

# Walk 1-L Cuns Fell, Maiden Way & Ousby Townhead

*Tracing Roman footsteps through the High Pennines via an iconic outlying peak*

**Distance:**  
10.25 miles (16.5km)

**Cumulative Height**  
2300 ft.

**Our rating:** Strenuous

**Local services:** Shop and tea rooms in Melmerby. The Fox Inn at Ousby.

**Start grid:** NY612373

**Map:** OS Explorer OL31–  
North Pennines –  
Teesdale & Weardale

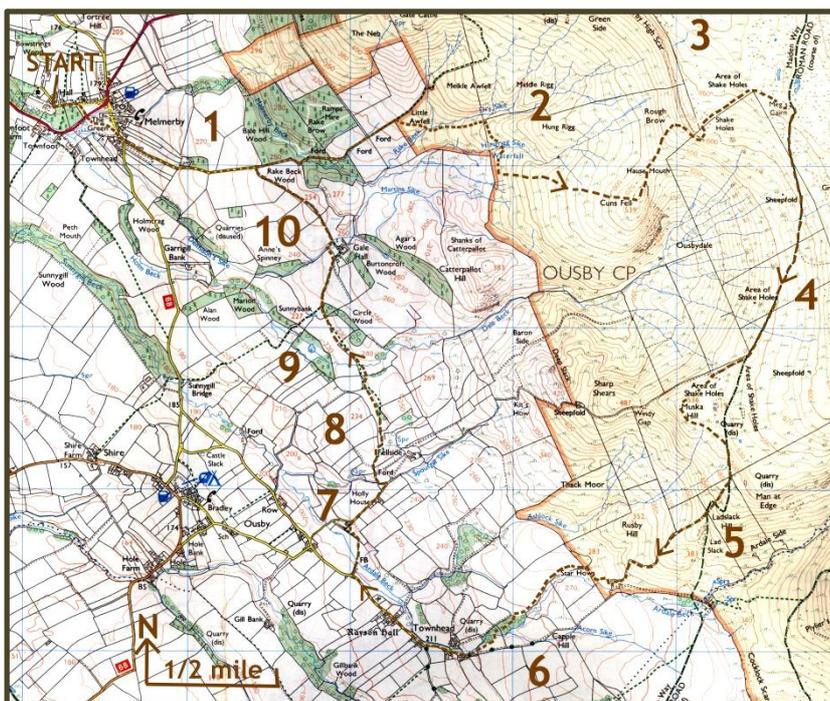
The walk starts from the gateway to Melmerby Hall and heads eastwards using local roads, tracks, hill paths and steep grassy slopes to traverse Cuns Fell and reach Megs Cairn and the Roman Road (Maiden Way) on the high backbone of the North Pennines. It then traces the course of the Maiden Way gently downhill before dropping down steeply, along an old mining wagon way, into the Eden Valley at Ousby Townhead. The route back to Melmerby utilises field paths and tracks to the east of Ousby, passing by Gale Hall.

## The Walk

1. Commence the walk from the Melmerby Hall gateway and proceed along the village street ahead. Pass by the Village Hall then turn right at the first junction and drop downhill to a junction with the A686 road on Melmerby village green. Cross the road and keep ahead to a footbridge, then once over turn left with the path before veering uphill to the right onto the upper level of the green. Continue along the left edge of a playing pitch then bear

left and cross a grassy mounded area to drop down to the local road at the further left corner of the green. Bear right along the road for a short distance, then turn off left along a 'no through road' (signed Public Footpath - Gale Hall & Melmerby Fell) that rises uphill out of the village. Continue along this road for about ½ mile to the point where the metalled carriageway turns off to the right as the access to Gale Hall farm.

2. Keep ahead from here along a rough track (signed Public Footpath - Melmerby Fell) down through woodland to cross a footbridge over Melmerby Beck. Rise steeply uphill from here and upon leaving the woodland keep along a straight section of track to



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pass by a small copse on the right side. Immediately beyond the copse, turn off right, through a gate into an area of pasture. Cross over the pasture at an angle of about 45° from the copse boundary and drop steeply down to ford Rake Beck. Once across turn left and keep near to the beck to reach a small gate in the wall ahead. Turn right after passing through the gate to contour across the hillside. Cross Hungrigrig Sike then turn left onto a steep grassy path that leads uphill from a gate to the field on the right. Keep along this path as it rises up the flank of Cuns Fell, then at a suitable point bear off right up the rough pathless grassy slope to reach the summit of the Fell (539m - 1768 ft.). From here there will be stunning, uninterrupted views of the Eden Valley on a clear day.

