

The College Valley-Birding in the heart of the Cheviots

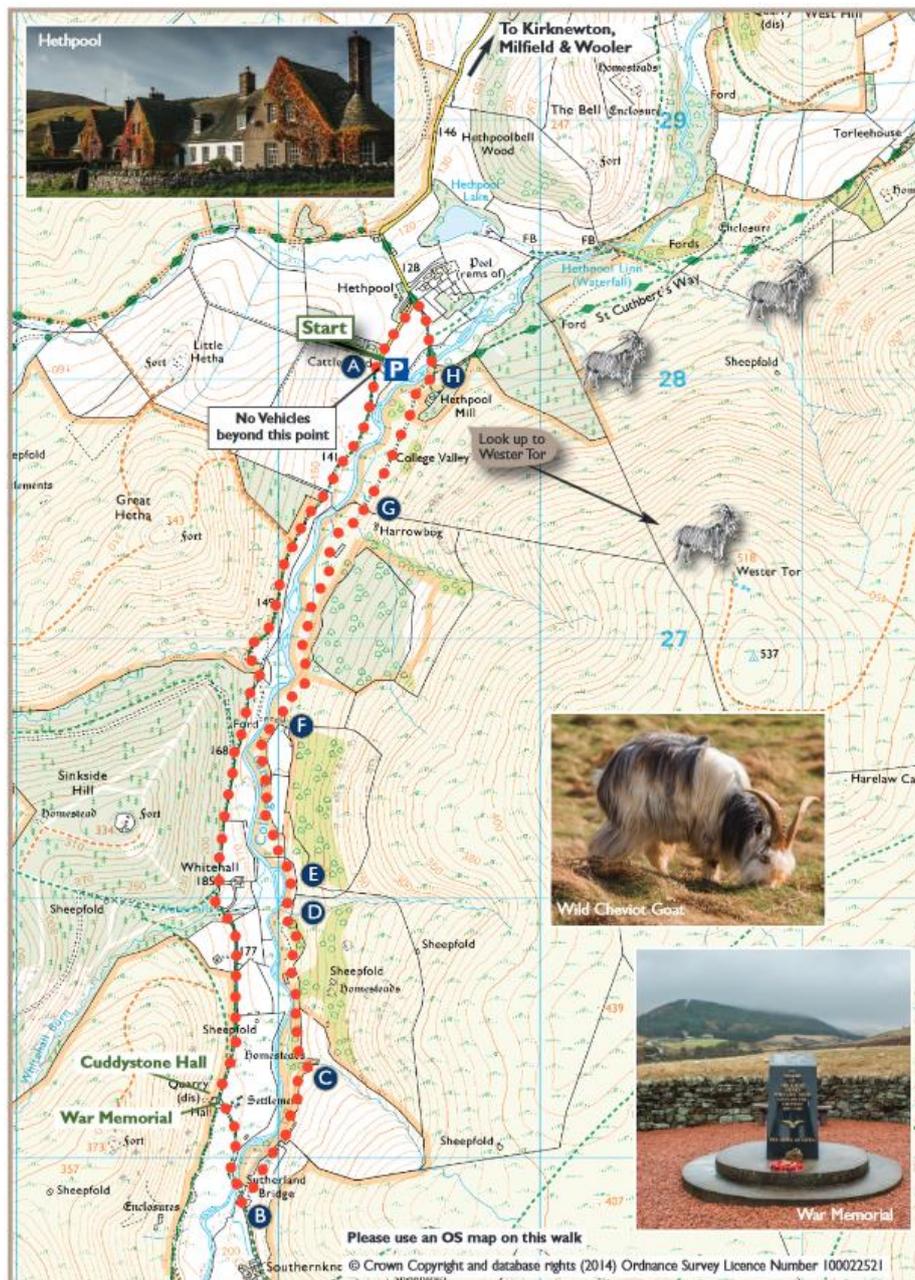
Location

One of the most peaceful and unspoiled valleys in the Cheviots, the College Valley is fringed on the West by a string of ancient granite hills topped by Iron Age Forts dating back more than 2 ½ thousand years (Great Hetha, Little Hetha, Sinkside and Black Hags), and on the East by the impressive Newton Tors. To the North of the Valley are the historic Collingwood Oaks, a protected woodland, whilst Harrow Bog at the foot of the Tors is a SSS1 and said to be one of the largest semi- natural areas of woodland in the National Park

