

PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

11 Greendale Horseshoe from Nether Wasdale

an eagle's eye view of the walk



distance : 13.4km/8.4 miles *time* : allow 6 hours
ascent : 808m/2,650ft *grade* : quite strenuous

PARK: Either in the capacious pub car park at The Screes (seek proprietor's permission) or on the green by the blue-painted maypole in front of the little parish church at Nether Wasdale GR125041.

WALK SUMMARY: A magical mix of lowland woods and pastures at the walk's beginning and end, with a great gather of fells in its midst, the rugged scarp of Buckbarrow approximately 427m/1,400ft, the barren whaleback of Seattallan 693m/2,274ft and the deceptively simple traverse of mid-height Middle Fell 585m/1,919ft.

MAPS: OS Outdoor Leisure 6 The English Lakes South-western area, Harveys Superwalker Lakeland West, Outdoor Atlas and British Mountain Maps Lake District.

Shy side of Wasdale

Visitors to Wasdale are invariably bent on reaching the lake to admire the wild screes and the famous dalehead circle of fells, however the wooded lower pastures up from Gosforth and Santon Bridge provide the perfect lead into the high fells and are a delight to explore. The rugged façade of Buckbarrow, an obvious climb, followed by a great leg-stretching march over Nether Wasdale Common onto Seattallan then turning back over Middle Fell makes a natural fell circuit. In haste most fellwalkers actually choose to start from the open road at Greendale rather than Nether Wasdale,

oblivious of the virtues of the longer approach.

The latter part of the walk enjoys superb perspectives towards the magnificent screes of Illgill Head and Whin Rigg peering above stately oakwoods – the middle section of this latter stage belongs to Woodhow Farm, currently on the market for £1.1 million, rough grazing, it seems, has a value well above agricultural returns in this majestic setting.

Nether Wasdale is exemplary as a community, whilst forfeiting nothing to its setting it serves the needs of the visitor with two hotels, a pub with B&B, a sensitively cared for camping ground and there is even a beautifully positioned camping barn at Murt Farm. It is not surprising that it has been a national finalist in the Pride of Britain Award, a regular winner of Cumbria in Bloom and the Best Kept Small Village, it is delightful - full of understated charm. Before you start walking take a few moments to look inside the little church of St Michael and All Angels, note its recently exposed plasterwork with Latin text, breathe in its aura of calm that will set you in the right frame to enjoy the outdoors, at peace with a calamitous world.

Ramble on

Follow the footpath signed 'Gill and Buckbarrow' this leads via the farmhouse and sheep-handling pens at Church Stile Farm. During my recent visit the hefted Herdwicks were having a welfare check having recently been separated from their latest crop of lambs - the distinctive black lambs seen a little later on, busily fattening up on the late flush of grass caused by this particularly mild season.

The track leads on by the farm's attractively laid out farm holiday park (for camping and touring motor homes - permanent caravans only). The site, well merits the Gold Conservation Award posted at the entrance: a great deal of thought has gone into the details of environmental impact, this is no municipal park. The woodland habitat surrounding the site encourages birds, bats and insects; a serpentine woodland walk, separate from the right-of-way, allows site visitors to gain an intimate view of this treasured place leading to a bench with a lovely view up the valley.

The waymarked footpath bears right onto a green track leading beside an oakwood to a ladder stile. A more confined path rises through gorse to reach a further ladder stile and duckboards, the pasture footpath heads on via gates with Buckbarrow a striking feature ahead. Enter an outgang lane at a gate, this leads via a ford and footbridge, passing Gill Farm it becomes a gravelled farm access lane. Rising by a cottage, cross the cattle grid then bear right joining the open road.

Almost at once step off the road, ascend to the right of Gill Beck with the rising wall close right. The wall is soon lost on the obvious ascending path through the depleting bracken, the path draws right on the steady climb with every excuse to stop and look back over the diminutive Tash Tarn and the wood-dappled vale. Ford the upper gill, rising with the ridge, either scramble up the steep slab in the upper rock tier or follow the grass path left skirting all difficulties. The path clearly

forks, though the intent to reach the summit cairn of Buckbarrow will lure the walker naturally right, through the modest rock-bands. The cairn is a lovely place to pause and admire The Screes across the valley, the length of Wastwater and the Scafell massif. The name Buckbarrow is likely to mean 'the craggy place of he-goats'.

Backtracking, follow the swelling undulating ridge with a path apparent on the next brow, continue north-east to the old shepherd's cairn on Glade How. An acrobatic kestrel swept past me in this vicinity which was indeed appropriate as Glade meant 'red kite' the only other representation of this place-name in Lakeland is Glade Howe in Naddle Forest near Haweswater. Re-introductions of this once rare, fine delta-tailed bird of prey elsewhere in the UK, have led to a gradual increase in the number of sightings in Cumbria.