3. Turn to the left on the summit and drop downhill to the col 'Hause Mouth'. Continue uphill along a grassy path turning sharp right beneath the rocky band of Melmerby High Scar to then rise steeply up to a gate. Pass through, turn to the left then left again to pass through another gate immediately above the scar. Next turn right and continue uphill, with a wall to the immediate right side, as far as a sharp right corner in the wall. From this point bear right and cross a shallow rocky hollow, to reach the pronounced ancient 'Meg's Cairn' (663m - 2175 ft.).

4. Just beyond the Cairn is the high level Roman Road - 'Maiden Way'. Drop down to this route and turn right along its rocky path. This then descends over rocks to reach a gate which is set in the wall line that was followed earlier. From the gate keep along the route line of Maiden Way as it gently descends across the face of the hillside. In a distance of about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile the path passes through two gates to then reach an outside wall corner on the right. Here there is a path junction. Leave the junction along the right fork and drop down a little. Bear off left when convenient up the short grassy slope of Muska Hill (536m - 1759ft.) where there are stunning views and a monument to a much loved Retriever dog 'Muska' (2000-2013) which lived at the foot of fells in nearby Ousby.

5. Bear left at the top of the hill and drop down its gentle southern slope to meet with the path (that by passed the hill) from the left then drop down to a gate. Once through you will find some old quarry working remains including the top mound of a former quarry tramway. Turn to the right by this mound and trace the tramway route down the hillside (Ladslack Hill) for about  $\frac{2}{3}$  mile, passing through a gate en route. When nearing the foot of the slope and approaching a bridge over Ardale Beck (when you are alongside a large former lime kiln), turn off right, through a gate onto a grassy path. Locate a gate, which is elevated somewhat, at the further left corner of this enclosure and make over to this, crossing a water course en route.

6. Bear left from the gate and keeping a fence to the left drop gently downhill through a pasture to reach a gate at its further left corner after about  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile. Pass through this gate, drop down a muddy track into a sporadically wooded valley then continue to cross a footbridge over Ardale Beck. Keep ahead upon leaving the footbridge, climb right up a slanting slope and pass through a gate. Turn right, follow along the right fence line then pass through a further gate onto a track at Townhead farm. Continue ahead across the farm apron, then onto the metalled access road. Keep along this road for  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile and shortly after passing by C12th St Luke's Church (which may be visited) turn off to the right along a Public Footpath signed to Holly House.

7. Drop down a short length of sunken path from the stile then veer round left and over a footbridge across Ardale Beck. Bear left from the footbridge and cross some meadowland to a gate then continue on, rising gently uphill to another gate. Once through this gate turn left and follow along the boundary of a field, turning sharp right at one point and rising up steeply, alongside a dwelling curtilage, to reach a gate at a local access road. Once through the gate continue along the road in the same direction as before and rise gently uphill. After passing by Holly House drop down towards a bridge, but turn sharp left off the road just before reaching the bridge.

8. Go through a gate onto a signed Public Footpath to Gale Hill and Sunny Gill Bridge and drop gently down a grassy path to reach Spoutgill Sike. Pass through a gate, ford the Sike then continue steeply uphill on the grassy grooved track ahead. At the top of the rise climb over a stile on the left then drop gently downhill for a short distance on an unsurfaced track, with a wall to the right side. Where the wall ends turn off the track to the right and continue alongside a fence as far as a stile set in the fence. Climb over the stile then continue, in the same direction as before to reach a gate in a shallow valley bottom. Continue on from the gate keeping to the right side of the valley, eventually reaching a further 'signed' gate ahead.

9. Go through this gate and continue, with a wall to your left side and shortly pass over a stile into another shallow valley area. Keep ahead from the stile and cross the valley towards a low bank, crossing a footbridge over Dale Beck en route. From the top of the bank make over to the left side of the field and continue to reach a stile (adjoining gate) at the further left corner. Keep ahead across the next field to reach another stile (adjoining gate) close to the corner of woodland on the further side of the field. Continue alongside the woodland along a section of grassy/muddy track to reach a track junction.

10. Veer right at the junction and continue uphill to come alongside the concrete barn structure to Gale Hall farm. From the point where the track turns to the right, around the barn, keep ahead and drop down to the right corner of a grassy pasture. Pass through a gate and immediately turn right and keep alongside a wall to reach the main access route to Gale Hall, beside a bridge. Turn left onto the track, cross the bridge, then continue along the track for a distance of about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to eventually pass over a cattle grid (adjoining gate) and drop down to the head of the local access road to Melmerby. Turn left and continue gently downhill back into Melmerby. Retrace your steps across the green to return to Melmerby Hall and the end of the walk.