



GRAVEL RIDES NORTHUMBERLAND

15 gravel bike adventures
in North East England



JORDAN MATTHEWS

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Front cover Lakeside Way, Kielder (route 09). © Phil Thomas

Back cover Deep in the Cheviots (route 15). © Phil Thomas

Opposite Descending to Kirknewton (route 15).

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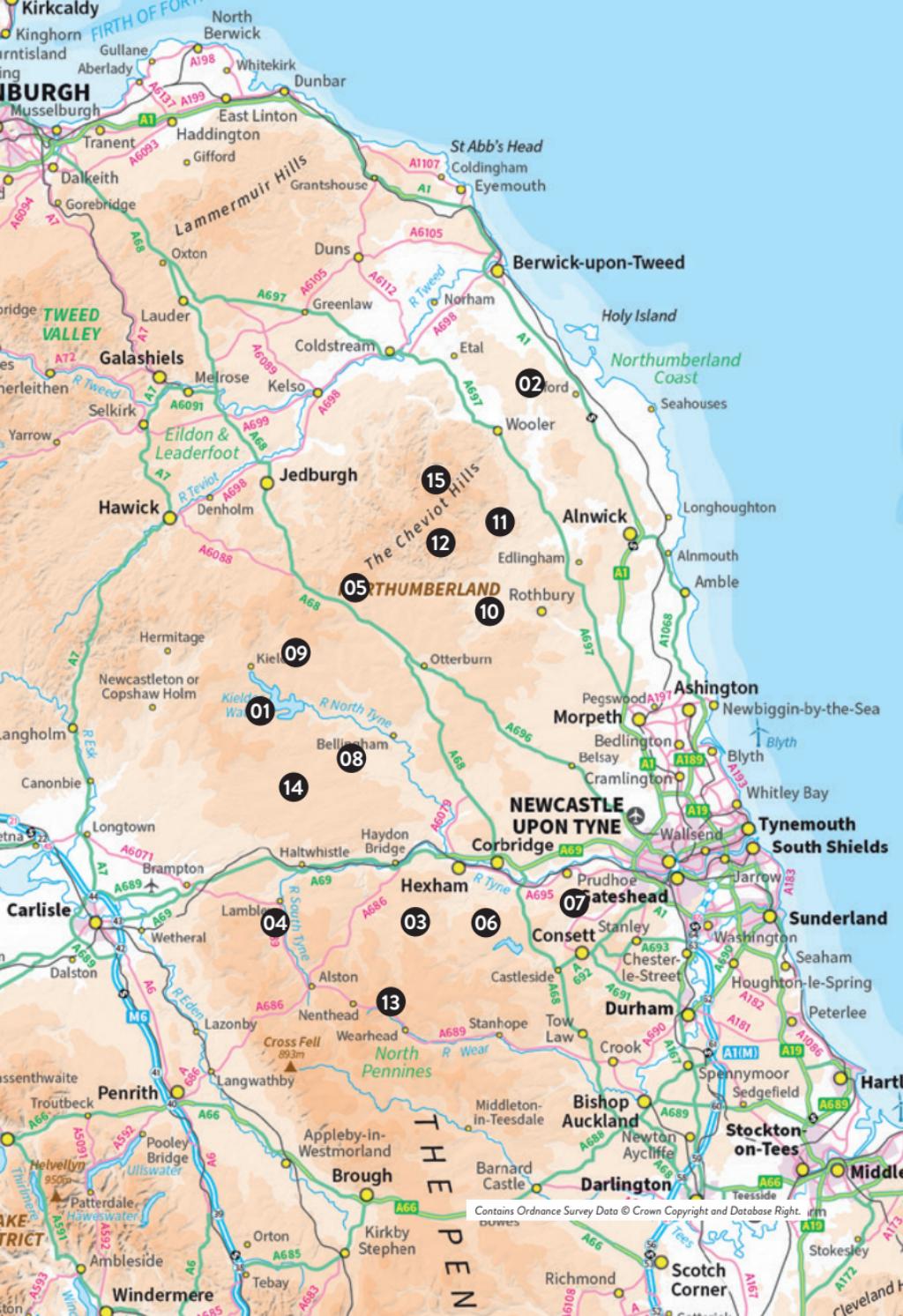
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PLEASE GIVE WAY TO HORSES AND PEDESTRIANS.





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Download the Gravel Rides Northumberland GPX files from
www.adventurebooks.com/GRN-GPX

Route grades

■ Easy ■ Straightforward
■ Challenging



Introduction

For me, gravel riding is an excuse to explore and have an adventure. Ever since I started riding bikes and more so since I started riding gravel, I have always been pondering things such as: *what happens if I take that less-used track instead of the well-worn trail?* *and what is that bridleway like and will it link up with my favourite stretch of byway?* *and how can I include this cafe on a ride while touching the minimum amount of road?* I didn't know it at the time, but the knowledge I was acquiring of gravel riding in Northumberland was growing, and the culmination of that is packaged up neatly for you in this guidebook.

Northumberland is a unique and wild area of the country, steeped in history. This book seeks out some fabulous hidden corners of the county where ultimately there are some fantastic places to ride a gravel bike. It is the least densely populated county in England, ensuring you won't be bumping into many others on your rides, yet you might encounter wildlife such as osprey, deer, red squirrel, curlew and grouse, to name a few.

