

# Access Opportunities on the Defence Estate

## Otterburn Northumberland



*Extensive circular route over the lonely, windswept ridges and hills along the watershed forming the England-Scotland border.*

**Distance:** Approximately 11-12 miles (17.6-19.2km) (Complete circuit via Windy Gyle incorporating route variations at start and finish)

**Duration:** 6-7 hours

**Grade:** 

### OS map sheet(s)

OS Landranger Sheet 80 (1:50,000)

OS Outdoor Leisure Sheet 16 (1:25,000)

**Starting Grid Reference:** GR 824 108

### Site description / history

A military presence, in the form of Roman legions, existed in the Otterburn area as long ago as the first and second centuries AD. In 1911, the War Office bought 7,690 hectares of land and the artillery ranges were extended during the Second World War. Otterburn Training Area (OTA) now consists of some 22,900 hectares of land, all owned by the MOD, and is the largest single firing range in the UK. It is partitioned into three separate Danger Areas: Redesdale Range, Otterburn Range, Bellshields Demolition Area and has three Outside Gun Areas. Some 30,000 soldiers use the area each year. The Cheviot Dry Training Area is to the north of these four areas.

The majority of the Training Area lies within Northumberland National Park and contains thirteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest, including the ancient hay meadows at Barrowburn beside the River Coquet. There are also many sites of archaeological importance, notably the Roman Camps at Chew Green and six marching camps along Dere Street, the Roman Road from York to Scotland.

There are approximately 93 miles (149km) of public rights of way and permissive paths crossing the area, of which 53 miles (85km) are open at all times.

### Walk description

From the car park at Buckham's Bridge **A** (GR 824 108), walk back along the road to Blindburn. There are two route options from here for the first section of the walk:

#### Option 1 (High Level Route)

The first option is a high level walk. At Blindburn turn left up the hill before the farm **B** (GR 829 108) and ascend the ridge towards Yearning Law **C** (GR 818 118). It is possible to climb up to the crenellated summit of Yearning Law, or to traverse around the southwesterly side of the summit and then to continue up to point **D** (GR 812 127) where the two route options converge at a col.

#### Option 2 (Valley Route)

The second option takes you up the valley of Blind Burn by turning left immediately after the farm at Blindburn **E** (GR 830 109). After a mile (1.6km) of gentle ascent, Yearning Hall is reached **F** (GR 824 120), comprising a ruined hut, enclosure and a few solitary pines. From here the walk continues up the valley and into the col **D** (GR 812 127). This is a less exposed route.

From **D**, the path contours round below Lamb Hill until, at the crest of the ridge, the Yearning Saddle Mountain Refuge Hut is reached **G** (GR 804 129). This offers a welcome (and the only) respite from persistent wind on the walk. Turn right here and follow the ridge north eastwards over Lamb Hill, Beefstand Hill, Mozie Law, past Plea Knowe **H** (GR 835 150) and finally, Windy Gyle **I**, keeping the border fence on the left throughout - a distance of about 4½ miles (7.2km). Views northwards into Scotland are consistently good and the view towards Cheviot itself improves at Windy Gyle **I** (GR 856 153). Windy Gyle is distinctive because of its Trig Point and Russell's Cairn.



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From Windy Gyle **I**, turn south-eastwards crossing a stile/fence. Continue in the same direction until, after about 140m, a track is reached descending eastwards. Follow this until, after a further 180m, a path marker is reached where the track forks **J** (GR 864 146). Take the right hand route. This descends sharply over pleasant grassland becoming a broad but well defined ridge, with dark, coniferous woodland in the valley bottom to the left and a steep drop into the bare valley on the right. The farm buildings at Trows **K** (GR 855 126) soon appear. A good track passes the farm and continues on to the surfaced road down the valley. Follow the road to Rowhope **L** (GR 854 123) where there are two route options:

### Option 3 (Road Route)

The first option continues down the road to join the main valley road after about 365m **M** (GR 859 115). Turn right and head back up the valley, along the road to Blindburn **B** and Buckham's Bridge **A** beyond. This route is a low level road walk.

