



Northumberland National Park

Simonside Ridge Walk

Grade: Strenuous

Length: 4.2 miles (6.7km)

Time: 2.5 - 3hours

Map: O.S. Explorer OL42
Kielder Water & Forest

A walk onto the iconic ridge of Simonside, involving some steep climbing which is rewarded by panoramic views of the surrounding landscape, including Coquetdale and the Cheviot Hills. The route follows the Forestry Commission Red Route - look out for red arrows as an additional guide.

A Follow the main forestry track out of the car park, passing the sheltered information board and the wooden barrier, as it winds uphill. At the junction, turn right, passing the tall repeater mast on your right.

Follow this track through the trees and bear left at the next junction. *In the centre of the clearing ahead of you are the remains of a bronze age burial cairn.* Continue uphill until you reach the large stones and a path leading off to the left, signed for Little Church Rock.

The main route continues straight ahead, but for an interesting short detour, take this path to the left and visit the spectacular rock outcrop. Return to the red route by the same path, turn left and pass between the large stones.

B Continue on the track until you come to a path leading off to the left. Follow the uphill until you reach the edge of the trees. *Look out for the slab of rock on the ground with crossed lines carved into it.*

Bear left at the top where the tree line meets the heather moorland and follow the path as it continues uphill, with the rocky face of Simonside in front of you.

When you reach the forest road, turn right and walk along until it bears right. Here, take the path leading steeply uphill to your left, passing the interpretation panel. *This path is very steep and involves scrambling up amongst the rocks but the effort is rewarded with stunning views of Coquetdale and the Cheviot Hills from the top.*

At the top you reach a section of path reinforced with sandstone flagstones to conserve the heather. Follow this path, passing the ancient burial cairn marking the summit of Simonside on your left.

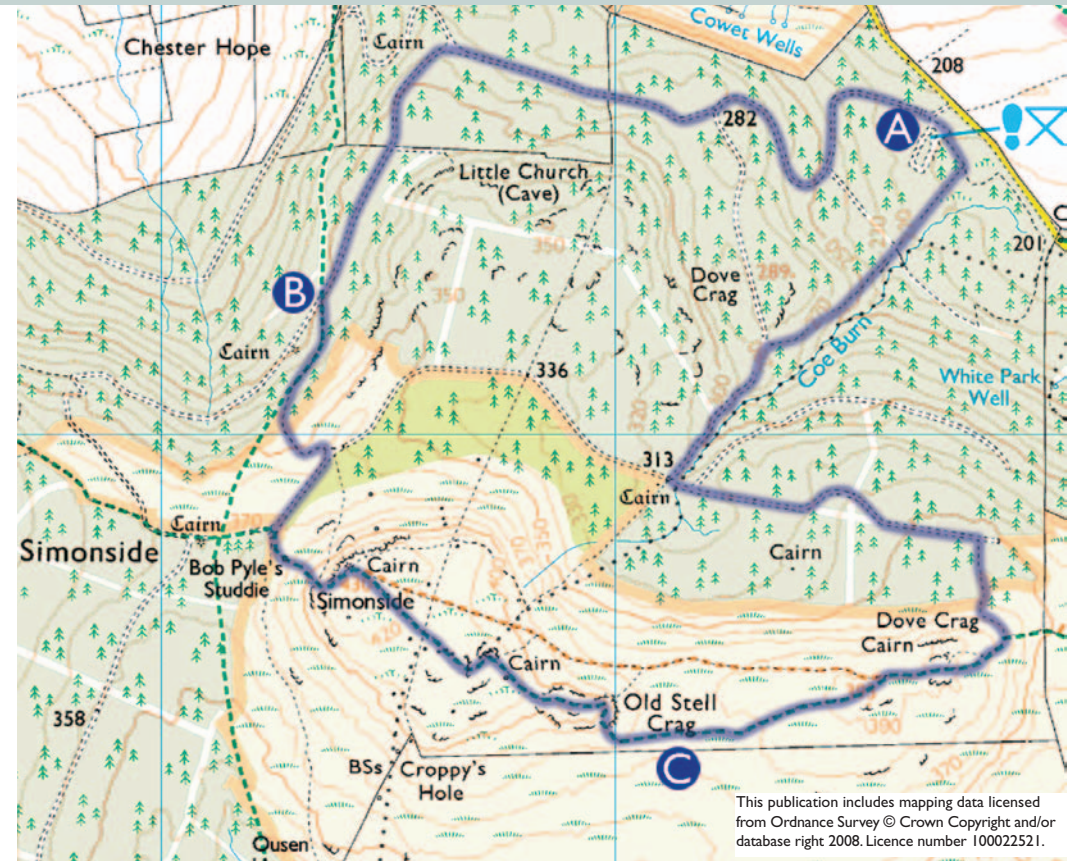
Continue as the path bears right towards another rock outcrop. Below this, where the line of flag stones ends, follow the path around the top and pass another cairn. Continue on the clear path until you rejoin flag stones as they bear right, then descend the sandstone path through the Old Stell Crag outcrop.