This book features 15 gravel bike routes of varying difficulty and over terrain ranging from smooth gravel all the way to rough and challenging off-road tracks; some start to push into MTB territory, but with skill can be ridden on a gravel bike. Be it a technical descent or a steep uphill, don't be afraid to get off and push – I still do! No matter what stage you are at in your cycling journey, there is something suitable for all, with rides ranging from 10 to over 104 kilometres.

The routes are graded easy, straightforward and challenging and each route description explains in more detail what to expect on a particular ride with some recommendations on what type of gear you might want to take with you and what to kit your bike out with. Information is also provided for certain sections of routes that may need extra consideration, such as active forestry areas which may be busy with logging trucks, or areas which may be more difficult to ride after heavy rain.

There are routes in the book that are fully accessible by train, such as 07 *Tyne & Derwent Valleys* which starts from Wylam, and 04 *South Tyne Trail* which starts from Haltwhistle; some others are a short ride away from public transport.

It has been an absolute joy to put this book together, and hopefully the route descriptions, photos and insights will inspire you to get out into the sometimes sunny, sometimes windy, sometimes rainy, but always beautiful county that is Northumberland.

Enjoy!

Jordan Matthews

OPPOSITE ENJOYING A CHEVIOT DESCENT (ROUTE 15). © PHIL THOMAS



GRAVEL TOWARDS LADLE WELL SHOOTING HUT.

03 HEXHAMSHIRE COMMON

21.9km/13.6 miles

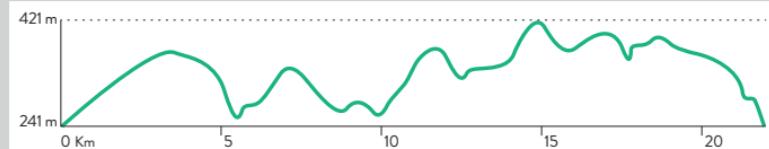
Introduction

Starting from Allendale, which means 'valley of the shining water', this short yet challenging route is perfect if you have limited time but still crave that wild experience a gravel ride can bring. But be warned, mobile phone signal can be patchy at times on this route. There are also a lot of grouse shooting huts and hides, and after 12 August, there are many shoots, so bear this in mind when setting out to do this one.

Heading uphill pretty much from the off, the route is not short on climbs, both on and off road. You will soon find yourself steadily climbing up a gravel track to the heart of Hexhamshire Common in the North Pennines. Common.

After a grippy gravel descent, the road turns smooth close to the easternmost part of the route and then heads south before soon turning west and back on the rough stuff to tackle the Common once again towards Stobb Cross. To finish there's a fun bit of singletrack before the final descent into Allendale.

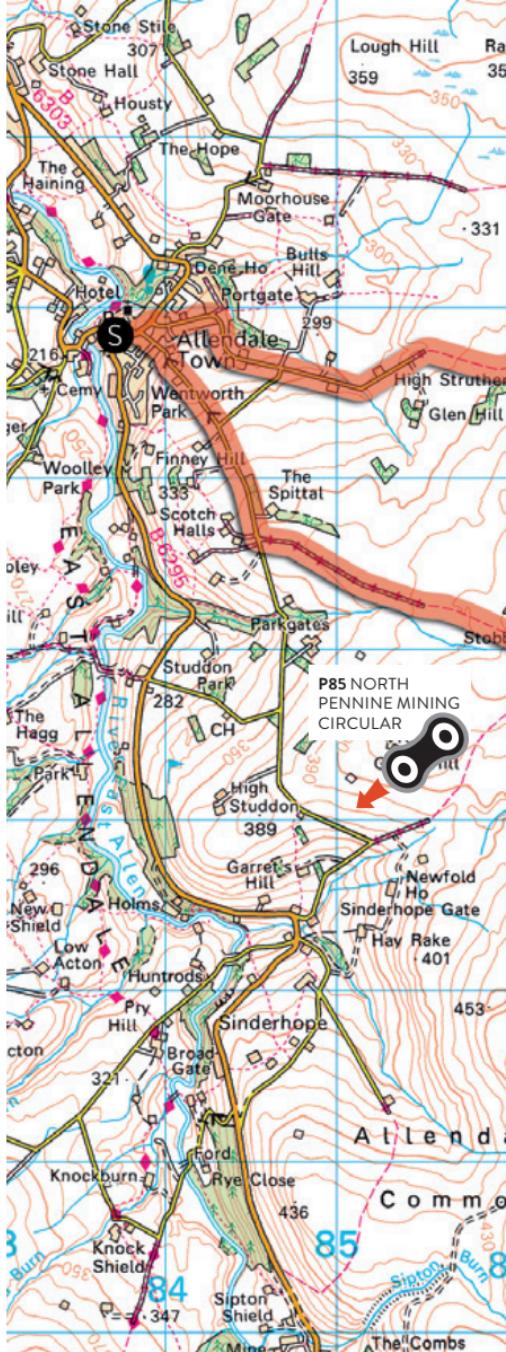
Starting and finishing in Allendale means the lack of provisions on this route is not an issue as you can either fuel up beforehand at one of the number of cafes or stock up at the Co-op, or save the cuppa for when you get back. You might even have time to visit the interesting museum of classic sci-fi. Just keep a lookout for the TARDIS and Dalek!



