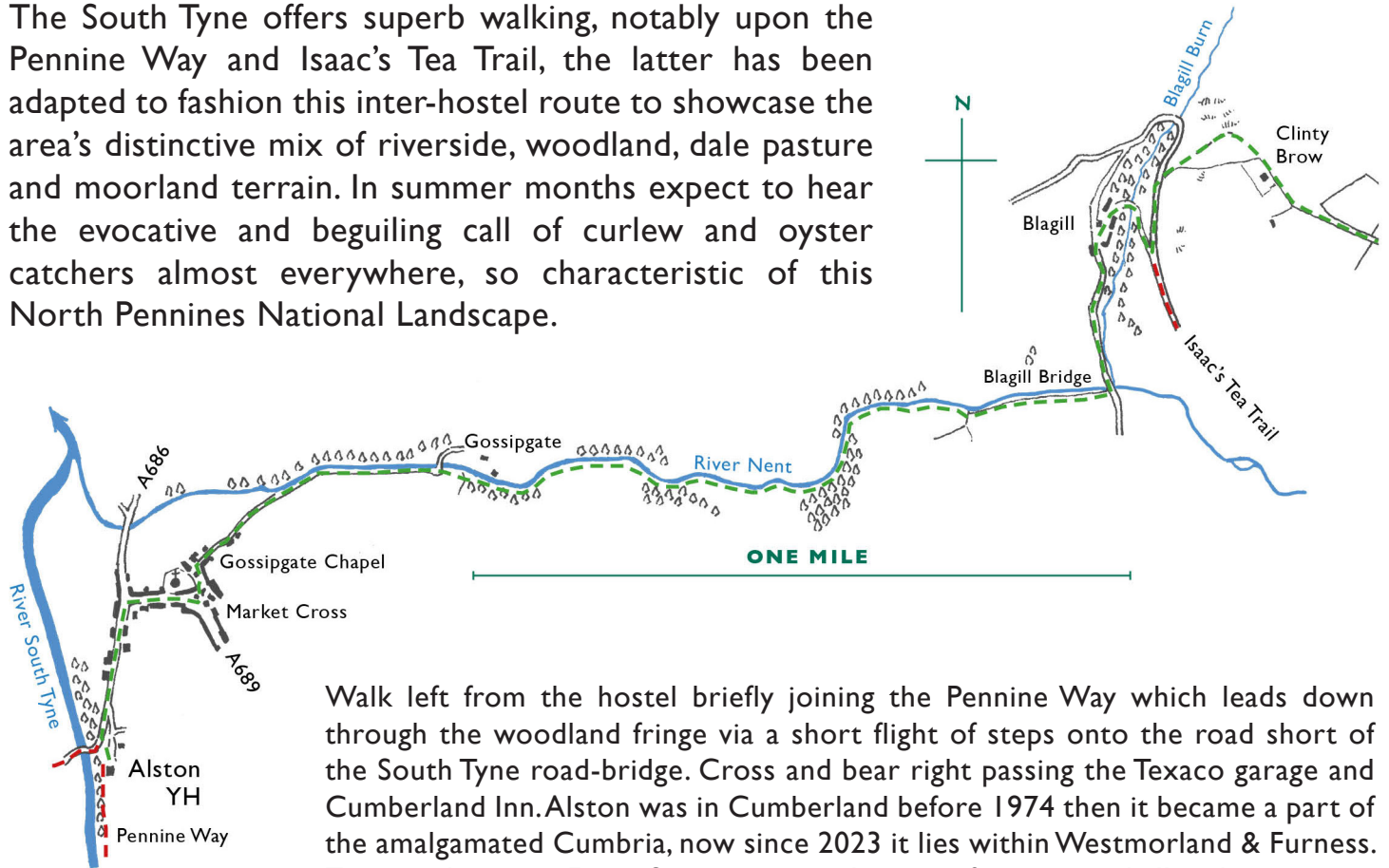


# INTER-HOSTEL WALKING ROUTE

## **Alston to Ninebanks** 6 miles 1050ft ascent approx time 4½ hours

Alston Hostel, otherwise known as Firs Edge, has undergone considerable improvements in the last couple of years and is a fabulous place to stay. In an area renowned for white-washed farmhouses and cottage exteriors, the hostel bucks that tradition as it wears a rather dashing dark grey coat.