### Option 4 (Bridleway Route)

Alternatively, the second route option is more energetic and reduces the amount of road walking. At Rowhope **L** (GR 845 123) take the bridleway crossing the Rowhope Burn to ascend the Hindside Knowe **N** (GR 850 118), and then traverse around the ridge down to Carlcroft **O** (GR 838 117). Pick up the main road up the Coquet Valley, back to Blindburn and Buckham's Bridge **A**.

### Option 5 (Bad Weather Escape Route)

Should weather conditions be bad, an escape route from the section of the route between Yearning Hill **G** and Windy Gyle **I** can be taken. Turn right (south) at Plea Knowe **H** (GR 835 150) back down to Hindside Knowe **N** (GR 850 118), following The Street, (an old drovers' road into Scotland) and then on to Carlcroft **O** (GR 838 117) and back to the car park at Buckham's Bridge **A** along the road.

## Points of interest

- The Upper Coquet Valley provides wonderful hillwalking country giving the walker a sense of the 'wilderness' experience.

- Remote farmsteads nestling in the valleys below the bare hillsides. Circular stone sheepfolds (known locally as 'sheep stells') are a common landscape feature in the area.
- OTA includes many valuable wildlife habitats including ancient woodlands, heather moorland, peat bogs and upland burns. Wildlife species found in this area include Red Squirrel, Golden Plover, Black Grouse, and Curlew.

## Restrictions / access times

The recommended walk falls within the Cheviot Dry Training Area and is outside the MOD's byelawed area. The rights of way in this area are accessible at all times. However, military personnel/vehicles engaging in military training activities may be encountered. The land is used for tactical training, using blank ammunition and pyrotechnics, so be prepared for sudden noises.

## Safety

- When red flags or lamps are flown/shown and barriers are closed to denote live firing, access is restricted to roads, tracks or paths outside the byelawed area.
- Roads, bridleways and footpaths marked in green on the map may be used at any time, even when the red flags or lamps are flown/shown or barriers are closed to denote live firing on the live firing area to the south of the Cheviot Dry Training Area.
- Although only dry training (ie blank ammunition and pyrotechnics) takes place within the Cheviot Dry Training Area do not touch or pick up any metal objects lying on the ground.
- The weather in the Cheviots is changeable and can become severe even in summer. There is virtually no shelter along the whole length of the walk. Do not set out unless you have suitable clothing and footwear.

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



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- The area is very remote and lacking in distinct features. It is advisable that someone in the walking party can competently navigate with a map and compass. If needed there are numerous escape routes - every burn flowing south will lead to the road.

## How to get there

There are no bus services in this area. Access to the area is only possible by private car or bicycle along the road from Alwinton. In winter, driving conditions may be hazardous. There is no access from the west.

## Local facilities

There are car parking and picnic facilities at Blindburn and Wedder Leap. There is a pub and toilet facilities at Alwinton. Mobile telephone network coverage is very poor in this area, but there are public telephones at Windy Haugh and Alwinton.

## Useful contact details

For more detailed information on safety and access to OTA call 01912 394329.

