HERITAGE REIVER COUNTRY TRAILS

travelling through troubled times
a journey in the Land of the reivers

NORTHUMBERLAND

CONTACTS

Bellingham Heritage centre – 01434 220050

High Rochester – telephone Brigantium Archaeological Centre on 01830 520801 for information on the roman fort

FURTHER READING

A Visitor's Guide to Redesdale
The Redesdale Society 1999

The Steel Bonnets
George Macdonald Fraser Harper Collins 1995

Northumberland the official National Park Guide
Tony Hopkins Fraser Pevensey Press 2002

The Northumbrian Uplands
Geoffrey N Wright David and Charles 1989

National Park Hidden Treasures Leaflet
Available form Tourist Information Centres and information points

Tales of the Border Reivers
Sandhill Press 2000

The Border Reivers
Keith Durham Osprey Publishing 2003

MAP

Ordnance Survey Explorer OL 42
Kielder Water.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Bellingham TIC – 01434 220616
Refreshments and toilets available

Otterburn Mill TIC – 01830 520093
Refreshments and toilets available

The Border Reiver, Otterburn 01830 520682.
Refreshments and toilets available

LOCAL SERVICES

Bellingham – refreshments, shops, toilets, petrol and bank available in the town

Otterburn – shops, refreshments, toilets, parking, post office available

West Woodburn – refreshments available in the pub and shop, toilets and petrol

Greenhaugh – refreshments and toilets available at the Pub

Rochester – parking, café and toilets

www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk

www.wild-redesdale.co.uk

A History of the Reivers

Who were the Reivers?

When did they live? What did they do? These questions and others are all very important and need to be answered before you embark on following the Reivers' Trail. The answers will help you to understand the important part the reivers played in the history of North Tynedale and Redesdale and to appreciate the places and buildings you see as you follow the Trail.

The reivers were some of the ordinary people who lived in the two valleys in the period from the latter part of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Reiving is an old word for raiding and carrying off people and goods. The reivers were men who raided across the Scottish Border to carry off the cattle and farm stock and any other valuables belonging to the people living there. They also had a habit of raiding and robbing their English neighbours if they had a quarrel with them!

How Reiving came about

This unruly and sometimes very violent society came about as a result of the history of the whole Border area. In Roman times, Hadrian's Wall established a boundary across the island of Britain. To the south was Roman government, while, beyond the Wall, the land was controlled by native tribes. After the Romans left, the region south of the Wall reverted to control by local native tribal chiefs. Although the Wall was no longer a frontier, the tribes in the area around it seem to have been able to prevent Picts and Scots invading from the north from taking control of the region around the Wall.

Gradually, out of this chaos, the kingdom of Scotland emerged in the north of the region while, in the south, a kingdom of Northumbria developed which became part of England under the government of the Norman kings. When the Normans began to establish firm control over Northumberland about a century after the battle of Hastings, they found much of the county was coveted by the kings of Scotland. In order to keep the peace, the Scottish kings were permitted to rule Tynedale under the overlordship of the kings of England. This agreement brought about relative peace in North Tynedale and Redesdale and the area prospered. This peaceful situation continued until the end of the thirteenth century when full-scale war, lasting on and off for three hundred years, broke out between England and Scotland.

How the Reivers lived

As a result of warfare, many people fled North Tynedale and Redesdale. Those who remained developed a way of life that enabled them to survive under difficult conditions. They banded together in family groups or graynes, usually sharing the same surname and similar in many ways to the Highland clans. Members of these families tended to live in the same places, so we find Robsons living near Falstone, Halls and Reeds in Redesdale and the Charltons in North Tynedale north of Bellingham. They also built strong houses called bastles, characterised by walls up to two metres thick, stone roofs, and a second storey for living which could only be reached by entry through the strong ground floor chamber used for storage of food and valuables. Often these buildings were built in groups for mutual protection as at Black Middens or Gatehouse. This way of life characterised the reiving period, but it had begun to disappear by 1603 when, on the death of Elizabeth I, the Scottish King James VI became King James I of England. Although some sporadic reiving continued into the seventeenth century, James was able to reduce cross-Border hostility and begin to restore North Tynedale and Redesdale to more peaceful government.

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Bellingham Church – It is believed that the first church in Bellingham was a wooden building. Its successor, also dedicated to St Cuthbert, was built in the twelfth century. Much of that church survives to the present day, probably because it was strongly built and capable of surviving the attacks which were launched at it by both Scottish raiders and local reivers. The roof has always been made of stone slabs to resist attempts to burn it. This was very necessary as reivers from the Charlton family attacked the church in 1525 to force a priest to give communion to their outlaw relatives, while, in 1597, the Scottish Lord Scott of Buccleugh attacked the church with cannon fire in order to avenge reiving raids on his cattle.