The South Tyne offers superb walking, notably upon the Pennine Way and Isaac's Tea Trail, the latter has been adapted to fashion this inter-hostel route to showcase the area's distinctive mix of riverside, woodland, dale pasture and moorland terrain. In summer months expect to hear the evocative and beguiling call of curlew and oyster catchers almost everywhere, so characteristic of this North Pennines National Landscape.

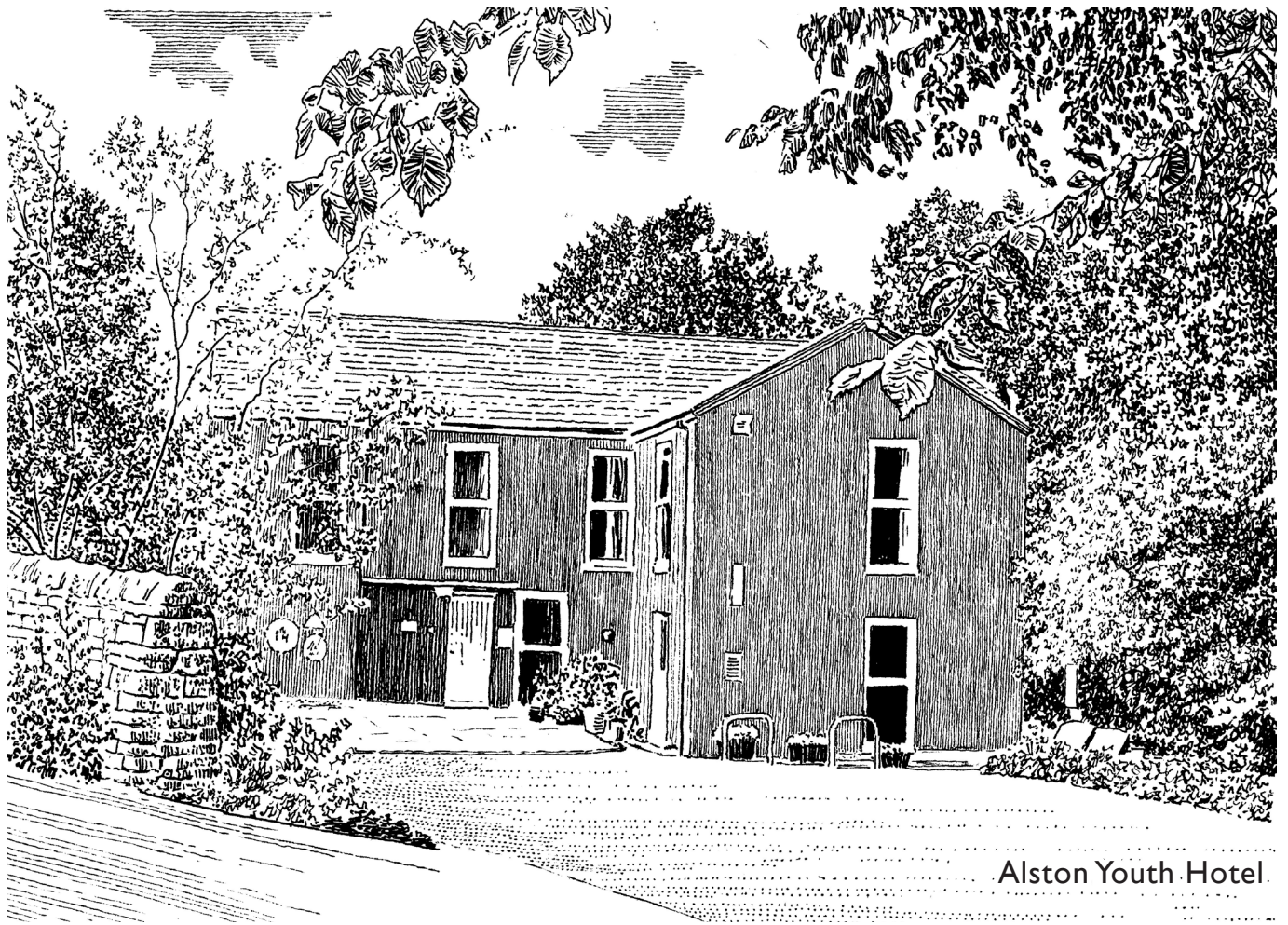


Walk left from the hostel briefly joining the Pennine Way which leads down through the woodland fringe via a short flight of steps onto the road short of the South Tyne road-bridge. Cross and bear right passing the Texaco garage and Cumberland Inn. Alston was in Cumberland before 1974 then it became a part of the amalgamated Cumbria, now since 2023 it lies within Westmorland & Furness. Turn up the steep Front Street passing the magnificent town hall and even more gracious Parish Church. Enter the heart of Alston, with its distinctive surround of

