

# Northern Cross

*the Christian Easter pilgrimage to Holy Island – Lindisfarne*

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## Frequently Asked Questions



### Welcome,

We've gathered together a series of helpful answers to frequent questions, plus some important notes. Please read through it all, it aims to cover the general situations (but note there will still be some different specifics regarding to each Leg – walking group). If you have further questions, something we've forgotten to say, or you want to check something, email us or give us a call.

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### When does the pilgrimage start?

Walking groups (legs) gather on either the Friday evening (most groups) or Saturday evening (some, occasionally) before Palm Sunday - so that's one week before Easter. We actually start the walking fairly promptly on the morning of the following day - Saturday for most groups. We will have some form of gathering around the cross to mark our coming together as pilgrims.

### How do I get to the start point?

**Carlisle** Leg is accessible directly by train. **Lanark** Leg is accessible by train (typically from Glasgow or via bus from Edinburgh). Edinburgh is also close to **Haddington** Leg's start point, and Melrose (start for **St Cuthberts**) is reachable by bus from Berwick-on-Tweed or Newcastle. Bellingham (start for **Northumbrian**) is nearest to Hexham which can be reached by train, and it will typically be possible to make a pick up from Hexham railway station, by prior arrangement. Seahouses (**Family Leg**) is just off the A1 so well connected by road for those MPV journeys, although liaison over Hexham/ Berwick railway station pickups is possible by prior arrangement.

### How can we get back from Lindisfarne / Holy Island?

The pilgrimage finishes after lunch on Easter Sunday, and dependent on tide times ([details here](#)) for the tidal vehicle causeway, everyone departs very soon after. The nearest [railway station](#) is Berwick upon Tweed (30 minutes drive away) where there are reasonable coach and rail links to London, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Although it is ultimately up to individuals to arrange either lifts or shared taxis to the railway station, or to destinations southwards in England as desired, in practice lists of people offering or wanting lifts are put on a noticeboard to coordinate return journeys where possible. Northern Cross does not provide any official transport off Lindisfarne at the end of the pilgrimage.

### Should I bring my car?

We recommend public transport or lift sharing to the start and end points (thinking of the environment and costs). The Leg Leader may be able to co-ordinate travel arrangements given enough notice. While one or two support cars are required to carry luggage, food and weary pilgrims, more vehicles can be a burden when there are too many as they need to be moved day to day; and may well have to be left in a nearby town for most of the week.

If you must bring your car then it is only useful as a support car if some named people other than you can drive it, so please discuss with the Leg leadership and look into the costs involved in your car insurance, before making this decision.

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## How much do I have to carry?

Just your choice of daysack. Throughout the pilgrimage we will have support cars to transfer the baggage, or the injured and the exhausted. All that needs to be carried on the pilgrimage itself, aside from the cross, is a daysack, with essentials as waterproofs, water, and any personal snacks, energy bars etc.

**Note:** the principle exception to this is St. Ninian's Leg where support cars are not available - for these operate as unsupported walking groups, solely dependent on what the walkers carry on their backs. Also St Cuthbert's Leg walkers need to carry their lunches, and also it has some days crossing terrain where the nearest roads are quite some distance away, so for a car pickup mid-walk, walkers would need to specially divert 'sideways' away from that day's route. However all other Legs operate with full support as described.

## How difficult is the walking?

Each leg varies - the best descriptions are on the individual Leg pages. However please note that many of the routes include sections both exposed and high up, which in inclement weather can become temporarily unpleasant if you are not prepared with suitable wet weather gear etc! However we would emphasise that whilst weather in the Borders of England/Scotland can be unpredictable, our support vehicle is available (except as noted above) to carry those who are in need. It is important to understand that walking 70 to 120 miles in a week is physically challenging, but not beyond the capabilities of most people.

Not everyone necessarily walks all the way; there are jobs for car drivers, shoppers and cooks. The physical demand of Northern Cross is to have the will to go on and walk for several days in succession. Although many pilgrims manage well with little preparation (our frequent quickstops are the key to breaking up a long day's walk) it is a good idea to have a few substantial practice walks first, to harden your feet and check your gear. We are also joined from time to time by local people who help to share our burden. We can cater for all ages - from family groups with babies/ toddlers through to teenage children, to students, to those mid-life, and those retired. All are certainly welcome.

## How much does it cost?

The charge for walking with Northern Cross is in the approximate region of £180 (but varies by different group/Legs due to individual route costs), and this includes all food and accommodation. Note Family Leg has a different price structure, see the [Leg page](#) for details. A small non-refundable deposit of £20 is required to secure a place. The balance of payment is to be made either by late February or as requested by the Leg leadership team. More details can be given by the Leg leadership when you choose your intended Leg.

Remember to factor in **your own travel costs** to and from the pilgrimage.

A limited number of subsidised places are available at reduced rates, supported from central Northern Cross funds and by voluntary contributions from other walkers. Typical beneficiaries would be students and low/unwaged. If you wish to apply for a subsidised place, please indicate when you [apply](#), and this will be confirmed further to you. To discuss a booking to walk, or the possibility of a reduced rate, please contact the Coordinator via the [contact page](#).

