

Cross the roundabout keeping the Delaval Arms to the left, turn right through a small car park and follow the cycleway south to a local nature reserve.

The wetland area was created by volunteers in the late 1990s to provide an alternative high tide roosting area, a feeding point for migrating birds, and a breeding habitat for wetland birds. It has been highly successful in these aims and as the area matures so does the importance of the site.

During its lifetime the area has been a firing range (as far back as the Napoleonic era) and the banks on the seaward side of the reserve, and those further north, are the last remains of its military heritage. For some time it was also a golf driving range.

To the right can be seen the iconic lighthouse on St Mary's Island. The lighthouse has a visitor centre and can be visited at low tide. On reaching Trinity Road turn right and follow the footpath to the main road. Carefully cross the road and follow the footpath to the right along the northern boundary of Whitley Bay cemetery. Where the road takes a 90 degree right turn, go straight ahead following the public footpath sign.



Bluebells

Whitley Junction, old station at Monkseaton looking South. Level crossing beginning of Avenue Branch Line.



Go through the sides of a former bridge over the Collywell Bay Branch Line and follow the footpath left to a junction east of Brierdene Farm.

This crossroads is an important site. In front can be seen the remains of old Bell Pits, possibly dating back to the Lindisfarne Monks. Medieval Ridge and furrow grassland is visible on all sides. This has not been ploughed since medieval times when farmers dug drainage furrows and planted their crops on the ridge.

Take the left path along the hedgerow. This follows the course of an old 18th-century waggonway and passes over the dene on a man-made embankment.

At the end of the embankment bear right and follow the path to the Avenue Branch Line.

The raised areas in the adjacent fields are sites of former mine workings.

Return south along the Avenue Branch Line, under Monkseaton Drive to the entrance of Churchill Playing Fields. Do not enter the playing fields but continue along the path, with the railway line appearing on the right. Cross Marine Avenue to Monkseaton Metro Station.

Design: Hollie Atkinson

NORTH TYNESIDE

WAGGONWAYS



HOLYWELL DENE WALK BLYTH AND TYNE RAILWAY

Taking in contrasting environments of coast and country this walk follows the route of the former Blyth & Tyne railway lines and offers a fascinating insight to the area's mining history dating back to the bell pits worked by the Lindisfarne monks.

Start: Monkseaton Metro Station
Distance: 9.3 km (5.8 miles)
Time: 3 hours
Terrain: Variable - can be muddy in parts

Leave Monkseaton Metro at the platform 2 exit, cross Norham Road, pass through Souter Park and turn left at the tennis court and into the car park. **The wall on the right is part of the original Blyth and Tyne Railway Station platform. There was once a level crossing across Marine Avenue here.** Cross Marine Avenue and pass northwest through Churchill Playing Fields. Just past the athletics track, the path veers left and passes between the north end of Hartley Avenue and the clubhouse. Follow the path northwards along the former Avenue Branch Line.

The old willows, particularly around the cricket pitch, provide sites for greater spotted woodpeckers and a careful search will reveal their feeding activity and their nest holes. The route continues past the rear of Whitley Bay High School and under Monkseaton Drive. At this point the path enters a residential area but the hedgerows provide a natural barrier to the neighbouring streets. On leaving the built-up area, the waggonway borders farmland with distant views of Earsdon to the left and the golf course to the right.

The old branch line is lined with some of the oldest hedgerows in the borough, consisting of hawthorn, elder, dog rose, bramble, goat willow and silver birch. These hedgerows have their own bird community with yellowhammer being one of the most conspicuous singers in spring. Continue along the path passing Briardene Farm on the right. The path goes under a bridge on Hartley Lane and enters Holywell Dene.

A large embankment was built here to enable the railway to cross the Seaton Burn river.

Follow the path across the dene, turn right immediately, not going under a stone bridge, keeping to the upper path.

Sixty years ago, the dene housed a small community of mine and agricultural workers. Remains of their cottages, four mills and a mill race can still be seen.



Old mill, Holywell Dene 1910 (now demolished)

The slopes of the dene still retain the varied plant species that is expected in this sort of habitat including violets, ramsoms (wild garlic), bluebell and wood anemone.

The large trees are mostly sycamore, ash and oak. Over eighty species of woodland birds have been recorded including some of the rarer migrant birds such as yellow-browed warbler and firecrest.

The stream, once heavily polluted, is now clean and supports much wildlife. The increase in invertebrates and fish has allowed both kingfishers and dippers to re-colonise the river and even otters can be seen by the lucky few.

Where a farm road dissects the dene, pass over a stone bridge and turn immediately left. Continue, keeping the burn to the left and pass a small pond on the right with flags and waterfowl. Walk through the small car park and turn left on to Hartley Lane towards the sea.

Continue past the gardens of the 18th-century miners' cottages and follow the incline into the dene itself.

Opposite the first row of bungalows are the remains of a bridge which carried the former Collywell Bay Branch Line. This was built in anticipation of a new seaside resort at Seaton Sluice. Although World War I prevented completion of this scheme, the track was used to carry munitions to the fortifications at Seaton Sluice.

