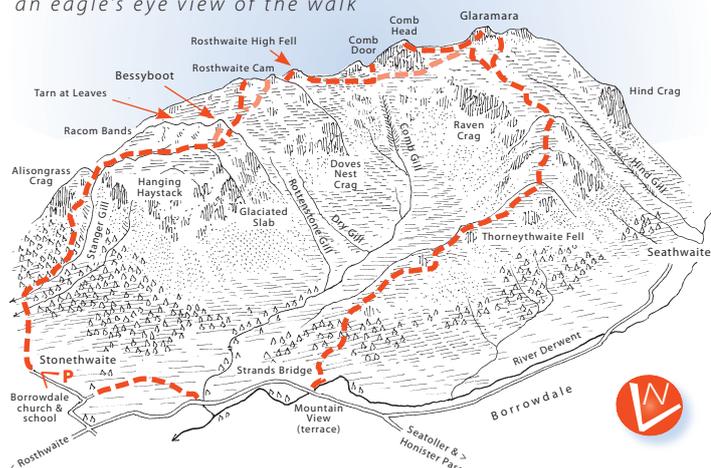


# PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards  
on BBC Radio Cumbria

## 12 Glaramara from Stonethwaite

*an eagle's eye view of the walk*



*distance* : 10km/6.25 miles    *time* : allow 6.5 hours  
*ascent* : 762m/2,500ft    *grade* : strenuous

**PARK:** A suitably discreet lay-by GR 261139 has been created about half-way along the minor road from Borrowdale primary school towards the beautifully situated hamlet of Stonethwaite.

**WALK SUMMARY:** A natural horseshoe, wandering over the rugged high fell pasture of Rosthwaite Fell from the head of Comb Gill, slipping up through Comb Door onto Comb Head, crossing a damp hollow onto the summit rock castle of Glaramara. Turning north, the route descends the popular ridge path down Thorneythwaite Fell, a memorably scenic finale as late afternoon light traces across distant Derwentwater and Skiddaw. Do not undertake this walk in misty conditions, Rosthwaite High Fell and the connection to Glaramara is no place for first time visitors to these confusing fell tops.

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

### Rosthwaite High Fell?

The Scafell massif sends two arthritic finger ridges north into Borrowdale: the stubby thumb of Seathwaite Fell - widely associated with its rain gauge recording it as the wettest ground in England; the high rolling Glaramara ridge ending in the knobby-knuckled Rosthwaite Fell, beginning from the false Esk Hause, the pass carrying the ancient high path from Great Langdale to Wasdale, ground swells onto Allen Crag then rocks and rolls north via Lincomb Tarn to culminate on Glaramara. Glaramara echoes of mysterious Irish origins, scabbling through sources

suggests it to be Irish Norse, though problematic perhaps it translates as 'the shieling of the ravines'.

The ridge splits around Comb Gill with Thorneythwaite Fell falling swiftly towards Seatoller. From the craggy crest of Comb Head the two-part, triple-summited, Rosthwaite Fell runs on down to end abruptly above Stonethwaite. Rosthwaite Fell is a confusing ridge, problematic in mist and, as I found during my most recent visit, the ideal place to run a navigation course: a small party, led by Stuart Carter, proprietor of Climb365 based in Windermere, was using the northern sector of the fell as a challenging environment for training on a day of wintery squalls and swirling cloud.

Traditionally, the summit of the fell is identified as the conical top known as Bessyboot. This is reasonable in terms of its proximity to Rosthwaite, but most unsatisfactory in terms of the whole mass of fell itself. For heading south from this lovely little summit, the ridge crosses the broad depression containing Tarn at Leaves then mounts robustly onto the great mass of rugged ground with two distinct high points.

Viewed from the Borrowdale road en route to Seatoller, and from Bessyboot, Rosthwaite Cam is the definite summit. However, even Alfred Wainwright conceded that this characterful 'lion without a lamb' rock is dwarfed by a peak across Great Hollow. In hindsight, when I wrote my guide to the Mid Western Fells in the Lakeland Fellranger series, I should have identified this rock peak as Rosthwaite High Fell, but I chose a somewhat enigmatic name which distinguished it no less effectively.