DISTANCE 21.9km/13.6 miles **ASCENT** 450m/1,476ft **HIGHEST POINT**
421m/1,381ft **START/FINISH** Allendale Town **START/FINISH GRID REF**
NY 837558 **SATNAV** NE47 9AZ **GPS** 54.8973, -2.2547 **GRADE**
TERRAIN Gravel tracks and back roads **PUBLIC TRANSPORT** Haydon Bridge railway station (11km) **PARKING** Free parking in the village square **MAP** OS Landranger 87, Hexham & Haltwhistle (1:50,000)



1 BROAD MERE DESCENT IN THE RAIN!
2 STOBB CROSS SINGLETRACK.





Coffee and food

The Forge Cafe, Allendale

The Tea Rooms, Allendale

Emma's Coffee & Sweets, Allendale

Co-op, Allendale

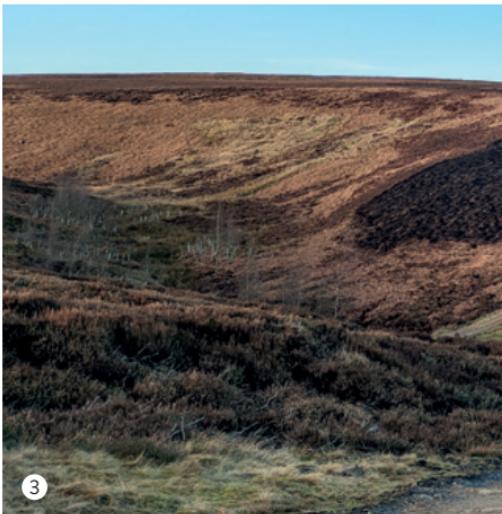
Bike shops

Free bike repair station in the middle of Allendale (outside the visitor information centre)

North Pennine Cycles, Nenthead

Hadrian Cycling Ltd, Haltwhistle
(ebike hire and repairs)

3 THE CLIMB TO STOBB CROSS.



Directions

- ① From the market square in Allendale, ride east with the Co-op and butchers to your left. At a T-junction turn **L** to join the B6303, then take your second **R** to start climbing up Shilburn Road. Continue **SA** on this road until it turns to gravel and you reach a gate. There is a bridleway signpost heading towards *Hexhamshire 3*. Continue **SA** on the gravel track to climb on to *Hexhamshire Common*. Keep an eye and an ear out for the curlews, and please keep to the track as this is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- ② At a fork in the track, keep **R** to continue climbing through open moorland. Then start to descend on a looser sandstone gravel trail until you reach an offset crossroads. Keep **L** to start with, then bear **R** through a metal gate to continue descending. The signposts are a bit confusing here. Keep heading east towards the paved road and plantation which you should be able to see in the distance. The gravel becomes smoother downhill to another gate, and then the track becomes a bit rougher and steeper. Take it easy down here as there is a gate at the bottom. Go through this, keep **L** over a bridge and start climbing a paved road. Follow this road, past the plantation and all the way to a junction where White Hall Chapel will be ahead of you.
- ③ Turn **R** to start climbing uphill. After around 2.5km, at the top of this climb, continue **SA** over a cattle grid signed *Harwood Shield* and past a dead-end road sign. Go through another gate and follow the paved road around to the **L** to reach Harwood Shield Farm.



- 4 Go through the farm, keeping to the track, and turn **R** immediately after the big barn. Keep to the **L** of the drystone wall and follow the track. The bridleway marked on the OS maps here which goes off the main gravel track into the moor is impassably overgrown; the gravel track that runs alongside the bridleway is the more sensible route to take. At the end of the corner of the fence line, take the less-defined track to the **R** with more grass on to start to head downhill. You will see a sandy ascent in the distance; you are heading towards this. At the fork at the top of the steep ascent, turn **L** to cross the Broad Way and start to descend. At the next junction, turn **L** over a small bridge. There is a *No public right of way* sign to the right at this junction.
- 5 At the crossroads after the first black shooting hut, take a tight **R** to go up a steep rocky incline. Make sure you take the correct turning here as this is the only public right of way. Follow this up and down until you reach a defined crossroads. At the next crossroads, head **SA** on to a singletrack section, with Stobb Cross in the distance on top of the hill. The route stays below Stobb Cross, always keeping to the left of the summit. It can get muddy here, but it is rideable most of the year. Keep **SA** on this track to a gate. Go through this on to a wider gravel track until you reach a T-junction. Turn **R** on to a paved road and follow this all the way back to Allendale.



07 TYNE & DERWENT VALLEYS

40.7km/25.3 miles

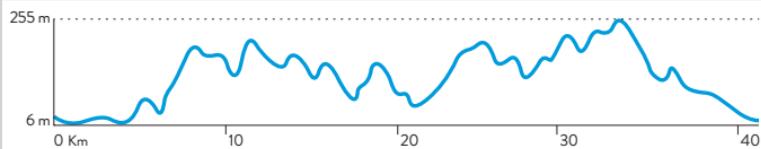
Introduction

This route really defies what is imagined when you think of Northumberland. While the majority of Northumberland is sparsely populated, the Tyne Valley, particularly this area south of the Tyne, is more densely populated. Don't let this put you off though as this route is such a treat, quickly escaping the bustle into the quiet hills. You will even dip over the 'borders' into Tyne & Wear and County Durham. This ride also showcases that you don't need to travel far to find great riding. Just a short train journey from Newcastle city centre, you can be up in the hills, looking over the meandering Tyne Valley in no time at all. And if you want to make a long day of it, you can cycle west along National Cycle Network Route 72 from Newcastle.

The route starts in Wylam, a picture-sque village by the Tyne and birthplace of 'father of railways' George Stephenson.

From Wylam, you ride along traffic-free NCN72 and then head uphill out of the valley to wind your way through small back roads, and farm and woodland tracks to eventually pass Vindomora Roman fort, which dates from circa AD 150.