shops and surprisingly tall buildings centred upon the canopied Market Cross. Swing left before the Co-op passing between Cobbles Café and the Turks Head, further attractive houses are seen grouped in this area known as The Butts. This back lane leads on past the former Gossipgate Chapel. As the last bungalow is passed the walled lane descends by a pony enclosure, now as an open track it comes tight beside the River Nent with its distinctive carboniferous limestone bed passing a river level recording gauge. Though un-muddied the Nent suffers from the long after effects of lead and zinc extraction upstream at Nenthead, hence the greenish-yellow tinge and lifeless riverbed.

Reaching Gossipgate Bridge be sure to stand on the bridge to gain a lovely view upstream of a waterfall spilling over the limestone shelf. The name Gossipgate suggests townsfolk were of a habit of wandering this delightful quiet way and discussed local matters. Go through the kissing-gate before the bridge, guided by the Isaac's Tea Trail sign 'Blagill Bridge'. The meadow way leads quickly to a second kissing-gate entering woodland. The narrow path, tight beside the river, coping with tree roots undulates until it opens as a meadow way, a fence ensures close company with the river. After a plank and kissing-gate the path runs on with the fence close left, then another kissing-gate causes the path to switch sides of the continuing fence, soon to enter woodland again at a kissing-gate. Once again the narrow path hangs above the river until a further kissing-gate releases the path a little into lighter woodland coming down a short bank into the meadow. Following a new kissing-gate the path runs alongside a fence to a wall squeeze-stile onto the road at Blagill Bridge.



