

Hadrian's Cycleway with Evelyn and Katharine May 2017



Our trip started with a night in Carlisle City Hostel which is to be recommended.

Central for local sights and hostelrys. Clean and friendly. Safe bike storage. We had opted for a family room with its own facilities, which meant climbing 49 steps to the top of the building.

We found all along the route that visitor attractions shut at 5pm and open at 10am.

Luckily we were able to visit the Carlisle museum as we travelled through two days later.

The only other misadventure was we and our bikes nearly got shut in on the Virgin train! Luckily an off duty member of staff heard us and let us out with his key. The engine drivers's response was, "Where did those two come from?" Next stop would have been Preston....

Next morning we took the train to Ravenglass down the Cumbrian coast.

The official Sustrans NCN72 [map available from Sustrans online shop] starts there, with a visit to the nearby Roman bathhouse of Glannaverita. This is impressive with its 3m high intact walls, and conveniently there is no visitor centre so open for viewing. The Sustrans route signage was badly faded, but after some false starts we started out along a causeway path.

Maybe 50% of NCN72 is off-road. There is nothing to be seen of the Roman earth and wood fortified wall and forts up this coast.

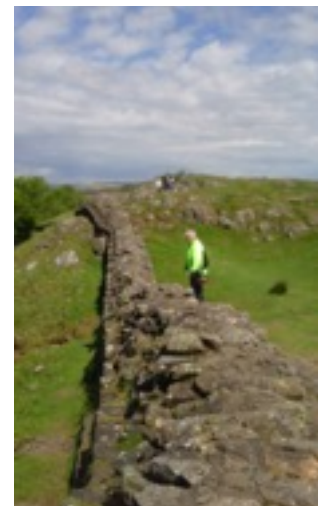
With the wind behind us we cycled the 50 miles to Silloth with relative ease, taking short cuts from the signed route for the last ten miles.

Cheap accommodation had been hard to find, but we had a comfortable B&B (full of cyclists), a meal at the Golf Club and a walk through the dunes to the beach.



Day 2 of cycling took us 50 miles to Brampton. We enjoyed rolling around the Solway coast with its flowers and birdsong, had early references to Roman occupation at Bowness on Solway and Banks and stopped at Carlisle to visit the museum and have lunch. Again we were impressed by all the well-signed off-road tracks taking us effortlessly through Carlisle. At Brampton we stayed at the Oakwood Park Hotel. Although slightly out of the town, dinner with an excellent choice of dishes was served. In the evening in the lounge we enjoyed the company of an Australian couple and five Canadian ladies, all walking the Wall. We felt as if we might be part of an Agatha Christie house party whodunit! Evelyn felt at home with the chickens, geese and sheep as we explored the grounds.

Day 3 was a day of fairly big hills and Roman sight-seeing, so we limited ourselves to 40 miles and nightfall at Corbridge. Soon after Brampton we saw first Lanercost Priory then started seeing bits of Wall and wayside forts. We were disappointed at Birdoswald Fort which declared itself shut for improvements. We slipped in to take a look at the site, but were chased by an officious young lady. I'm afraid I was rather rude to her, as there was no sign of the "construction site". We felt sorry for all the happy walkers converging on the site alongside a long, continuous stretch of wall, not to mention the minibus of children about to be disappointed. A steep climb out of Greenhead was rewarded by a long stop at the Roman Army museum. As recommended, we

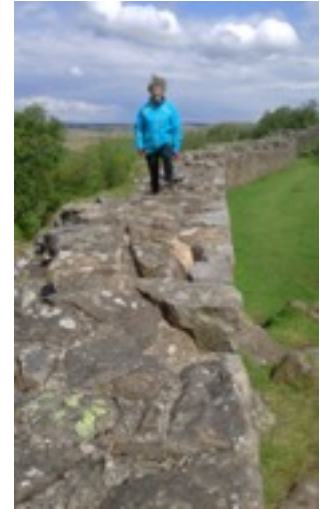


bought a double ticket which would let us in to Vindolanda later that day. We wanted to get another look at the Wall, as after this point NCN72 diverges from the walking route, so we cycled on another half mile

to Walltown Crags, where a seven minute walk took us to a spectacular viewing point. Here the Wall follows the undulating topography, snaking into the distance. Not sure if we were allowed to, but we did photograph each other atop the Wall!

We had thought of staying on the B6318 which follows the course of the old military road.

However, when we saw the traffic we thought better of it, and were glad because NCN72 takes an attractive route through Haltwhistle. Another tough climb brought us to Vindolanda, a large fort and town which predated the Wall. We were there till closing time. There was so much to see in the museum and the site itself which is still being excavated by volunteers. We were particularly stunned by the hundreds of pairs of shoes which are still being found. The Roman residents used wooden tablets to write on, and with careful washing and infra-red photography, the writing has been deciphered as shopping lists, letters, invitations and all the business of daily running of the farm. Amazing! At Corbridge we missed seeing the Roman town because of the unhelpful opening hours. However our landlady conducted us "just 80 steps" to the pub for a meal. She told us during the big floods she had been rescued by boat from an upstairs window! Corbridge is under going "no more floods" improvements.



Our final day took us to Newcastle, much of the route following the River Tyne.

We stopped at Segedunam, the end to the official walking route at Wallsend. This fort and the nearby baths have been excavated since the demolition of the factories and worker' houses of industrial Newcastle. There was a viewing point over the site and an interesting video timeline which really brought alive "history" in the making. Unfortunately time ran out for us so we didn't get to the official end of the Hadrian's Cycleway at the reconstructed Arbeia fort at South Shields. We had hoped to use the well signed tunnel to cross the Tyne, but apparently this had been closed for three years, and although there was a shuttle bus which would take bikes, regrettably we turned back to Newcastle Central Station for the trip home. Last refuelling stop of the day was at the local cycle hub, and last amusement of the day was a cycle across the Millennium Bridge and back!