Bellingham Town Hall Clock - Bellingham Town Hall was built in 1862. The clock was a gift of members of the four graynes (chief families) of the North Tyne valley - the Charltons, Dodds, Milburns and Robsons. These were four of the most important families of reivers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Hole Bastle – This bastle dates from the late sixteenth century. It is almost as it was when it was built. The only changes that have taken place are in the shape of the windows, there is an outside stairway to the upper floor instead of an internal ladder and the roof is now of slates, not stone slabs. Today, it is used as a farm building.

Low Cleughs Bastle - Low Cleughs has been consolidated by the National Park and can be visited by walking up from the lay-by next to the road. The bastle was built in the sixteenth century and is unusual in having the door in the long wall and not at the end. The upper door was probably added in more peaceful times as entry to the upper floor was usually from the ground floor by an internal ladder. The building illustrates the usual construction methods and types of materials used.

Corsenside Church - Corsenside Church was built in the twelfth century and dedicated to St Cuthbert. The church was strongly built with thick walls and a stone slab roof. The windows were enlarged in the nineteenth century as originally they were much smaller. There was a village nearby and the church, as the strongest building in the area, was probably used as a refuge in reiving times. The house nearby was built in the sixteenth century for the minister and was originally one storey lower than it is today. It was also strongly constructed to withstand attack from marauders. The church can be visited, but the house is privately owned.

Otterburn Tower - Otterburn Tower has grown over the centuries. The first part was constructed in the fourteenth century and was besieged by the Scots at the time of the battle of Otterburn. By the early sixteenth century, the tower had become the home of the Hall family, notorious for their reiving on the Border. The family lost the Tower when the head of the family, the magistrate Mad Jack Hall, was executed for treason for taking part in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715. As a punishment his estates were confiscated and he was executed for treason. The Tower passed into the hands of a succession of private owners until it became a hotel in the twentieth century.

Percy Cross - The Percy Cross commemorates the battle of Otterburn fought near this site in August 1388. This was one of the more important battles in the 300 year long series of wars between the two countries and helped create the circumstances in which reiving became a way of life for the local people. There is an information board near the Cross which explains all about the battle.

Jedburgh   A68

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Rochester

Horsley

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK

Otterburn Range

Davyshiel Common

N

HERITAGE

REIVER COUNTRY

TRAILS

Comb Moor

R. Rede

Elishaw

Blakehope Fell

Gorless

Highfield Moor

Blackburn Common

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OTTERBURN

Rothbury

Garret Shiels

B6341

A696

Newcastle

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High Rochester - High Rochester was a small hamlet built within the walls of a Roman fort. There are two bastle houses, one to the left of the entrance, the other at the left hand end of the row of houses that face you across the green as you enter the fort. Both these bastle houses are constructed from stone quarried from the remains of the fort. The houses are lived in and there is no admission. There is a public right of way and footpath with stiles around the outside of the Roman fort. Walking this path will give you a clear idea of the strength of the fort's position and the reasons the bastles were built in this place.

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Gatehouse - Some experts believe that four of the houses in this small hamlet were fortified. It is known that two nearest to the exit to the road to Black Middens definitely are bastles, but the community were so frequently attacked by the Armstrongs of Liddesdale that they were all probably defensible. They were built close together to give mutual protection and, by their strength in numbers, dissuade Scottish raiders from attacking them. All properties are privately owned.

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Black Middens - This bastle is in the care of English Heritage which has consolidated the building for public access. Approached from an adjacent car park, an on-site interpretation panel explains how the building was used.

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Tarset Castle - A castle was first constructed by the Scots on this site in the mid-thirteenth century when Tynedale was granted to the Scottish Crown by the English King. It was built on a strategically important site which commanded the Tarset burn and the river Tyne. It was originally rectangular with towers at each corner. A garrison was installed here by the English Crown between 1525 and 1527 to control the reiving families in the valleys. However, in the latter year a large force of Charltons allied with Scots from Liddesdale overwhelmed the castle and levelled it to the ground. Despite its fine position, it was never rebuilt. There is no access to the site, it must be viewed from the parking place at the roadside.

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Dally Castle - Like Tarset Castle, Dally Castle was originally built by a Scotsman in the thirteenth century. It may have been a simple hall house at first, but was later more strongly fortified. It passed into English hands about a hundred years after it was built and may have been used to keep order in this area. Its closeness to the Charlton family lands led to it being abandoned in the sixteenth century. Some of the stones from the castle were used to build the neighbouring mill and houses. Access from adjacent car park.

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Hesleyside Hall - Hesleyside was the home of the head of the Charlton family. In the fourteenth century, the family had a tower house capable of holding a garrison of fifty men on this site from which they organised their grayne or clan. During the reiving period, raids were organised from Hesleyside to steal cattle and other property from the Scots or English Border families with whom the Charltons were feuding. Legend has it that the wife of the head of the family would serve a spur on a large meat dish to her husband when she knew food supplies were low in order to encourage him to get on his horse and steal some supplies! The present Hesleyside Hall was built in the eighteenth century. The house is still lived in by the head of the Charlton family and the spur is kept safely ready for use!