The borders between Northumberland, County Durham and Tyne & Wear are all a bit of a blur at the southern part of the route. After crossing into County Durham, you join the Derwent Walk for a short section before leaving the county to start riding back north towards the Tyne Valley, perhaps pausing for a rest and a sweet treat from Riverview Bakery at Blackhall Mill. After climbing through Milkwellburn Woods and cruising around Chopwell, a gradual climb rewards you with panoramic views of the Tyne Valley, before a sweeping descent on tracks and hedge-lined back lanes to Wylam.



DISTANCE 40.7km/25.3 miles **ASCENT** 760m/2,493ft **HIGHEST POINT**
255m/837ft **START/FINISH** Wylam railway station **START/FINISH GRID REF**
NZ 119644 **SATNAV** NE41 8HR **GPS** 54.9749, -1.8144 **GRADE**
TERRAIN Cycle paths, forest and farm tracks, bridleways and back roads **PUBLIC**
TRANSPORT Wylam railway station **PARKING** Tyne Riverside Country Park Wylam
car park **MAP** OS Landranger 88, Newcastle upon Tyne (1:50,000)

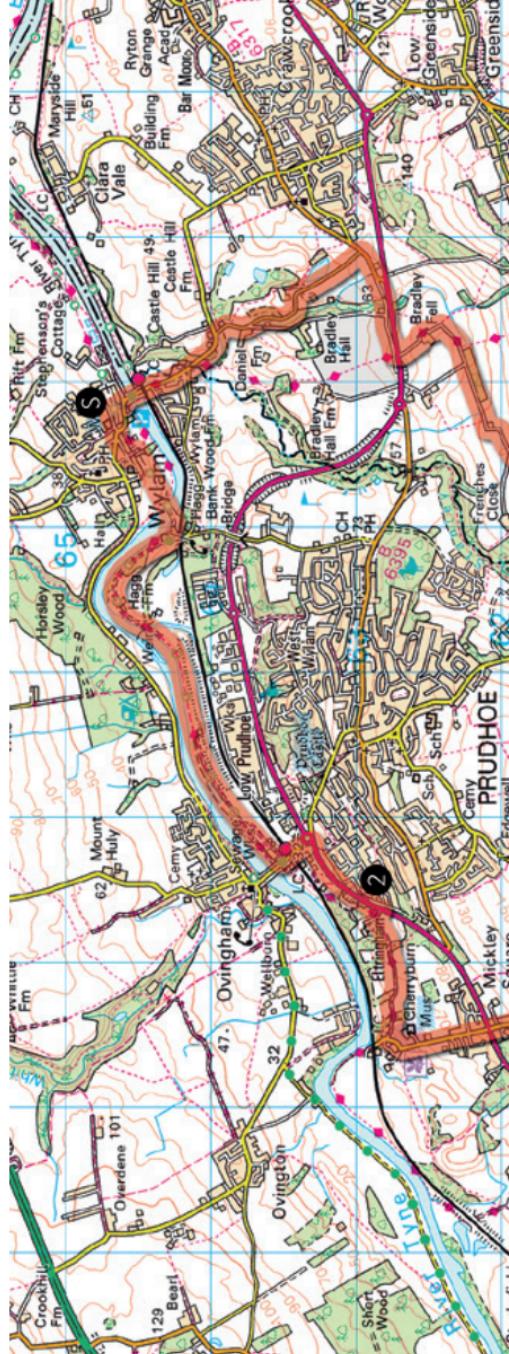


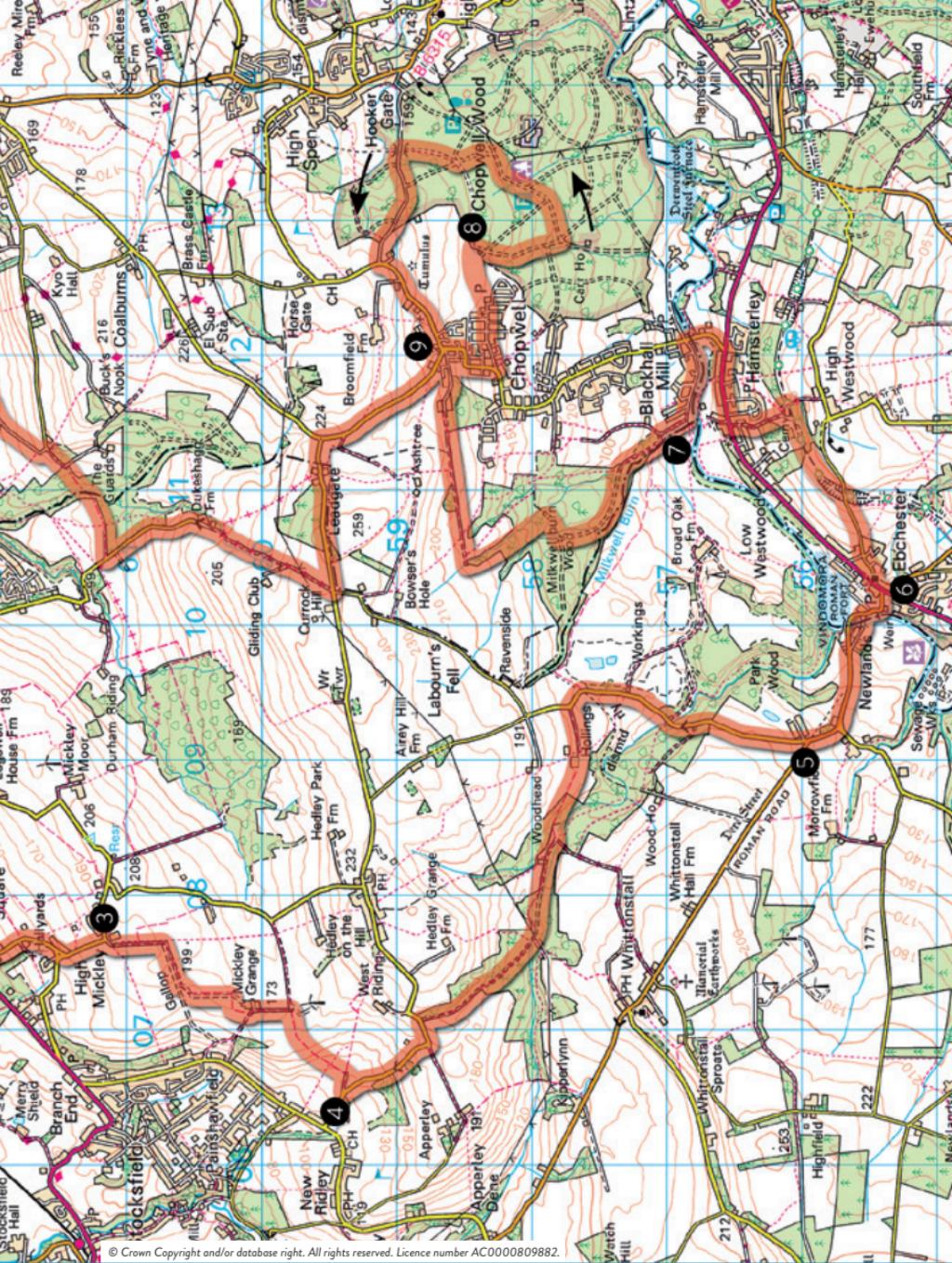
1



2

1 RIVERVIEW BAKERY. 2 RIVER TYNE.
© PHIL THOMAS







3

Directions

- ① From the station, turn **R** on to the main road and cross the bridge. Turn **R** and then bear **L** by the war memorial, before taking the narrow path by the car park to National Cycle Network Route 72. Turn **L** and head west, signposted *Ovingham, Corbridge & Hexham*. Give way to pedestrians and sound your bell as it can be quite busy, especially at weekends. Cross to the south side of the Tyne on the magnificent Hagg Bank Bridge (known locally as Half-Moon Bridge), built for the Scotswood, Newburn and Wylam Railway. Continue **SA** on NCN72 until you go under Ovingham Bridge. Turn **L**, past the Tyne Riverside Cafe, then exit the car park to the **L** and turn **R** at the T-junction to join Station Road. Cross the railway tracks and turn **R** at the roundabout to join the busy A695 uphill for a short section.
- ② Take the first **R** down a small road towards an industrial estate, and almost immediately turn **L** to join a byway, signposted *Eltringham House*. At the end of the byway, turn **L** to climb past National Trust property Cherryburn, birthplace of master wood engraver, artist and naturalist Thomas Berwick. Carefully cross the A695 at Mickley and continue uphill on Eastgate Bank. Continue **SA** to High Mickley.