The open pasture loses its rocky ribs on the steady rise to the isolated cairn on Cat Biels, evidently once the frequent of wild cats. To the west the towers and turrets of Sellafeld are a reminder of twentieth century technology, a stark contrast with this bare upland which is almost devoid of man-made distractions, intervening clear-felled conifers in the upper Bleng valley apart. Bleng is an intriguing river-name and appears to mean 'the dark one', the earliest record being from 1577. A narrow path winds easily on along the broad ridge in a confident north-easterly direction rising onto Seatallan's gently domed top.

A cairned wind-shelter has been adapted from a broad-girth tumulus, a matter of twenty yards west of which stands a stone-built Ordnance Survey column otherwise the summit is barren. Enjoy the spacious views: Haycock seems perhaps more distant than one might have expected, Scoat Fell and Red Pike are in simple profile, while Great Gable, and the Scafells beyond Yewbarrow sit grand and aloof. The name Seatallan means 'high land belonging to Ailene', a old Irish Norse personal-name also represented in Starling Dodd (stylized 'Ailene's mountain path').

A small cairn gives guidance for the easy, progressively steepening, descent from the north-east brow. As the ridge starts to ease, with the deep hollow of the Pots of Ashness below, break right guided by a prominent cairn on a rock. Pass under the rocky bluff of Winscale Hows, along a definite shoulder to reach the broad rushy saddle at the head of Greendale. In misty conditions take care to avoid being drawn down into the deep Nether Beck valley. From the saddle Greendale Tarn can be espied downdale, the upland bowl within which rests is less than emerald. The intention is to keep to the emerging ridge leading south via prominent and avoidable rock castles onto Middle Fell.

In contrast with last month's constant flow of walker encounters on the Helm Crag ridge, I only spotted five people on my travels, two were non-English speaking Poles, with whom I exchanged a cheery nod, one was completing the walk as I began, only two did I manage a good extended conversation. Namely Ian Smith and

his young son from Towcester in Northants. Ian is a keen member of the On-line Fellwalking Club (www.fellwalkingclub.co.uk - check out their quarterly journal 'The Lost Sheep') founded during the travails of Foot and Mouth in 2001 by Blackburn-based fell-walking enthusiast Peter Burgess - there must be something about Blackburn and fellwanderers!

The cairn is a further place to stop and enjoy the Wasdale scene. The fell-name described the high fell between the two 'barrows' - Buckbarrow and Yewbarrow. From the open road, running close to the shores of Wastwater, Middle Fell looks uninviting with no hint of a break in the irregular craggy wall. However, a clear path, free of obstacles runs over the top leading down the south-south-west ridge to join the Greendale Tarn path. Lower down there are views across the ravine to the cascading Tongue Gills tumbling from the vicinity of a tall cairn on Buckbarrow. Wainwright, meticulous in recording such detail, never mentioned it, so this fine cairn must be less than forty years old.

The Wasdale Screes command attention as the path sweeps down through the bracken to reach the open space (parking) next to Greendale House. Go right along the road and, crossing Greendale Bridge, take the footpath left at the gate signed 'Galesyke'. The clear path leading down through Roan Wood emerges into pasture at a gate, a green track ensues. After the second gate, ignore the signed path to the lake, advance to a third gate by the attractive rocky eminence of Ashness How.

Ignore the fenced lane at the next gate. Turn immediately right at the stile, follow the green track via a gate bear left upon meeting a wall in open woodland crossing the gated Scale Bridge. Go half-left, the short distance to pass through the gate and wall squeeze stile. Joining the green bridleway go left, with the wall close left to a gate at Mill Place. Pass the two enchantingly sited and tended cottages then wander down the access lane to the road. Go right to complete this grand little fell and footpath tour. How convenient, at hand The Screes and Strands, a combined pub and hotel business. The hotel-name is intriguing and probably derives from the old name for 'a sandy shore', of Wastwater presumably.

After walk refreshment

At Nether Wasdale: The Screes/Strands Hotel and Low Wood Hotel, the latter for cream teas in the elevated conservatory, a special treat; at Santon Bridge: Bridge Inn; at Gosforth: Lion and Lamb, The Wheatsheaf, and The Globe. Not forgetting the Wasdale Head Inn in't tu'ther direction, at the dramatic head of Wasdale.

Picture Gallery

Forty colour images can be viewed on the BBC Radio Cumbria website taken on my two most recent visits, separated by two weeks in early and mid-October, the rapid move to autumn colours can be detected.

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