## Where do I send my application?

Please use the [online booking form available here](http://www.northerncross.co.uk/join.htm) <http://www.northerncross.co.uk/join.htm> and provide all the necessary details. We will then get in touch with you.

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## **What does the cost include?**

The charge covers all accommodation, breakfast, packed lunches, evening meals, and all the associated luggage support transport from the start of the Legs through to the end of the pilgrimage on Lindisfarne on Easter Sunday lunchtime. Additional costs are limited to your cost in getting to the start point, and in returning from Lindisfarne (lifts or taxis to Berwick train station (30 minutes journey) can be arranged but should be costed for). During the pilgrimage additional costs will be the price of any extra drinks, chocolate, snacks or odd lunchtime pints, or such like that you may wish to buy. Please note that cash points are limited to the major settlements of which there are few if any, so please remember to bring cash with you.

## **How do I pay for the week?**

Each leg has different times when costs are incurred. Firstly there are upfront costs incurred beforehand in organisation, and then through the week expenses depend on the mix of accommodation, daily food, and fuel for the support car. This is all managed for you by the leadership team.

As a pilgrim, you just need to pay your £20 deposit beforehand, (to secure your place), and then pay the remainder cost either just before the week, or by bringing cash with you. The Leadership will advise how /when they prefer this to be paid.

## **Boots and Waterproofs.**

It is essential that anyone embarking on this pilgrimage has good walking boots or stout shoes that are bedded in, and waterproofs (including **trousers**). Without these, it can make the experience extremely miserable, never mind painful if you have unsuitable footwear.

## **Additional points to consider?**

If anyone who is considering applying for the pilgrimage is unsure as to their suitability on health grounds they should check with their doctor / GP. It is also strongly recommended that all pilgrims take out insurance cover (for loss or damage to personal property & personal accident cover) for the walk. While Northern Cross is insured for public liability purposes this does not cover loss or damage to individuals personal property & personal accident.

## **Where do I stay / where do we sleep?**

Remember that accommodation is not luxurious - this is not a typical holiday - nightstops range from village hall floors (typically) to Youth Hostels (occasionally), so more or less all accommodation will be communal. Many pilgrims bring a blow-up mattress or a camp bed and a pillow to ease the pains of a day's walk. It can often be cold in the halls, so make sure your sleeping bag is warm. Earplugs are also recommended. **Handy tip**; bring an empty pillowcase and stuff it with your clothes to make an instant pillow at night!

On Lindisfarne itself the SVP hostel is simple, but provided with beds and showers in small group dormitories.

## **What about liability?**

NorthernCross as an organisation is insured for public liability purposes for the duration of the pilgrimage. As noted elsewhere, this does not cover loss or damage to individuals personal property & personal accident. Everyone who comes on the pilgrimage comes at his or her own risk, and it is up to you to decide if personal insurance cover is required.

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## **What happens on the Island? (Lindisfarne/ Holy Island)**

Once we have reached our historic destination, after a hard week's pilgrimage we all have two nights on the island. We stay in the St. Vincent de Paul's children's hostel which is the only place large enough to house all of us on the Island. It is run by volunteers who cook our food. We all sit down together for breakfast, lunch and evening meals. This gives us a good chance to catch up with one another and to pass on messages to the group of services, activities or general notices. All of the activities and services are non-compulsory. You may of course do as you wish. Some people prefer to stay at a B&B on the island, although you would have to book well in advance and it will be more expensive than the SVP hostel.

Once we have met other pilgrims from other legs and crossed the sands, much of Good Friday is used for recovery and reflection of the events of the week. On Saturday morning we have review leg meetings and our overall Northern Cross review meeting (like an AGM but not) in order to make elections for the following year's and confirm decisions on how Northern Cross will run. The afternoon generally consists of shopping, viewing the Priory and other places in Lindisfarne, walking around the island, collecting wood for the Bonfire, and / or private or group reflections on the pilgrimage – **all of these are optional**. In the Saturday evening we have a major Easter Vigil service which is followed by a celebration into the night. On Sunday we clean the hostel before we parade around Lindisfarne with the crosses we carried celebrating. Then we leave the Island.

## **Who is organising the pilgrimage?**

Northern Cross is run by those who take part, a volunteer group of ordinary Christians. All the preparations are done in their spare time. It is not a profit-making business-type operation in which a service is delivered to those who pay the charge. Everyone who comes on the pilgrimage is expected to participate to make the pilgrimage a valuable Easter experience for all.

What we do, we do for ourselves, so please come along with a willing and generous spirit. You will have plenty of opportunity to demonstrate your tea and sandwich making skills. We do all our own cooking, washing-up and loading the support vehicles, so we ask all pilgrims during the walk to play their part in helping out with various duties. We also organise our own music and liturgy, and welcome contributions to music or liturgy, so please make any particular music, liturgical **or other relevant skills** (ie First Aid) known to the Leg leadership team beforehand as this is always good to know when planning the pilgrimage.

## **Can I join you just for the Good Friday crossing?**

'Non-pilgrims' are certainly welcome to walk alongside us crossing the sands, but you must be at Beal Sands by the 'gathering time' [listed](#) and follow the [instructions given at this URL: <http://www.northerncross.co.uk/goodfriday.htm>](#)

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