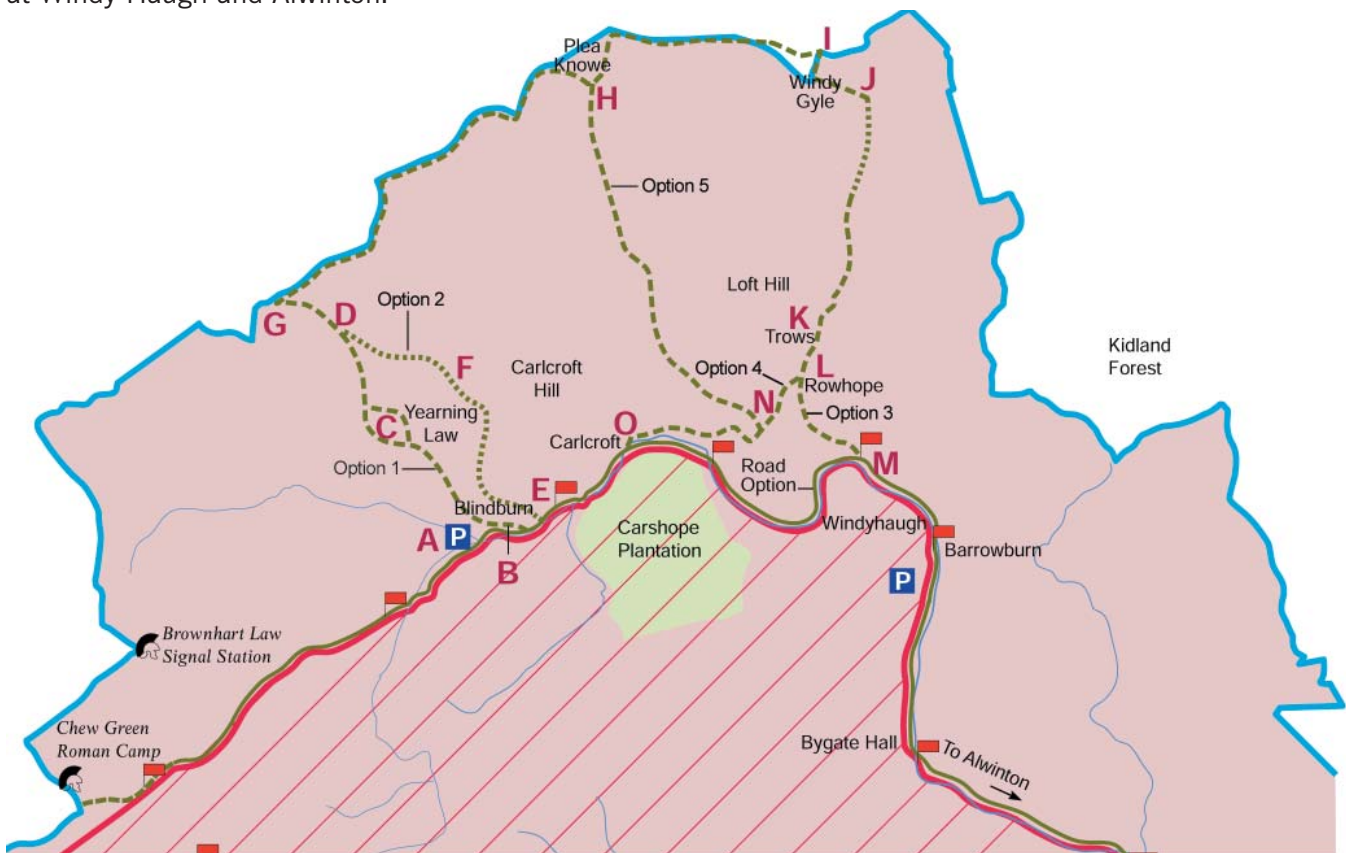
Programmes of walks, events and activities in this area can be obtained from the Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) on 01434 605555 or [www.nnpa.org.uk](http://www.nnpa.org.uk). There is an NNPA Visitor Centre at Rothbury (01669 620887) and also a NNPA information point in Harbottle Post Office, open between 9.00am and 1.00pm Monday to Friday.

## Other useful publications

**Ministry of Defence/NNPA** Otterburn Training Area: Public Access Guide (This gives information on other walks in the area)

**Ministry of Defence/NNPA** Upper Coquet Valley - Access Guide

**NNPA** Land of the Far Horizons. Free visitor paper.



ACCESS AT ALL TIMES	NO ACCESS IF RED FLAG FLOWN	MOD LANDS	
Roads	WARNING SIGNS	Training Area	Roman Sites
Bridleways	FLAGS (also lamps at night)	Woodland Training Area	Car Park
Footpaths		Live Firing Range Danger Area	
		Training Area Boundary	

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