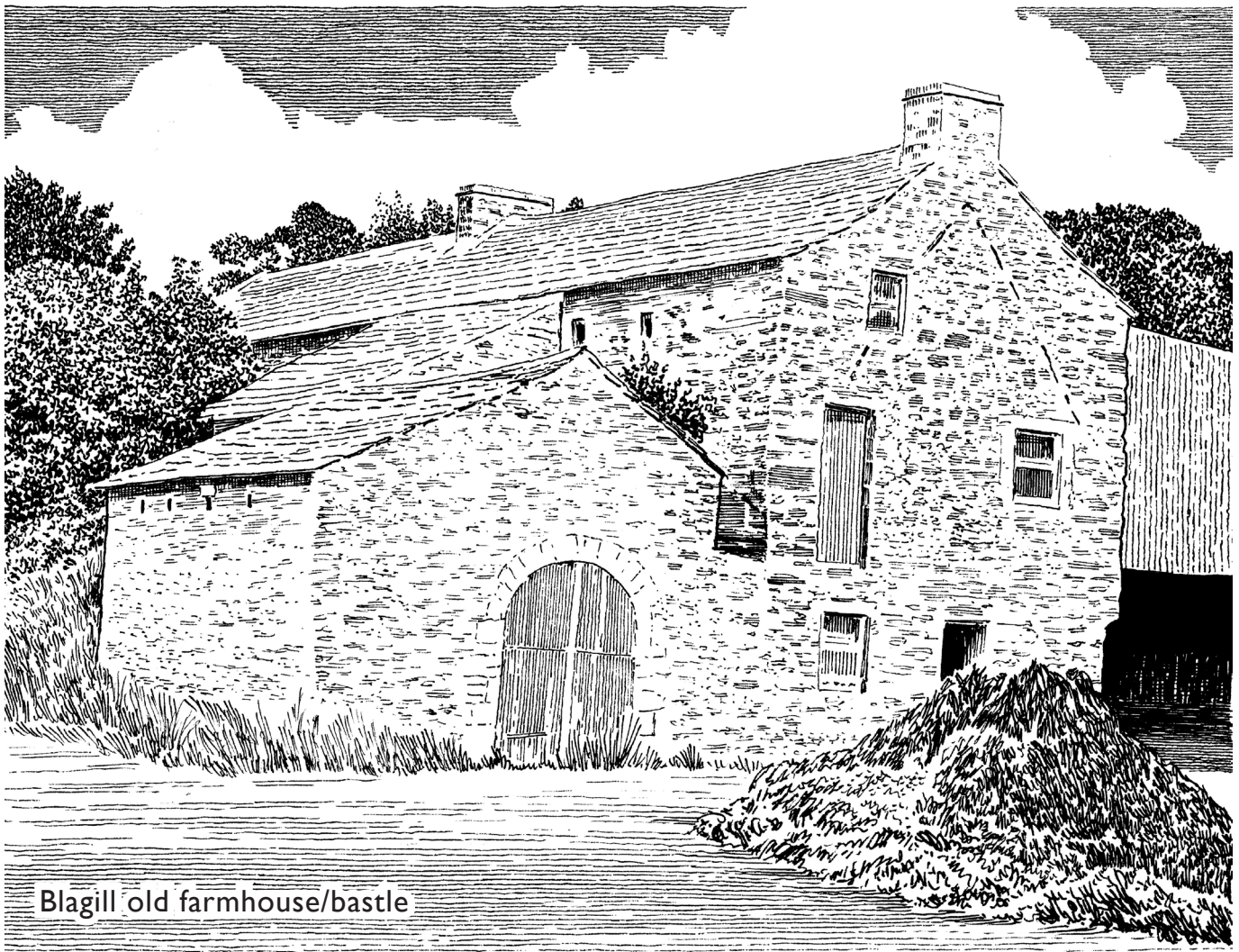


Alston Youth Hotel.



Alston Market Place





Blagill old farmhouse/bastle

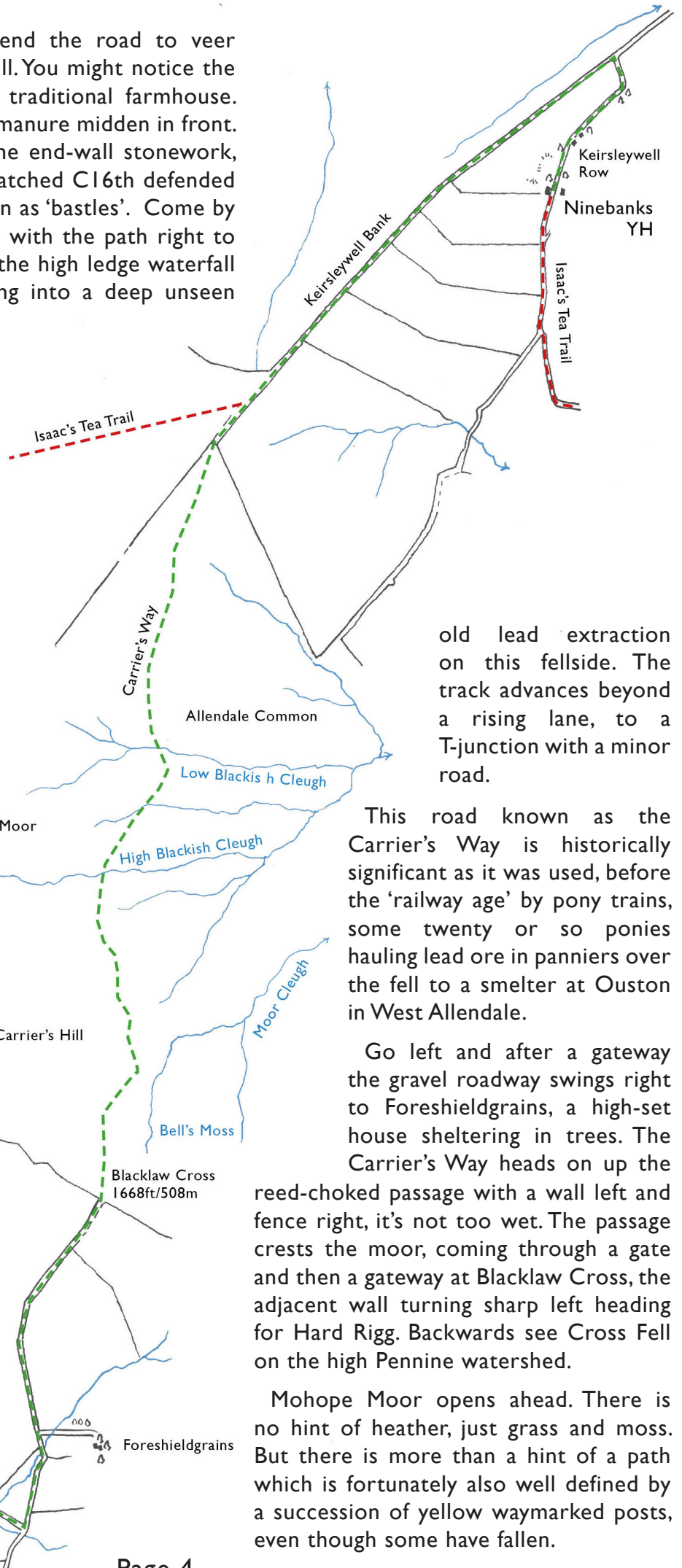


View from the Clinty Brow lane, the Carrier's Way runs right to left behind the barn