To mark the first anniversary of Park and Stride I am inviting listeners to email me via: [markbrichards@btinternet.com](mailto:markbrichards@btinternet.com) with the name I gave to the summit in my guide. The first received will be rewarded with a signed copy of one of my guides, and, as a further instance of generosity a second signed guide will go to the first person to give the date on the 50p coin I inserted into a notch on that summit! (See photo 22 in the website gallery accompanying this feature which confirms where I left it: the coin will also contribute to your post-walk refreshment, unless, of course, someone else innocently makes the discovery first!)

### Boot up for Bessyboot

Walk through the tiny community of Stonethwaite thereby sharing the progress of the 'Cumbria Way' and Wainwright's 'A Coast to Coast Walk'. The setting is sublimely Lakeland, the cottages authentically old and harmonious, however, Rosthwaite Fell casts its shadows all too soon across this community in winter months. Whilst at this time of year The Peathouse tearoom will be closed, the Langstrath Country Inn has the happy knack of being open all day hitting the mark at day's end, pop a mental postit in your mind.

The tarmac ends on a ramp rise above The Keld cottage, advancing a little above the meadow level. For all the roughness of the track the potential for car encounters persists, this is also the access to the National Trust camp site. The site lives up to the hamlet-name, for it is indeed 'a woodland sheltered stony clearing on the

strath next to Stonethwaite Beck'. The camp site entrance is the key for the start of the Rosthwaite Fell ascent. Go through the green metal gate on the right directly facing the entrance. The path quickly enters the open wooded environs beside the excited waters of Stanger Gill, an impressive series of fuming cascades. The path was pitched some fifteen years ago but the ascent is not plain sailing, there are a few awkward moments, and in damp weather the roots and stones are slippery with the algae as slick as ice after rain, so watch how you go. Climb to a stile in a short wall projecting from Alisongrass Crag, the path hugging the undercliff to zig zag onto grass. Take your breath here and look back, it is a majestic scene: the craggy walls of Hanging Haystack framing the deep green vale of Stonethwaite, looking beyond the Jaws of Borrowdale to Skiddaw. The gill is renowned as a place to spot ring ouzel, a declining species elsewhere, flourishing here.

The path enters a tiny amphitheatre where the wind can swirl confronting the walker emerging from the comparative shelter of the steep pitched trail. Keep right beside the beck, hop over a ford then pass the end of a short wall leading to a more awkward ford beneath the top waterfall in Stanger Gill. The narrow path climbs the opposite bank, ignore the more obvious path leading straight on, bear left on the narrow trod effectively keeping company with the headwaters of Stanger Gill. Drift slightly right as peaty ground intervenes, and on meeting exposed peat hags the path swings left under a bank. The last of a succession of rocky ridges, known as Racom Bands, comes close left, this can be clambered up as a direct route (no path) to the cairn on Bessyboot 551m/1,808ft.

Alternatively, keep with the natural southward progress of the narrow path climbing to the summit from the head of Dry Gill, though this does mean backtracking to continue. The charming name Bessyboot derives from either a lost sheepfold (booth/bothy), presumably named after a particular shepherd's wife Bessy, the local pet form of Elizabeth, or it might just refer to the reasonably sheltered part of the fell. Consistent with several spots on this ridge the view west is best: across upper Borrowdale to Gillercomb, with Sour Milk Gill prominent, and Honister Pass.

Descending from the cairn, Tarn at Leaves comes fully into view, a barren place, made all the more lifeless by the knowledge that it is devoid of fish. It was a long held practice of miners to stock any decent body of high fell water, they didn't here! The name is intriguing, rushes fringe its shallow shores, what is meant by 'at Leaves' has not been satisfactorily explained.

