**The Cheviot**

Kathryn Turner writes; The Cheviot, a prayer walk prepared by the parishes of St. John Vianney, West Denton and St. Cuthbert, Throckley.

See OS Landranger Map 74/75. Or find on [Google Maps](https://goo.gl/maps/Em7WLSG3BFnBQv338).

The walk starts beside the Harthope Burn (ref. NT 954 225), take the road from Wooler signed Harthope Valley. Take first road on right after 1km. Continue to road junction at Middleton Hall. Turn right up Harthope Valley (several steep hills to start with) to starting point (about 8km. from Wooler) and stop just before the bridge. There is plenty of parking at side of road on grass.

But they that wait upon the Lord,

shall renew their strength;

they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary;

and they shall walk and not faint.

*(Isaiah 40 : 31)*

**Jesus said to His disciples, “*Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.*” (*John 14:1)***

**The Harthope Burn (Grid ref. NT 954 225)**

****Spend a few moments in silence with your eyes closed thanking God for bringing you to this special place. Allow all that separates you from God’s love to drain away from you – your resentments, pride, jealousy, ambition, greed anxiety, fear and sense of inadequacy and hopelessness. Relax, knowing that you have been called here to listen to God’s word and to have your hearts set on fire by its power.

It is very difficult not to feel at peace in this lovely spot. You are surrounded by God’s creation – let your senses feast on that creation – let your eyes delight in the majesty of the hills, your ears thrill to the gurgling burn and the sound of His birds - Rejoice in the sweet smells of nature and let your lips relish the fresh rain from heaven and your cheeks give welcome to the cooling breeze. Let all your senses praise God and thank Him for making YOU part of His creation.

We are gathered this morning on the banks of the Harthope Burn, rising far above us on mighty Cheviot, pure water, rain and melted snow from heaven. Water cleanses, but our burn cannot cleanse itself and on its journey through these hills sadly it will change from a life-giving to a life-taking force as pollutants, invisible to the eye transform this thing of beauty into a parody of what a stream should be. It may still gurgle, it may still delight the eye but the purity and innocence we see here have been lost for ever.

How like the stream you are. You are beautiful and it is God’s wish that you remain so. Unlike the stream you can be cleansed every time you turn to God in sorrow. Time and time again you can experience the healing waters of baptism as God welcomes you back.

The stream looks the same on most of its journey. You may look the same at the end of our Lenten journey but are you the same? Unlike the stream you have the choice about what pollutants do to you. What are the pollutants in your life which stop you from remaining the stream God created? In what ways will you be different at the end of your Lenten journey and in what ways the same? Which is the pollutant which is damaging you most? How are you going to prevent it from entering your stream? Is there anything you could do to make your stream even more appealing In God’s eyes?

How grateful are you to God that no matter how polluted your stream has become you can always go back to the source and be that thing of beauty again?

**Turn left along road for 100m. to the sheepfold (ref. NT 953 225)**

**In all truth I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a bandit. He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and he leads them out. *(John 10 1:3)***

**The Sheepfold (Grid ref. NT 953 225)**



Sheepfolds, a very familiar feature in the Cheviot landscape are not only a testimony to the dry-stone walling skills of generations of Northumbrians but a reminder that this is truly “sheep country.” Even the breed of sheep reared here takes its name from the hills where they graze – the cheviot. There are more sheep in this county than people!! The theme of Jesus’ parable will be very familiar to the inhabitants of this valley. In Palestine at the time of Jesus, sheep had many natural predators so keeping them in a sheepfold at night was essential. However, just as important, was leading them to new pastures every morning. Our Cheviot sheep are “hefted” which means that they have lived on a particular fell for many generations so they do not wander. Not so in Jesus time – the sheep followed their shepherd and only their shepherd (they recognised his voice) knowing that he would lead them to lush pasture. Sheep are very sociable animals so would look forward to nights in the sheepfold with their fellows knowing that nothing could harm them.