Turn left crossing the bridge, ascend the road to veer right into the farming hamlet of Blagill. You might notice the tall stone barn beyond the present traditional farmhouse. Invariably there will be a tractor and manure midden in front. Spot the steep pitched roofline in the end-wall stonework, this is a rare survival of a heather-thatched C16th defended farmhouse, such buildings were known as 'bastles'. Come by the big house Springbank descending with the path right to cross a bridge over Blagill Burn. See the high ledge waterfall down to the right, the burn tumbling into a deep unseen ravine.

The track comes up to join a minor road, turn left to come upon a gate on the right. sign Clinty Brow Farm with a 'public way' fingerpost. Follow the open tarmaced road up the steep slope it swings right and passes the tidy environs of the former farmstead with its wind turbine. The open roadway levels as it goes through a gate into a walled lane with lovely elevated views of the Nent valley. Note the settlement ponds in the valley where attempts are being made to filter out the pollution of lead and zinc. Close to the left as you advance see spoil banks from



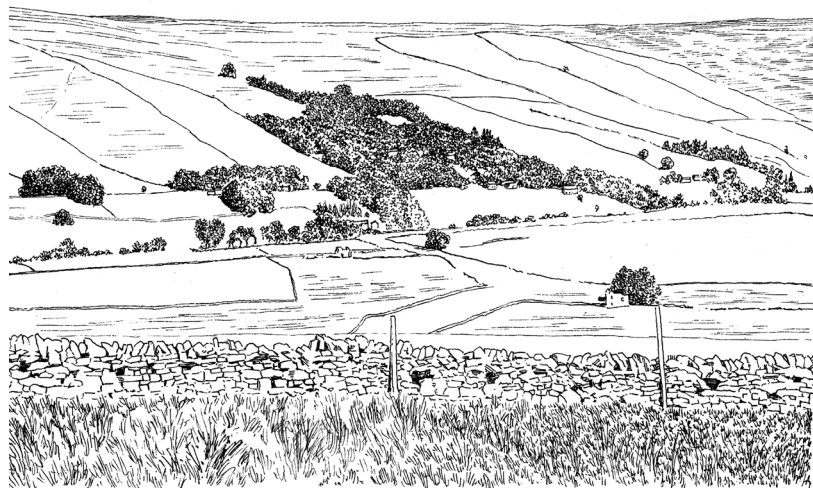
old lead extraction on this fellside. The track advances beyond a rising lane, to a T-junction with a minor road.

This road known as the Carrier's Way is historically significant as it was used, before the 'railway age' by pony trains, some twenty or so ponies hauling lead ore in panniers over the fell to a smelter at Ouston in West Allendale.

Go left and after a gateway the gravel roadway swings right to Foreshieldgrains, a high-set house sheltering in trees. The Carrier's Way heads on up the reed-choked passage with a wall left and fence right, it's not too wet. The passage crests the moor, coming through a gate and then a gateway at Blacklaw Cross, the adjacent wall turning sharp left heading for Hard Rigg. Backwards see Cross Fell on the high Pennine watershed.

Mohope Moor opens ahead. There is no hint of heather, just grass and moss. But there is more than a hint of a path which is fortunately also well defined by a succession of yellow waymarked posts, even though some have fallen.

There are some damp patches and tiny water channels, you'll dampen your boots barely to ankle height. The Pennine moorland horizons are exquisite and seem to stretch forever. You'll love the sense of freedom and company of curlew and the odd sheep. For all the lack of features the path is consistently visible even in mist. In fact I met a lady heading to Loveladyshield Hotel for afternoon tea on the sunny June Sunday I traversed the moor. The joy of the space is such that as the fence is spied drawing acutely in from the left on White Hill, to converge with a wall rising acutely from the right the moor is no more.