The Valley is owned by College Valley Estates, and driving on the road *beyond the car park at Hethpool* is accessible only with a permit (£10) obtainable from Savills Estate Agents, Wooler (Tel: 01668 281611)

DIRECTIONS

From the A697 Coldstream- Morpeth route, turn at Akeld (a few miles north of Wooler) on to the B6351 for Kirknewton; continue driving beyond the village and cross the bridge over the College Burn, then take the next left at Westnewton and follow the narrow road to Hethpool and the Car Park **OS Map Ref:-NT894284**. We recommend carrying and using an **Ordnance Survey Map** when you tackle this route, especially if you intend to tackle the extension towards Dunsdale. (The Map below, *by kind permission of Northumberland National Park*, is intended for reference only.)



ACCESSIBILITY

The entire circuit of this walk is approximately 4 ½ miles, with the most productive birding area being the new path following the East side of the burn (recently restored by the National Park- see Map). However there are parts within this area which are not suitable for those with mobility problems or for very young children, due to some steep banks, overhanging branches and two small burns to cross *en route*. Parts of the route can be obscured by bracken during early summer despite regular attention by Rangers and the path can be very wet and muddy in winter.



However, a linear route up the quiet road to the West of the burn is eminently suitable for those with limited mobility or even wheelchair use, and a wide variety of birds can be seen from here at all times of the year but especially during Spring and Summer.

When to go

Although the route can be followed in either direction, for birding we suggest following the path *in reverse direction to the map*, i.e. turn right from the car park at (A) along the road you have just driven and right again at Hethpool to cross over the river to Hethpool Mill (H). Assuming one is making the full circuit, the very best time is **early and late Spring and early Summer**. In Spring the path through the woods is strewn with flowers such as Primrose, Violet, Wood Anemone and Wood Sorrel. At this time birds seen include Dipper (inevitably present at the bridge over the College Burn at the start of the walk and where Pied and Grey Wagtail are often seen.) The small area of woodland to the right is frequented by Roe Deer. Heron, Raven, and Buzzard are regulars. Passing through the wooded areas of Birch and Alder, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Long-tailed Tits and Wrens are common sights. Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Redstart are common migrants to these woods in spring, swelling the chorus of the resident Robins, Blackbirds and Thrushes. On the College Burn listen for the unmistakable calls of nesting Common Sandpipers and Oystercatchers whilst Swallows, Sand Martins and House Martins are also present. Listen out for Cuckoos calling in late April/May. On the slopes of the Tors on your left nesting Curlew and Red Grouse are heard, whilst Meadow Pipits, Buzzards and Kestrels are common sights



Other Fauna:-Wild Cheviot Goats have extended their range up the valley from their usual haunt near Yeavinger Bell and Easter Tor and can now often be seen on the lower slopes of the Tors from this path. Walking quietly will reward

with the occasional view of Red Squirrel; Stoats are a common sight among the rocks and old rocks on the way. A special Winter treat is to see them in their ermine! Roe Deer may also be seen.

(NB To extend the walk, leave the footpath on reaching the road at (**B**) and turn left. Continue for another a mile or so beyond Southernknowe up the road towards the former farmhouse at Dunsdale up the Lambden Burn with its steep screes. This brings you into wilder moorland territory where Ring Ouzel, Wheatear and Whinchat may be seen and Grey Wagtail can often be sighted.)

Whether you extend your walk (or not), from point **B** you can return to your car at point **A** by following the valley road back down the other side of the river to the car park near Hethpool.



In Summer listen for the harsh warning calls of Jays watching over their fledglings and in late summer an Osprey on migration may be sighted, the Lake at Hethpool House providing good fishing!

During Autumn and Winter the summer migrants, will be absent and Curlew and Oystercatcher will have returned to the coast but the absence of leaves on the trees will afford better sights of the valley's resident birds. During the Autumn the frantic activity and raucous calls of Jays gathering acorns are a common sight. Great Spotted Woodpecker, Linnet, Meadow Pipit and Yellowhammer are also usually present.

In **Winter** large flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare are a common sight especially in the fields near Collegeburn and Southernknowe.

Liz Harrison