For you, the sheepfold probably seems a very attractive option – safe from harm – no risk and the regular company of your friends. Your sheepfold may be your family, your work, your parish or one of the many places where you feel snug and safe in your comfort zone. However, your daily challenge is to leave the sheepfold and follow the shepherd to pastures new. New people, new problems, new situations, new opportunities to not only follow the shepherd’s footsteps but to become the shepherd yourself, leading others to the truth. It is then that you will realise that with the shepherd at your side you will be filled with His power and you can start becoming the disciples you are called to be. Resting in the sheepfold with Jesus and then following him wherever he may lead you is the life of the true disciple.

**Continue along road for 300m to trees and a signed path on the right (ref. NT 951 222)**

**Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. *(Matthew 7: 24-25)***

**Start of Track (Grid ref. NT 951 222)**

A sensible and serious walker will never get her feet wet. The hardest part of any expedition is planning the route. For many mountains you can see the summit from the valley below. However, the direct route will rarely be the best. If you listen and look you will never get wet feet – listen to those who have been before – listen to the weather forecast – listen to the map - it is your best friend – what is it telling you? From here, you could walk on a compass bearing straight to the top of Cheviot – the direct route - you would climb walls, ford streams, negotiate bracken and long heather and you would get your feet wet!!

History is a great teacher – many of the tracks we walk today have been walked for hundreds of years. These tracks through the Cheviot Hills may well have been walked by St Cuthbert and the monks on Holy Island as they made their way to and from Iona. The tracks which slowly evolved will prove to be the easiest and the safest. Planning a route is not just about getting there. You must consider many other factors such as your fitness, the distance, the height climbed, the terrain and the weather. Fortunately, walkers have Naismith’s rule (roughly 4km an hour plus one minute for every 10 metres climbed). If a mountain rescue team knew you had left the Harthope Valley at 10.15 this morning they could predict fairly accurately where you would be at any time after that.

The sensible walker uses Naismiths Rule and all the other tools she has to be safe and to reach her destination. Sensible followers of Christ listen to the Words of God and act on them. You are clearly seen to be a follower of the Lord if you follow his “Golden Rule.” – “Do to other people what you would want them to do to you.” What would you want somebody to say and do to you when you have been bereaved? What would you want somebody to say and do to you when you feel that you are a failure? What would you want somebody to say and do to you when you have lost your faith? What would you want somebody to say and do to you when you are forced to live on the streets? What would you want somebody to say and do to you when you are in the grip of an addiction? What would you want somebody to say and do to you when you are lonely? Think about these things – you will start following the Golden Rule and you will be on the right track – the track that is built of rock and you will never be lost even if rain, floods and gales confront you.

**Continue up the track for 2.5 km to Scald Hill (ref. NT 929 218)**

**And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no haversack, and no coins for their purses. *(Mark 6:8)***

**Scald Hill Grid (ref. NT 929 218)**

What is the baggage allowance? One of the first questions asked when booking a flight? Usually followed by, “How can I get 14 dresses for the evenings, 14 changes for the daytime and my make-up into 20kg? Will I need a waterproof? What happens if it turns cold? How much suntan cream should I take? Will I be able to buy Polo mints and decaffeinated coffee? Will there be a cash point machine. The stress of going on holiday can be overwhelming. Mountain walkers face a similar trauma but for them the problem is greater – they do not just carry the baggage to and from the hotel – their baggage goes with them wherever they go. Good advice is, “Be ruthless – if you have to think about whether you really need an item – you probably do not!! Throw it out!! It is wise to buy the smallest rucksack because you will always fill what you have to capacity.” Desperate measures are sometimes called for such as drilling holes in fork handles to make them lighter or living on raisins and nuts instead of heavy stodge.