- ③ After the *High Mickley* sign, turn **R** on to a rougher road in front of some terraced houses and keep **R** to join the bridleway signposted *Ward Lane & Mickley Grange*. This section can get churned up depending on the time of year, but it doesn't last long. At the top of the rise, turn **R** through a gate alongside the Gallop with stunning views west towards Stocksfield and the Tyne Valley. Follow the bridleway



4



5

3 BROOM HILL. © PHIL THOMAS 4 HADRIAN'S CYCLEWAY. © PHIL THOMAS 5 MODIGARS LANE. © PHIL THOMAS

to the **L** and climb slightly. The bridleway goes in front of and beside the next farm, not through it: look for a bridleway to the **R**, where you go through a gate and follow a narrow, hedge-lined track to pop out through a gate near Mickley Grange Farm. Bear **L/SA**, with the farm on your left. At the gates and T-junction, turn **R** to follow the edge of the farmland through another gate. You are now on Modigars Lane. Keep **SA** downhill and then turn **R** to a road junction.

- 4 Turn **L** uphill and cycle partway up Hedley Hill, home to an infamous annual hill climb race. After around 1km, turn **R** on to a doubletrack bridleway into Westriding Wood. This small section gave me the idea for this route: I first rode it around eight years ago on my first gravel bike and it blew me away. I'm not sure if it was the discovery of new trails, the smooth forest tracks or just being outside, but I knew this section had to be in the book. Follow the track **SA** all the way past Spring House and Hollings to a T-junction with a road. Turn **R** on to Lead Lane.
- 5 After almost 2km, turn **L** on to the B6309. Be careful on this busy and fast section of road. Follow the road around to the left, and then turn **R** on to a small road signed as a dead-end (bikes are allowed through). Cross the River Derwent on Ebchester Old Bridge, built in 1862 on the site of a Roman bridge on Dere Street, which ran from modern-day York to Hadrian's Wall and into Scotland. After crossing the bridge, carefully turn **R** back on to the B6309 and ride uphill into Ebchester.