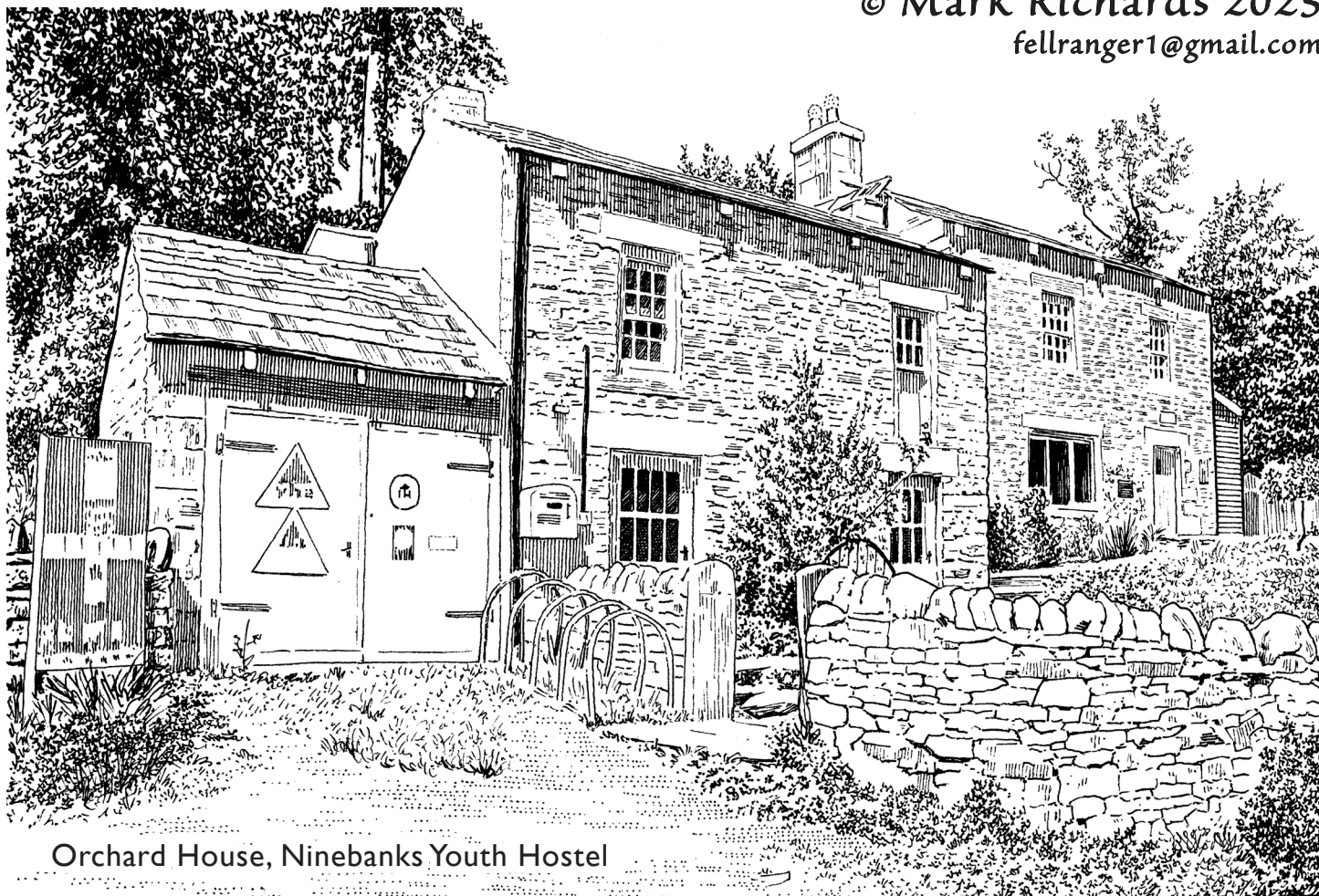


West Allendale from the Carrier's Way

Compensation the view of West Allendale. A new metal hand-gate, beside a gate set in a pond of sorts, ensures easy progress on down with the wall to come upon a stake with an orange teapot attached! Yes, the track coming in from the left is Isaac's Tea Trail once more having crossed the moorland ridge from the South Tyne. A gate giving access to the rough Keirsleywell Bank lane, overuse by off-roaders has torn the heart out of the sunken track, thankfully the bank on the left provides bouncy turf for the walker all the way down with West Allendale spread out ahead. Lower down spot a newly built section of drystone walling, a sign that this landscape is cared for and loved.

Coming onto the road swing right by the Coronation Oak Tree 2023, passing cottages in Keirsleywell Row to arrive at Orchard House. You'll instantly fall in love with the hostel and its setting, the valley and surrounding moorland giving scope for gloriously immersive wanderings. There is also a hostel further up the West Allan at Carrshield should you want to take a grand tour much as Isaac's Tea Trail may tempt you to Allendale Town over the horizon above East Allendale.

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Orchard House, Ninebanks Youth Hostel