Have you ever felt that you were born with a rucksack firmly attached? Most of us do. As we go on life’s journey rubbish is collected until our rucksack slows us down or even brings us to our knees. Fear is a heavy item in our rucksack – fear of people and places fear of the unknown, fear of death and many irrational fears many to do with our self-image. The French say that fear is the devil’s holy water – and it is! What useless baggage are you carrying? Guilt, low self-esteem, voices from the past telling you what to believe, what you should do and how you should behave. The sad thing is that a lot of the rubbish in your rucksack has been put there by well-meaning others – parents – teachers friends, work colleagues and peers. They did not know the sort of person God wants you to be! Hidden in the pockets of the rucksack – hidden but very heavy, are our attachments – things we feel we cannot do without – financial security – respect from others – pride – status possessions. In another pocket and this is really heavy is the mask we wear to hide from others the person we really are. When Jesus sent his disciples out to preach and heal others he told them to take NOTHING!! – They left their rucksacks at home. How vulnerable they must have felt until they found a new freedom of being able to do God’s will with a spring in their step because nothing held them back and finding the rucksack being replaced by the loving arms of Jesus Christ who promised that he would make their burdens light.

**Follow the fence over very boggy ground for 1.75 km. to The Cairn (ref. NT 915 209)**

**Have you not read this text of scripture: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone; this is the Lord’s doing and we marvel at it.***

**The Cairn (Grid ref. NT 915 209)**

Alfred Wainwright (A.W. to his many followers) in one of his pictorial guides to the Lakeland Fells gave this instruction, “Turn left at the lone tree”. He had great faith that that tree would be a perpetual landmark for the generations of walkers who would follow the instructions in his guides. The tree may well have withered but our cairn here as we approach the summit of our mountain will last for as many years as these hills themselves. It has truly become part of the landscape, a welcoming landmark for those seeking the summit. The rock on which we stand is granite: 380 million years ago volcanoes brought this rock from deep inside the earth. Granite – hard – beautiful – useful – so many fine buildings and our roads owe much to granite – but sometimes shunned and rejected as being too small and useless. The rejected stones have become our cairn - strong, solid, giving life and hope to the stranded walker who thanks God for the men and women who, over the years have helped this cairn to grow, one rejected stone after another – Eucharist indeed – “fruit of the earth and work of human hands” – how many walkers’ feet have been washed at the hands of the cairn builders of Cheviot?

God gives us the materials in plenty. Are you a cairn – builder? Are you one of the rejected stones just waiting to become the corner stone. Where are the cairns in your life – the people, places, teaching and ideas which help you reach your summit?

When are your actions truly Eucharist – thanking and praising God by using what he has given you to benefit others? How do you deal with the other ‘rejected stones’ which you meet every day?

**Follow the path along the fence and over large flat stones for 700m to the summit of Cheviot, trig point on a cairn (ref. NT 909 205)**

**Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. And he said to him, “I will give you all these if you fall at my feet and do me homage.” *(Matthew 4:8)***

**The Summit of Cheviot (Grid ref. NT 909 205)**

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You have made it!!! From the peace of the burn, you have been reminded of who it is who leads us out of the sheepfold and promises us that He will take away any baggage you do not want. You have sought the right track and guided by landmarks you have reached your summit. How does it feel?

All mountains challenge us. There is not a mountain or a rock climb in the world that has not been conquered. Jesus faced the greatest challenge when he was tempted in the desert. At his baptism his father had recognised him as his son: what should the son do? He could have had power, status authority glory and fame yet he chose to be the servant of all and chose to start an uphill journey, as you did today which would lead him to his summit – Calvary and death on a cross. .

You will recall that temptation and sacrifice today as you take part in our Eucharist and share the Christ among us with your Christian family. To prepare yourself, do as you did down in the valley below, close your eyes, relax and simply enjoy being a cairn for others, a living monument to God’s unconditional love and forgiveness.

Lord Jesus, we pray that like you we will turn our backs on the kingdoms of the world and their splendour and that the journey up the mountain of our lives will lead us to the heavenly kingdom.

Amen