

Route 1: Eden Church Trail

The smaller towns and villages of the Eden Valley and North Pennines

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Penrith (1): The historic market town of Penrith makes an appropriate beginning to our journey, for here is the site of one of Eden's earliest Churches, St Andrew's dating back to at least 1133.

From Penrith, for two hundred years the capital of Cumbria (in the 9th and 10th centuries), our discovery of Christian heritage now moves out into the smaller towns and villages in the lovely Eden Valley.



Eden Hall (2): Beside the path leading to Edenhall Church can be seen an ancient Celtic cross. This symbol of Christian belief in death and resurrection has a special poignancy here, for it was the place where food was left for villagers isolated by the plague which swept England in 1598. The Church alone survives near to where the old villager once stood. It contains splendid examples of stained glass dating from the 14th Century to the present day.

Kirkland (3): The Pennines, which border the Vale of Eden, offer by contrast a more rugged environment which had to be traversed in all weathers. In the 17th Century, the dead of the area had to be taken across the Moors to Kirkland for burial.

Alston (4): You will see St Augustine's spire as you approach one of England's highest market towns. The church is the fourth on the site and legend has it that St Augustine actually came here in the 7th century. The church gate contains the arms of Durham Diocese and the Royal Greenwich Hospital; as both once appointed the clergy.

On display inside are the 17th century clock (once the property of the Earl of Derwentwater); and the foundation stone of the market cross; erected by the locally born William Stephenson, Lord Mayor of London in 1764. A modern embroidery depicts the six churches of the Alston Team Parish.

Nenthead (5): The churches here are the highest in England. The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was built at a time of great revival in 1853. Adam Dodds was one popular itinerant preacher who toured the county after John Wesley: it is said that the letters "A.D" on a building refer to him!

The local lead mine owners were Quakers. They offered to build the villagers a meeting place, and such was the strength of the Christian faith that the people chose a Reading Room instead of a pub! Reputedly the first free public library in Britain, it can be seen opposite the Methodist Chapel. Killhope Lead Mine can be visited nearby.

Kirkoswald (6): The village takes its name from the Church of St Oswald. He set up a wooden cross and preached Christianity in the pagan community. Those whom he converted, St Oswald then baptised using water previously worshipped. The village's full conversion to Christianity was marked with the building of a Church on the spot where the baptisms took place; the spring being preserved as a well at the west end. The bottom of a hill is an unlikely place to find a Church. In later years, a tower was built on the top so the bells could be heard by the villagers beyond.

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