford and District Hidden History. The Museum displays further information about the racecourse.

Otterburn Ranges

The Otterburn Ranges, or to give the area its proper name, the Otterburn Training Area (OTA), covers nearly 100 square miles of the southern Cheviots in Northumberland. It has been in operation as a military range for over 100 years and is the second largest range in the UK, after Salisbury Plain. The OTA trains over 30,000 service men and women each year and can house 1300 at any one time.

There are normally three infantry exercises held each year, and each Spring the OTA plays host to Steel Sabre, a massive artillery exercise. As well as our own armed services, these exercises also involve our NATO partners whose military convoys can often be seen on our roads.



*A battery of AS90 guns at Otterburn during Steel Sabre
[Coutesy of Sgt Si Longworth RLC (Phot)/MOD]*

It is during the spring artillery exercises, however, when most of us perhaps are reminded of the range's presence, when the firing can be clearly heard for many miles. Some of the guns are big - the largest of the British artillery pieces is the AS90 self propelled gun, which can fire a 155mm shell over 15 miles - so noise is inevitable. The range staff, appreciative of the need to minimise any disruption, measure the sound levels at a number of points outside the OTA and if necessary

they ensure the gunners move their artillery to positions further west, away from the main areas of population.

As well as artillery training, the OTA is also used for infantry training, with a number of ranges being in use where live firing of weapons can be carried out. There is also an area of the OTA, on the north side of the Coquet, where training with non-live ammunition is done. It is not unusual too see a group of camouflaged infantry when walking in the hills in this area.

During the First World War, part of the ranges were used to train soldiers in trench warfare, and a section of practice trenches are still in existence near Silloans. Coming forward to the very recent past, in another part of the OTA can be found a Forward Operating Base of the type that was constructed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Built with the same purpose in mind as the trenches - to train our soldiers in the specific skills needed prior to deployment to a war zone - it is a reminder of the reality of why Otterburn is here.



The Forward Operating Base, with views across the Northumbrian hills

As an establishment, the ranges have a permanent military staff of only five, who together control the safety and operation of the whole OTA. They are supported

by a civilian workforce of over 50 people - the ranges thus provide a significant source of employment for the local area.

But the OTA is not just about training our military, as vital as that might be. The area is also home to 31 tenanted farms who use all the ranges for grazing. Careful coordination is critical between the range staff and the farmers to ensure that the sheep and cattle are moved away from areas where live firing is taking place. Such stock movements might be required frequently which requires a high level of trust between the Army and the farmers.

The area of the ranges is part of the Northumberland National Park and is also home to a large number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which are regularly monitored by the range's dedicated team. Clearly, the controls on the OTA have created a protected environment where nature can flourish.



High Shaw Bastle within the OTA.

There are also many historical and archeological sites, dating from prehistory to the times of the reivers. In all there are 76 scheduled ancient monuments within the OTA, all clearly marked by sign posts - often a six-pointed star - to prevent

inadvertent damage. Some of the older concrete military structures are also now starting to generate historical attention!

Clearly, members of the public cannot access the range areas when there is live firing, indicated by the red flags around the perimeter and at the main entrance points. But the MoD is very supportive of public access where this is safe - so much of the area can be enjoyed by all - though not all of the time.

The areas which are designated as Open Access, which are mainly to the north of the Coquet, and smaller areas at the edges of the OTA can be walked at all times. There may be soldiers around but they will not be using live ammunition - only blanks and pyrotechnics.

The parts of the OTA which are used for live firing are designated as Controlled Access can only be permitted when the red flags **are not** flying, which indicate that there is no live firing. It is also important to stay on the way-marked roads and paths - although strenuous efforts are made to deal with unexploded munitions, the area has been used for over 100 years and so cannot be opened to non-trained people.

Despite this restriction, there are many miles of enjoyable (and quiet) routes for walkers and cyclists. Tourist Information outlets have brochures detailing the various access levels for different areas and, of course, these are also available on the internet, as are the dates for non-firing days. The range is in use for about 270 days each year, but from mid-April to mid-May there is a month long shutdown for lambing - and for vital maintenance works. Weekends in August are also usually kept free.

The OTA is a vast area, carrying out an important task in giving our service men and women the training they need in order to be able carry their challenging roles. The range staff also successfully juggle this military requirement with the needs of the tenant farmers, the National Park Authority and other interested parties. This has created a special place that is well worth visiting when access is allowed.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Range Commander, Major Frank O'Kane, who took time out of his busy schedule to show us around the ranges and provided much of the information contained in this article.