6 Turn **L** to join the busy A694 for a short section. Shortly, take the first major **R** uphill on Shaw Lane. Partway up the climb, turn **L** to join NCN14 off-road on the Derwent Walk. After 800m, turn **L** off NCN14 downhill on potholed Westwood Lane. Keep **R** at the next fork. Upon reaching the A694, turn **R** to join the road for a short section through Hamsterley. Turn **L** just before exiting Hamsterley, signposted *Chopwell & Blackhall Mill*, to descend Armondside Road. Cross the River Derwent for the second time and then turn **L** into Blackhall Mill, passing Riverview Bakery, a great place for lunch or a cake. Continue **SA** with the river on your left and pass a small bridge. Continue past a sign *Farm access keep clear* and head **SA** on the lane which becomes rougher and then turns to gravel.

7 At a big public bridleway sign by a low green gate, with a Milkwellburn Nature Reserve information board on your right, turn **L** off the road to go through the green gate into Durham Wildlife Trust's Milkwellburn Woods. Climb up the smooth gravel track and keep **L** at the first and second turnings. Keep **R** at Anne & Ernie's bench. At a crossroads, turn **R**, then take your next **L** to continue climbing. You will reach the most northerly part of the woods at the top of the climb. Follow the bridleway around to the right to head east on a straight gravel track. Keep an eye out for red kites. At the end of the bridleway, the track turns to paved road. Continue **SA** past terrace houses to a T junction. Turn **R** downhill into Chopwell, then turn **L** on to South Road, shortly after the Co-op. Continue **SA** along South Road until a Londis on your left: bear **L** here on to a small gravel track across a field. Join a small track that takes you **L** uphill, past a small play park and through a small wooded section, then join a more substantial gravel track into Chopwell Wood (also home to some great MTB trails).

8 Turn **R** at the first crossroads, just after a small rock chicane and next to the information board, to head downhill on a wide gravel path. Keep **SA** at the first crossroads, then turn **L** at the next crossroads, signposted *Boundary Loop North Loop Return to Car Park* with a green arrow. Continue **SA** at the next two junctions, following the same green arrows. Turn **L** to join the road for a short section. Take your next major **L** off the paved road through a green gate up a gravel track signposted *Old Railway Footpath* on a blue sign. Turn **R** at the crossroads to go past old railway carriages. Join the old colliery railway line, built to carry coal and bricks between Chopwell and High Spen. Follow this for a short section, go under the bridge, take your first **R** uphill, then turn sharp **R** over the same bridge. Turn **L** at the next fork, away from the signposted arrows. Keep **SA**, then at the fork go **R**, then **L** at the next (not through the green gate). At the road, turn **L** downhill and reach the junction you were at before the Chopwell loop. Be careful of oncoming cars and turn **R** on Greenhead Road.



6 HALF-MOON BRIDGE. © PHIL THOMAS

Coffee and food

Tyne Riverside Cafe, Prudhoe
Ebchester Village Store
Riverview Bakery, Blackhall Mill
Co-op, Chopwell
Bradley Gardens Cafe, Wylam
The Boathouse, Wylam
The Ship Inn, Wylam
The Coffee Tree, Wylam

Bike shops

Cycle Art, Prudhoe
Twelfth City Cyclery, Heddon-on-the-Wall
Brassworks Bicycle Co, Swalwell
Alpkit, Gateshead

9 Continue uphill and turn **L** at the next junction, signposted *Hedley on the Hill*. The road climbs and then descends. Just after the start of the descent, look out for a Northumbria Gliding Club *Try gliding here* sign and public byway sign to *Engine Road* and *Dukesagg Farm*. As you can see from the views down to the Tyne Valley, this is the bulk of the climbing completed. Turn **R** on the byway through a gate (not the left to the gliding club) and revel in the bumpy descent down *Engine Road*. Go through a gate, pass *Dukesagg Farm* on your right and continue downhill on a road. At the end of *Dukesagg Wood* turn **R** on a restricted byway heading east. Keep **SA** and cross a ford. Turn **L** at a road and follow this until you reach the busy A695. Carefully cross the A695 and turn **R** on a small road running parallel to the A road, then turn **L** at the end of that road to join the B6317. Take the next **L** downhill signposted *Bradley Gardens and Nursery*, then turn **L** at the T-junction to continue downhill on *Crawcrook Lane* back to *Wylam*.



APPROACHING CLENNELL STREET. © PHIL THOMAS

12 KIDLAND FOREST

33.2km/20.6 miles

Introduction

Tucked away in a remote part of Northumberland, the Coquet Valley and Kidland Forest are well known for the annual Naughty Northumbrian enduro, however this area isn't as well known for its gravel, but trust me, it's a paradise.

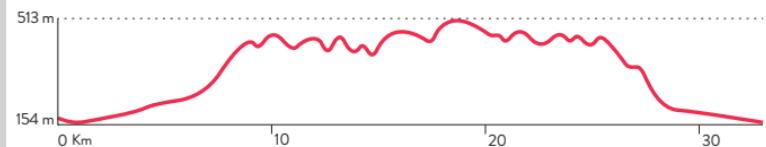
Don't let the short distance fool you and don't expect smooth gravel like Kielder; Kidland has some rough gravel and wider tyres with better puncture resistance are a good idea. What you do get though is pure adventure riding with sublime views and a real sense of achievement. This is one of my favourite rides in this book.

Make sure you are well prepared no matter what the weather as it can change at the drop of a hat. Take enough layers, a raincoat and more food and water than you think you need. The mobile signal in Kidland is pretty much non-existent, but it can be found the higher in the forest you go.