C Follow the flagged path across the heather moorland towards the next rock outcrop on the ridge, Dove Crag. *The panoramic view includes: South (near to far) Harwood Forest, Fontburn Reservoir, Hexham and Tynedale, and the North Pennines beyond. North NT Cragside, Rothbury, Coquet Valley and Cheviot Hills.*

Continue on the flags to Dove Crag, topped by another prehistoric burial cairn. *There are interesting rock formations on the outcrop, and a small conifer above which gets decorated every Christmas!*

Descend the pitched path on the other side of Dove Crag, on a path leading to the left. Follow the path down the hill towards the trees. Continue through the trees until you reach another clear track - *please note the path can be very muddy through the trees.*

Turn left onto the track and follow it to the main forest road. Turn right and continue downhill following the Coe Burn downstream. As the road bears left, take the path leading through the trees to the right and follow it back to the car park.



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Start at O.S Grid Reference: NZ 037 997

Car Parking: Forestry Commission Simonside car park

Toilets: Rothbury

Local Services: Rothbury

NNP Information Point: Rothbury National Park Centre

Terrain: Forest roads and paths, rough paths, moorland, stone flags and pitching



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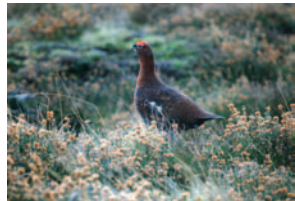
Getting there

To reach the car park at the start of this walk, take the B6342 South out of Rothbury. After about 2 miles, turn right on the sharp bend near the National Park boundary sign, onto a single track road. Follow this road, passing the Lordenshaws car park on your right. Continue between the trees, passing a layby on your left, and turn left into the main Forestry Commission car park.

Local facilities

Shops and services are available in Rothbury, including pubs and cafes, tourist information and accommodation.

Prehistoric flint tools



Red Grouse



Reproduced from the 1949 Ordnance Survey map.

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Points of Interest

Many of the paths through the forest have been improved by inverting the top soil so that the hard-wearing and sustainable substrate is on the top.

Simonside forest is a owned and managed commercially by the Forestry Commission. The dominant tree type is coniferous – with needles as leaves which do not fall in winter and cones containing seeds. The exception to this is the Larch which is a conifer but which does lose its needles – the only conifer species to do so. There are larch trees throughout the forest. The other conifer species are Sitka and Norway Spruce, Douglas Fir, and the native Scots Pine. There are also deciduous trees, which lose their leaves each winter, including the Silver Birch which can be seen on this route.

Simonside has been an integral part of peoples' lives for thousands of years and is steeped in folklore. Archaeology has unearthed prehistoric flint tools, bronze swords, pottery and ornaments as well as burial cairns and cists from the Bronze Age, and rock outcrops and caves used as shelters.

The burial cairn in the clearing below Little Church Rock was excavated during the 1890s and the stones from the centre remain banked up around the edge, with the cists (chambers) and capstones revealed.

Little Church Rock is an outcrop of the fell sandstone geology that underpins the Simonside Ridge. The name may be a reference to the rock as a gathering place, possibly for illicit preaching.

The carved rock on the ground as you climb up through the trees shows a grid pattern, whose meaning and origin of these lines has not yet been determined. They may date back to the Stone Age, and be linked to the mysterious cup and ring marked rocks at Lordenshaws on the far side of the main road. Alternatively they may be linked to the droving trade of the 17th to 19th centuries that saw cattle driven many miles through this area on their way to markets. The 'hollow-ways' left behind by the passage of hooves are a clear indication of the routes they took, this footpath follows one such route. It may be that the lines carved into the rock were to prevent the cattle slipping as they made their way uphill.

Look out for wildlife on this walk. Simonside is legally designated a European Special Area of Conservation, for its special habitats of heather moorland and blanket bog. These support a range of species of birds such as Curlew, Lapwing and Red Grouse. Birds of prey such as Buzzards and Kestrels can be spotted circling above. In the forest you may catch a glimpse of the shy Roe Deer or Red Squirrels.

Thanks to funding from Northumberland Strategic Partnership and One North East, we have recently undertaken the latest phase of a large programme of conservation work. This has included laying flag stones and pitching the steeper sections of the footpath along the ridge with natural sandstone. This provides a sustainable walking surface, to prevent erosion of the peat and damage to the vegetation.

Follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



Bronze Age Cairn



Mountain Bumblebee



Dove Crag



Blackface