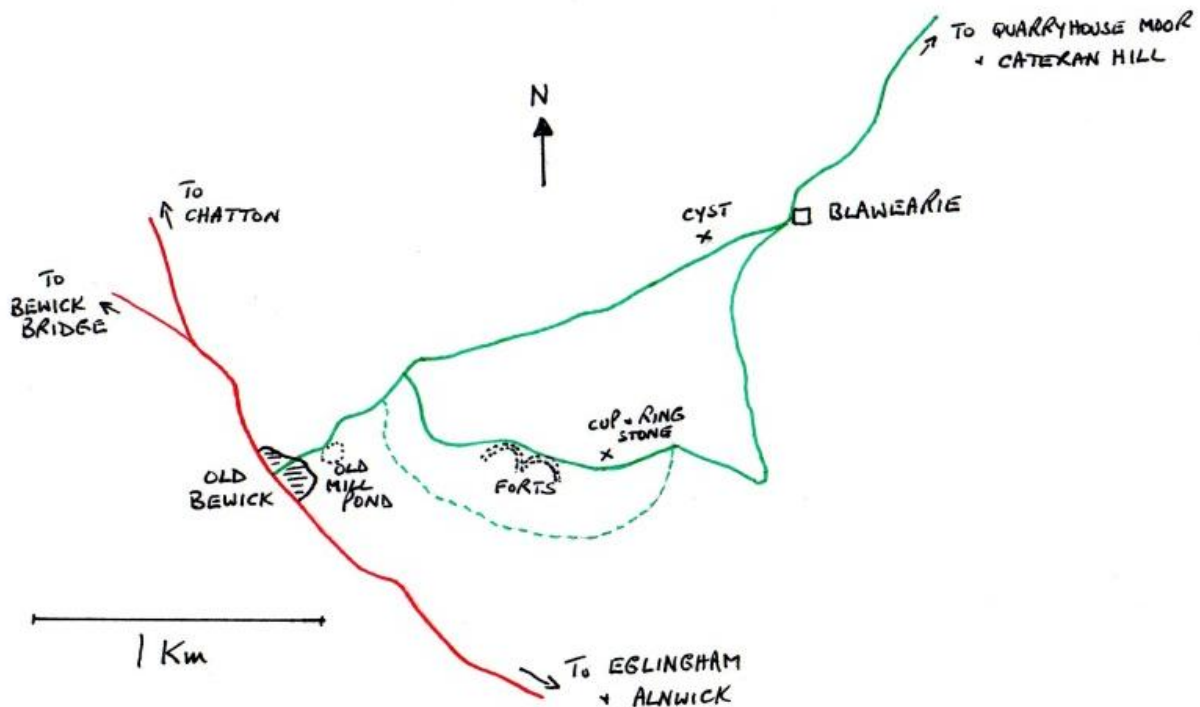


A Favourite Walk - Old Bewick to Blawearie and back via Bewick Hill



If you haven't walked to Blawearie you've missed a treat. Blawearie is a ruined farm with a haunting atmosphere all of its own. If I were poetic I might use the term 'faerie'. But it's no good me trying to describe it – you need to go there. Then if you choose your return route well you can explore a most amazing double hill fort on the southern edge of the Bewick Hill escarpment.

On the way there are other archaeological sites – a good cup-and-ring marked rock and Blawearie Cairn which is an important burial site from the Bronze Age, of which more anon.

Start: Old Bewick Farm (NU 066 215). **Total distance** c. 6.5 km (4 miles) **Conditions:** Some uphill, especially for the first half mile, and some wet patches – so good footwear is essential

Park on the wide road verge by the high stone wall of Old Bewick Farm. Take the track in front of the terraced farm cottages. Go through the gate with the Wrangham Estate's welcoming notice and climb up to the moorland. With Bewick Hill on your right, go through two more gates and continue to follow the main track – at one point there's a left fork but ignore it – until you start to see the copse of trees ahead of you that marks Blawearie (about 2km from the starting point).

About 400m before you reach Blawearie you'll see off to your left what at first seems to be a broken down Cheviot sheep stell. But don't be fooled because this is the Bronze Age Blawearie Cairn. In its centre is a big heap of stones with the remains of a circular perimeter wall. It was excavated in the 19thC and four stone-lined graves were found with pottery vessels, a flint knife and a necklace made up of 102 beads of jet and shale. Stan Beckensall excavated further in the mid-80s and found a pottery vessel with burnt human bones.

Blawearie itself was farmed until 1940 when the War Office commandeered it for military training and after the war the family opted not to return. The buildings are ruinous but the site, with its rock outcrops and trees has an extraordinary atmosphere. Not threatening, but almost magical.

From the farm you could opt to continue north to Quarryhouse Moor and try to find the amazing cave called Cateran Hole, but I'm assuming that you will now leave Blawearie and take the track south across the moor. If you are using an OS map ignore the indication of a right fork in this path. The last time I went there was no such branch in the path.

After about 1km you will come to a wall. Go sharp right here along the wall until you reach a wicket gate. Once again you'll have to ignore what the OS map tells you. My sketch map shows the OS path as a dotted line, but this takes you down and round the bottom of the hill. You actually want to stay on the top of the escarpment keeping the fence on your right. Otherwise you'll miss the forts.

Go through the gate and angle right towards the fence that runs up the gentle slope of the hill. After a few hundred metres you'll see a large stone on your right on the other side of the fence. There is a makeshift stile over the fence and it is worth getting over and looking at the stone because its upper surface is covered in cup-and-ring marks.

Get back over the fence and continue up the slope until you reach the very large semi-circular ditches and ramparts of the hill forts. They didn't need to be full circles because their southern flanks are on the edge of the steep cliffs which gave good protection.

Follow the track past the northern edges of the forts and you soon come to the top of the slope of Bewick Hill, down which there is a steep track (careful!) which comes to a stile at the bottom. Cross the stile and you find yourself back on the path that leads down to Old Bewick. One last thing to look at before you get to the farm is the old mill pond (at least I assume that's what it was) on your left. As mill ponds go this one had extremely well-constructed walls to keep the water in.

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