

WALKING IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

**CHEVIOTS, TWEED, ETTRICK,
MOFFAT AND MANOR HILLS**

by Ronald Turnbull

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Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. The research, editorial and design work for this guide was completed early in 2020 before coronavirus lockdown and there may be changes to facilities as a result. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1011/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: On Staerough Hill (Walk 12)

Until the founding of St Abbs harbour and village in 1833, fishermen had to backpack their gear down this Creel Path from Coldingham.

pavement leads uphill to sea views, and a 'Creel Path' signpost. The hedged and slightly sunken path now conceals the sea views. ◀

In 600 metres turn right, signposted for **Coldingham Sands**. At the path end stile, turn right and left down to the beach. Turn left along the beach huts and then the beach. After 300 metres at the beach end, take wide concrete steps up to the clifftop path into **St Abbs**. You can turn left for the village centre or keep right for the harbour.

Princess Aebba, sister of King Oswiu of Northumbria, established a monastery at **St Abbs Head**; St Cuthbert dropped in for a congenial B&B during his missionary backpack trips. The monastery later burned down and relocated to Coldingham



earlier, but at once turn right again on a smaller path which runs along the loch's foot to emerge at the end of a gravel track. Follow this ahead to a gate and a corner of the tarred access track. Follow this ahead, descending through fields then past houses to **Northfield visitor centre**.

From Pettico Wick follow the tarmac track over a cattle grid and at once turn right through a gate above the low cliffs. The coastal path is unclear on the ground but has stiles, gates and occasional signposts. Follow the clifftop fence, then slant up to a ladder stile near the field's top corner. Turn right across a stile and continue with fences to your left.

Now above high cliffs, you dip into a stream hollow to a stile on the left, then keep round to the right to cross the stream. Slant up to a stile on the right and follow clifftops, with fence to your left, to the two earthwork humps and grand views at **Tun Law forts**.

Return along the fence for 150 metres to a field gate, and slant down south to the field's bottom corner above **Coldingham Loch**. Go through two gates to a faint grass track above the loch with a fence to its left. Above a loch-side house, join a gravel track up to a gate; bend right and in 300 metres bend right again to another gate marked Farmhouse only. Follow the footpath sign along the track

*Clifftops west of
Pettico Wick*



GUILLEMOTS, GUANO, GEOLOGY

As well as a spectacular coastal walk, St Abb's Head is notable for its sea birds. During early summer, the offshore stacks are literally carpeted with guillemots, standing wing to wing on every non-vertical surface in an effect resembling Glastonbury Festival, and only slightly less noisy. In other seasons, the off-white coating is composed of their droppings – which, if the breeze is onshore, add a dark undertone to the scent of the wild flowers. You could also spot puffins, and diving gannets, not to mention shearwaters, skuas and shags, and that's just the ones starting with 'S'. So let's hope you brought the binocs.

If you think you may be intrigued by the spectacular rock formations, it's worth diverting to the Northfield Farm visitor centre to pick up the relevant leaflet. Inland, the country rocks of the Old Red Sandstone (at the southern end) are well displayed. At Pettico Wick the older country rock, the deep ocean greywacke, is even more impressive, its vigorous folding very visible westwards along the coast. Each of the thick beds is caused by a single underwater avalanche or mudslide. The lumpy surface of the beds on the left side of the bay is caused by the newly arrived mud slumping into the mud surface below – so these 'slump structures' are showing that the beds are now upside down!

The headland itself, however, shows a quite different sort of rock; reddish and purplish volcanic lava, brought downwards along the St Abbs fault line which runs along the Mire Loch and can be made out from St Abbs harbour. Seen from the harbour, the foreground rocks are chunky black 'vent agglomerate', revealing the actual eruption point.



Basalt seastack and sea birds, Pettico Wick

WALK 20

Rubers Law

Start/finish	Denholm village centre (NT 567 183)
Distance	10.5km (6½ miles)
Ascent	400m
Harshness	2
Approx time	3hr 30min
Terrain	Paths, tracks and field edges, rough on the ascent to Rubers Law
Highest point	Rubers Law, 424m
Parking	Streets around Denholm Green

Really, you should have been here 350 million years ago, when Rubers Law was an active volcano about as big as Vesuvius. It rose from a red sandy desert, with fine views of other nearby volcanoes at Minto Hills and Eildon.

Today, the volcano's feeder vent forms the rugged hilltop with its little cliffs. The preliminary walk through wooded Denholm Dean gives a glimpse of red rocks from that ancient desert. And the summit view, from the hill that rises proudly from the middle of the wide Tweed valley, still includes those spiky Eildon Hills. Plus, there's none of the hassle of using some monster amphibian as your pack animal.

Leave the large village green at the south corner (main road to Hawick) but turn off left into Westgate, to pass toilets. At a small gate turn right, down into **Denholm Dean**. Across a footbridge, follow the wooded valley upstream, soon forking left then crossing a second footbridge. At a path tee, turn right, soon to cross the third footbridge. The path then slants up to the wood's top edge.

Turn left, with a Scotways arrow, along the top of the wood, then keep ahead on a grass track between wide fences. ◀ At a lane turn left to a junction. Keep ahead for another 50 metres. As the lane bends left, take a track ahead down into a small wood. Cross a shallow ford to gates at the wood edge.

The Scotways arrow implies an ancient right of way: the wide-spaced fences suggest that was a drove road for cattle.

A plaque just south of the summit marks Prophet Peden's preaching point.

The path further left within the tree strip is part of a 'managed wild camping' zone.

Law summit from the north. The path passes a scrambly little cliff just before the white painted trig point. ◀

Turn back in the same direction, west of north, towards the triple-peaked Eildons. Soon you see a long strip of plantation below, running down towards Denholm: you'll be passing beside this. Take any path down to a clump of pines, and slant to the right through them to a wall-and-fence corner. A path runs down to right of this, then slants right, to the corner of the plantation strip. Two small gates on the right lead across the top of the plantation, then the path turns down to right of it.

Cross the end of a new track, and keep beside the trees down into a shallow wide valley. Turn left beside the plantation edge through two gates, then take a stile on the right, signed for Denholm and Gledswing Lo. ◀ Head up the field edge to its top corner. With woods ahead, turn left through a gate signed for Denholm.

Keep ahead to the wood edge (now looking out west) then take a path just inside the wood, bending right around its corner. You now have views over the wall to Denholm. Ignore a small gate signed Denholm and keep along the bottom edge of the wood to the top of a hedged stony path signposted for Denholm. Follow it slanting downhill. It becomes a track and turns down into the edge of **Denholm**. The Loaning street ahead leads to the A698; turn left to the big village green.

PEDEN THE PROPHET

During the Killing Times of the 1670s, hard-line Protestant ministers roved across the Southern Uplands holding illegal church services (conventicles) on the open hill. The most famous of them was Alexander Peden, disguised in a sinister goat-skin mask which can now be seen in the Museum of Scotland.

A small crag on Rubers Law, probably in the hollow south of the trig point, is 'Peden's Pulpit'. During one conventicle, government soldiers surrounded the hill, seeking to arrest or shoot down the worshippers. Peden appealed for divine help: 'Cast the lap of Thy cloak ower auld Sandy and thir poor things.' Mist descended onto the hill, and everybody escaped.