From the remote village of Alwinton, the route heads north following the River Alwin. This gravel road soon finds you engulfed on either side by towering hills, gradually climbing until you enter the forest. This is when the real climbing starts up Dryhope Hill. There is regular forestry work so make sure you give way to logging trucks and ensure you have the okay to proceed through any active areas.

Most of the elevation gain is completed on the first major climb and the remainder of the route is undulating, with a few steep kickers to keep you on your toes. From the roof of Kidland, the views over the forest and south towards the Coquet Valley are breathtaking.

I advise having the GPX file on a bike computer or phone and/or an OS map as the forest tracks can be quite confusing.



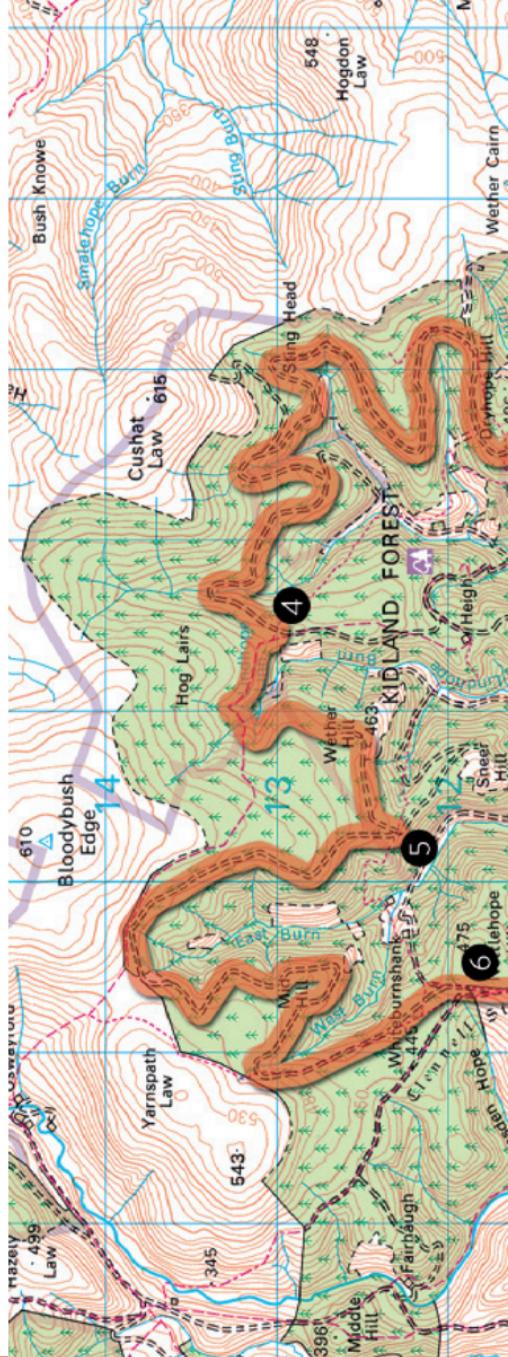
DISTANCE 33.2km/20.6 miles — **ASCENT 620m/2,034ft** — **HIGHEST POINT 513m/1,683ft** — **START/FINISH Alwinton** — **START/FINISH GRID REF NT 919063 SATNAV NE65 7BQ** — **GPS 55.3509, -2.1283** — **GRADE** — **TERRAIN**
Gravel tracks and minor roads — **PUBLIC TRANSPORT** None close; Alnmouth railway station (40km) — **PARKING** Alwinton National Park car park (also public toilets), or free parking on the village green (please park respectfully) — **MAP OS Landranger 80, Cheviot Hills & Kielder Water (1:50,000)**