A Shrine to Cocidius

When the Romans entered a new territory any native god was partnered with its Roman equivalent and adopted, just to be sure. Cocidius was a northern British god whose name can be associated with red, hunting or war. There are no less than nine carved images and 25 inscribed dedications to him on the Hadrian's Wall corridor. The best example is at Yardhope where this figure in bas relief brandishes a spear and shield on a vertical rock-face at the entrance to a small shrine.

This carving of Cocidius was not rediscovered until 1980. It first came to our attention at a talk given by the Education Officer from the Otterburn Ranges, who pointed out that the ranges offered many miles of quiet roads where motorists and cyclists could enjoy the wide views and vistas whenever the red flags are not flying indicating that military training is not being carried out with live ammunition! He showed a picture of Cocidius but was not very forthcoming about the location.

After some research we found further information about Cocidius and, crucially, a grid reference for his location. Now with curiosity aroused we determined to find him. With the map reference and a GPS device this should be easy! Having checked the Otterburn website to make sure the roads were open, we drove up to the Yardhope valley and set off up towards a rocky escarpment. We clambered through the heather and scrub until we came to the big rocks where the slope steepens.



The GPS did not lead us to Cocidius and we searched up, down and around the big rocks buried in bracken.

After some time searching, there was Cocidius - carved on a big rock welcoming us to an enclosed shrine with a votary shelf and a ledge that may have supported a roof. Overlooking a Roman road up the Holystone valley we can only speculate as to who carved this deity; was it a bored soldier on duty overlooking the road or was it perhaps carved earlier by locals and only later adopted by the Romans.

You can find Cocidius yourself. This remarkable carving on rock is well worth the effort of climbing up the slope and with an accurate grid reference and GPS you should not have the frustrations of our search. Although the rock carving is outside the Otterburn Ranges danger area, it is only accessible when there is no firing so it is advisable to check before setting off .

From Holystone take the road marked RANGES and continue passing St Mungo's Well on your left. Follow the road up through Holystone Common and crossing cattle grids until you reach the open moor and a yellow barrier marking the beginning of the ranges. Just before the barrier turn sharp left and follow the road down past North Yardhope and through the twists and turns at the bottom of the valley where you cross the Yardhope Burn. Climb up from the burn until you again reach the open moor.

Soon on the left is a huge old railway container (1) used as a shed. A short distance on, you cross the burn that flows out of Rowantree Cleugh (gorge or chasm) and there is a convenient lay-by (2) on the left where you can park. This is a good starting point for your expedition. Leave the road at (3) and walk along to (4) keeping to the western bank of the burn. At (5) the going gets steeper and you can avoid some of the heather nearer the burn. From (6) there is a track of sorts and you clear the heather at (7). At (8) you come to the big rocks, cross the burn, turn left and make a rising traverse with the big rocks on your right. At (9) there is a steep grassy slope up to (10) where you pass through a natural double gateway which leads up to Cocidius (11) on your right. Eureka!



The route to Cocidius



The 'double gateway' at (10)



The shrine at (11)

The map reference for Cocidius is NT 92522 00528 to 1m precision.

Russel Wills

Russel moved to Northumberland three years ago, after living for many years in Scotland. He enjoys exploring the local countryside and he is an active contributor to the Geograph project. This web-based initiative challenges individuals to upload a photograph from every 1km x 1km square on the Ordnance Survey map.

You can find out more from www.geograph.org.uk, and see one of Russel's Cocidius images at www.geograph.org.uk/photo/3934879

The Otterburn Ranges

Access information about the Otterburn Ranges can be obtained from Tourist Information Offices, National Park information points and from the Internet - use your search engine to find "Otterburn Firing Times" and "Otterburn Ranges Access Map".

Postscript

When I published the booklet "Edge of Empire", I thought I had included all of Northumberland's Roman remains that were both accessible and worth visiting. I was wrong. I missed at least one site - the shrine to Cocidius which is ably described by Russel Wills above.

If you do decide to visit Cocidius, it is well worth spending a little time in and around the nearby village of Holywell. Lady's Well, from which the village derives its name, was probably another local shrine that was adopted by the Romans, with a Roman road running immediately by this site.

The Roman road runs from the fort at Rochester (Bremenium) to meet the Devil's Causeway near to the Bridge of Aln on the A697. There is one short section between



Holywell and Yardhope where the foundations of this old road have been exposed at NT935017. The directions are as follows:

Take the forest track which runs west from the car park in Holystone. At a point on this track, the old Roman road joins from the right; signs of the old kerb stones can be seen in the heather, and the track of the road can be discerned through changes in vegetation. The track now follows the route of the Roman road. About 800 meters after passing through a gate, the track bends slightly to the right. At this point the Roman road continues straight on. Following the older route through the heather will bring you to the exposed section.

The land is sacred in many cultures. Why have we put a protective noose around the spectacular and the special and left the rest? All our surroundings are important to someone.

Courtesy of Common Ground