

Pass through the wide gate, now in a broad walled lane, that quickly constricts, bear right - yellow waymark 'Helm Crag'. A damp embowered passage leads smartly to the steep bracken and rock slopes at the foot of Helm Crag proper. Veer right and quickly left on a rising path, cross the small patch of quarry spoil to rise by wooden handrails. Momentarily the ground levels, beside an old quarry, thoroughly restored in nature's raiment. Rising again on a pitched path close by a wall, veering left under the yew-clothed White Crag, clambering by ice-smoothed rock shelves, enjoy fine views down into the verdant pastures of lower Easedale and across to Silver How and Great Castle How with Swinescar Hause between and the juniper forest of Blindtarn Moss.

The path dips then with a lovely view up Far Easedale the path switches right climbing on grass to a saddle of the ridge. Here peer over the brink to Town Head and the Great Tongue leading up to Seat Sandal, Grisedale Hause and Fairfield. The lion's share of the Helm Crag climb is all but complete. Walk up the ridge to the first eye-catching outcrop, a lion if ever there was, with a jumble of boulders cluttering the rift hollow beneath. The ridge path is a joy to tread and leads majestically to the main summit outcrop 405m/1,329ft, a tilted jagged mass of rock which will draw an camera from any pack. If not hands to rock, the scramble and subsequent descent are not really difficult as long as you have the basics of bouldering. Be consoled, the view from the top is no different from the grass below, this is a fine spot to view Steel Fell and Dunmail Raise with its backdrop of the Helvellyn range.

The main attraction is the enticing ridge continuing to the north-west over Gibson Knott. The path pitches down easily from directly behind the main outcrop to reach Bracken Hause. Paths exist trending down either side into Greenburndale and Far Easedale, in each case bracken dominates, the former the more pleasant trail if you're thinking of curtailing the walk.

However, our walk keeps to the ridge path, though this contrives to hold a leftward bias off the true ridge-top leading to the summit knoll of Gibson Knott above Horn Crag, a small summit cairn a good spot to pause 421m/1,380ft. On my visit, in early September, the cairn was swarming with a cloud of flying ants which seem to love sweaty walker's heads, sticking like glue, though they don't seem to sting: after all the pop entertainer Sting has a holiday home in Grasmere so they wouldn't, would they?

The ridge continues pleasantly undulating, note the throne among a mass of boulders on the right. The path dips briefly through a trough then slants steadily over Pike of Carrs and patches of eroded peat - hence the stepping stones, inserted to reduce the impact of us walking types!

The wet ridge to Steel Fell drifts right, but the main path strides on to the cairn on Calf Crag 537m/1,762ft, from where Deer Biolds Crag, invariably hard to see being in heavy shadow by the time you arrive - unless you come on a morning yomp. The whole mass of high ground backing the crag, Tarn Crag leading to Codale Head fills the southern gaze while westward the flat horizon of Greenup Edge leads the eye round right to Ullscarf, often considered the centre-point of Lakeland.

The ridge path is never in doubt, though you may be tempted to drift right onto the marshes fringes of a lochan to catch the lovely reflections of clouds and blue sky mirrored in its waters. The path arrives at the saddle at the very head of Far Easedale marked by a bleach white cairn and the remnants of a metal fence, the old gateway still intact slightly right of the cairn.

The trans-ridge path to Greenup Edge bound for Stonethwaite and Borrowdale, dips west through the wild head of Wythburndale across the northern slopes of High Raise below the broken Ash Crag. Our route turns left following the well-trod and maintained path into Far Easedale.

To untrained eyes it's a sparse landscape but far from dull, wild gills tumble down the fellsides into the marshy basin, a patchwork of colour and abstract textures. The broken wall of Ferngill Crag is followed by Deer Biold Crag which becomes strikingly apparent up to the right as the path weaves on by minor fords. Horn Crag, and as the path paces along the narrow trod, Helm Crag have their moments vying for your attention. Indeed there is even a Moment Crag between Pike of Carrs and Horn Crag.

The regular path from Easedale Tarn on the popular circuit via Sour Milk Gill joins on the lead down to Stythwaite Steps. The stepping stones have gone, replaced by a substantial timber footbridge - used as much by sheep as man. The character of the path changes again as the beck becomes more companionable.

Duly walls draw in about the path. Rugged walls and a stone-bedded path lead on beyond Brimmer Head Farm to meet the outward trail at the fork in the walled way near the branch to Lancrigg. Perhaps now you can consider that buttered scone and tea or cool sparkling water with ice and lemon?

After walk refreshment

Grasmere has no shortage of post-walk retirement, from temperance or tipple, from Baldry's Tearoom to hotel bars the choice is yours by inclination.

Picture Gallery

Forty colour images can be viewed on the website which are more telling of this walk than these words.

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