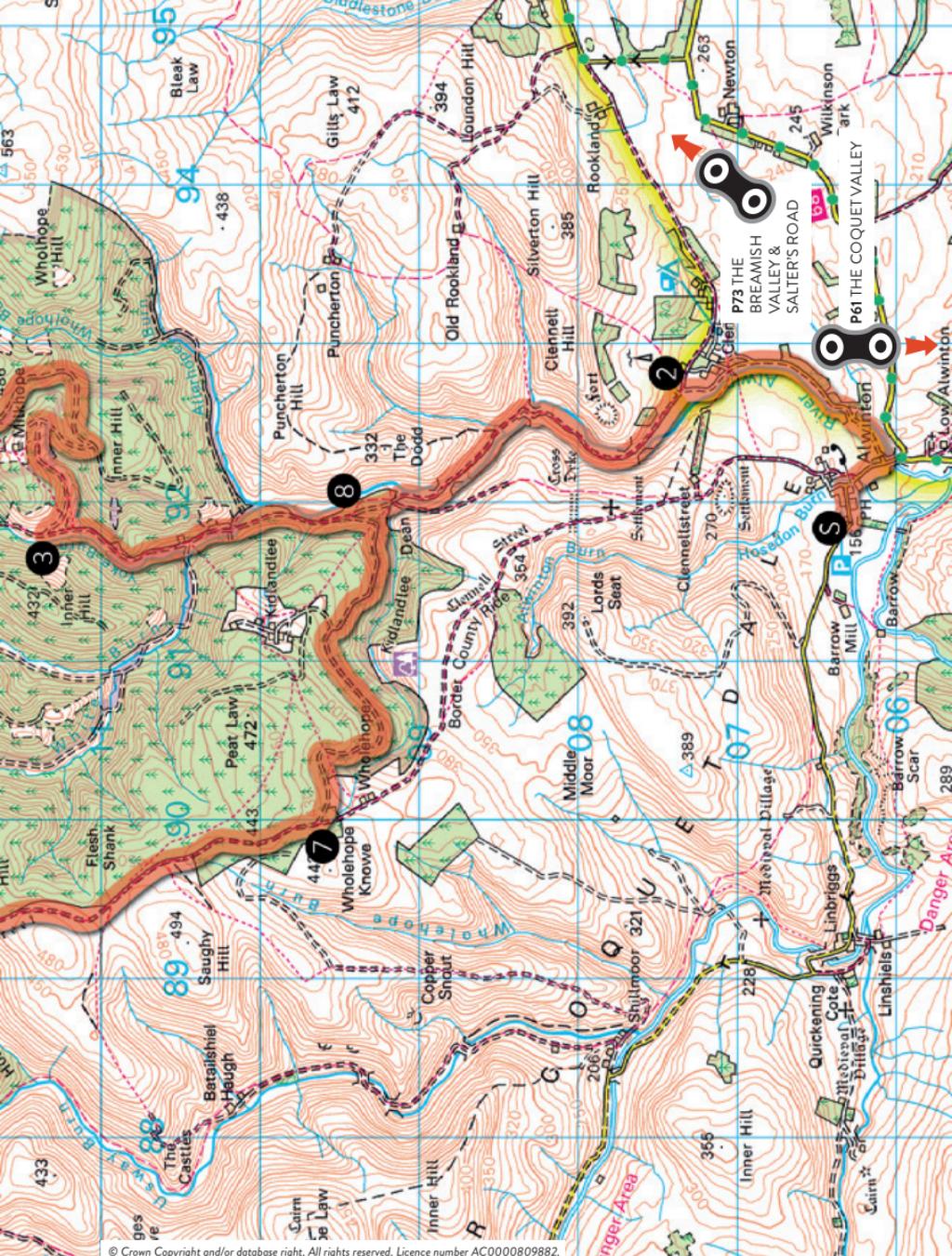


1



2







3

3 THE ROOF OF KIDLAND. © PHIL THOMAS

Directions

- ① Turn **L** out of the car park and then **R** to follow the road south out of Alwinton. Turn **L** signed *Clennell Hall Hotel* and ride over a cattle grid on to an open road – mind the sheep! You are now on a section of the Sandstone Way, but only for a short time. At a fork, keep **L** on the road, passing Clennell Hall and Farm on your right. The road soon turns to gravel.
- ② Continue **SA** on the smooth gravel bridleway following the River Alwin, with the surrounding hillsides becoming ever steeper as you head further into the valley. It is a gradual climb, so don't think it is just your legs not turning up today! Keep heading north on the main track and continue **SA** at the turn-off for Kidlandlee; you will be returning this way later. Descend slightly and pass the Forestry England sign at the entrance to Kidland Forest.
- ③ Just under 800m from the FE sign, turn sharp **R** to really start climbing. Follow the steep, winding climb; the gradient tops out at 15% in some parts. Keep **L** at a plateau and start to head in a general northerly direction, even though the track winds around Dryhope Hill. Here you are on the roof of the forest and the views are far and wide of Kidland and potentially the wider Coquetdale; breathe it in, as the feeling of remoteness is real up here. Continue on the gravel track, contouring the hillside, making sure you don't take any right or left turns. This is where having the GPX file on a bike computer or phone and/or an OS map is very useful.

Coffee and food

Rose & Thistle, Alwinton
Clennell Hall Hotel & Bar
The Star Inn, Harbottle
Spar, Thropton

Bike shops

Scrub Cycles, Rothbury

- 4 The next turn is easy to miss. Turn sharp **R** up a steep climb to head north-west; do not descend in a southerly direction. You are just over 15km into the ride at this point. Follow the gravel track until you start to descend from the top of Wether Hill. Descend gradually for about 1.3km.
- 5 Like the last turning, this one is easy to miss if you are not paying attention. About 17.4km into the ride, turn sharp **R** to start climbing again. Continue to climb and you will soon find yourself at the highest point of the route at 513m; this is also the closest point on the route to the border with Scotland, a few miles to the north-west. It is still undulating for now, but you will soon start heading in a southerly direction, beginning the gradual descent.
- 6 Continue winding your way on the rough gravel above Whiteburnshank and keep **L** to stay on a southerly course, joining the restricted byway of Clennell Street with forest to your left and the rising open moorland of Saughy Hill and Wholehope Knowe on your right. Over 200 years ago, Clennell Street was used by Scottish drovers and their herds to travel over the border on their way to the markets in Hexham and Newcastle. They would have stopped at Alwinton overnight, I'm sure, making the most of the two pubs that used to be there. Continue on Clennell Street until near the edge of the forest.
- 7 At a left-hand bend, Clennell Street continues straight off the main gravel track and on to singletrack: don't follow this. Instead keep **L** and continue on the gravel track, which is where the real descending starts. You have definitely earned this, and it is quite satisfyingly too, being probably the smoothest section of gravel; it is steep and loose in places, though, so take it steady. At a turning to Kidlandlee Holiday Cottages up a track to the left, keep **R**. Continue to the T-junction you passed in point ②.
- 8 Turn **R** back on to the valley track you started along. Retrace your tyre tracks down the valley and enjoy the gradual descent back past Clennell Farm and Hall. Cross the cattle grid and turn **R** to finish back in Alwinton. Be sure to plan enough time to finish the ride at the Rose & Thistle inn. The inn is also host to The Land Between bikepacking race, organised by Northumberland bikepacking aficionado Rich Rothwell. So, if this route has sparked your enthusiasm for longer adventures, be sure to sign up.