The ridge path passes under a bank surmounted by a large erratic boulder then takes a damp line holding an eastern bias onto the rising ridge. An indeterminate path can be sought halfway, it leads half-right up a gully directly to Rosthwaite Cam. This is a worthwhile move, the top of the Cam is an easy rock scramble (from the west side) and a superb viewpoint, particularly across the deep re-entrant Comb Gill valley to Raven Crag. The crag is the sole preserve of serious rock climbers, the easiest route known as 'Corvus' (named from the Latin for a raven), is in a league beyond fellwalking. The cliff,

almost permanently in shadow, is split by a gully out of which gushes a fuming white waterfall in wet weather. The Comb Gill valley, infrequently visited by fellwalkers, is a geologically designated SSSI: featuring the ravine of Comb Gill itself at the head, and Dovesnest Crag with its massive rock slip caves and chimneys. Neither are places where fellwalkers should venture – though one may climb out of the valley on the steep sides of these features.

The term Cam derives from the Norse for 'a haircomb', hence the stones surmounting a field wall became known as cams, this large rock apparently likened to a solitary wall stone. From the Cam you can comprehend the final rise of Rosthwaite Fell, it really ought to be called Rosthwaite High Fell. Traverse Great Hollow, no path, or should you be keeping to the conventional ridge path, very poorly evidenced on the ground, make purposefully onto this summit. The cairnless top at GR 11282565 is a suitable outcrop to sit for a few moments. The crest effectively forms the culmination of the Cam Crag ridge out of Langstrath, a popular scramblers' route rising from the Woof Stones. At 626metres/2,052ft this true summit is 75m/244ft higher than Bessyboot. It is a fine viewpoint for upper Langstrath and over Stake Pass to the Coniston Fells. Note the large quartz boulder on the near fell leading to Comb Door.

Step down from the peak re-joining the ridge path as it strides over a short length of broken wall. Embark upon a traverse of a broad boggy hollow aiming south-west. Coming immediately above Comb Gill's upper ravine, switch up the bank, off the narrow trod reaching Comb Door's obvious gap, a variant on Mickledore, only a considerably narrower rock passage. Small sheets of water go some way to fill the flat ground beyond - good photographic subjects (see the website gallery). Keeping under the cliffs an obvious path continues, descend briefly before switching sharp right onto a prominent bare slab edge. Set at an easy angle this glacially smoothed feature makes for easy route identification. Complete the ascent onto Comb Head's cairned top, anticipate a stunning view into the deep Comb Gill valley and over Rosthwaite High Fell.

If you are lucky you will see peregrine falcons soaring in this vicinity, they make Raven Crag a permanent base. Traverse the tarn-jewelled hollow south to join the popular path leading to the base at mid-point of the Glaramara rock castle. A six metre scramble ensues the well-rounded rock makes an easy ascent, harder in descent, and treacherous when iced up. The summit cairn, with shelter tucked into the rocks, well rewards efforts expended. The view south features Bowfell, Esk Pike, Great End and Great Gable. The summit is prone to lose its cairn from time to time, but the situation is reassuringly solid enough.

Leave the summit, initially heading south into a shallow depression then follow the natural weakness west. This puts easy ground at hand, swing round the summit outcrop right to join the main path. The path negotiates several headstreams, weaves over marshy ground mingled with boulders, keeping on a fundamentally northward declining line. You will notice numerous instances of path landscaping and restoration,

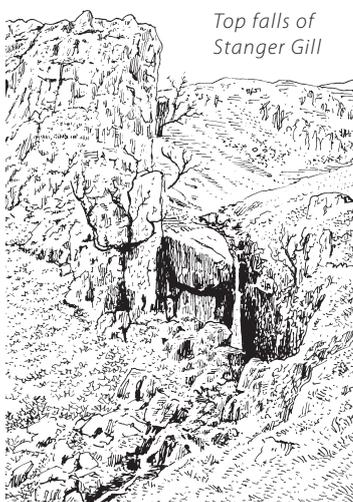
particularly lower down on the steeper section where the surface had washed away former stone pitching. Money for this work, co-ordinated through the Tourism and Conservation Partnership, came specifically from the Youth Hostels Association, Ramblers' Association and the Wainwright Society. It is an important function of the TCP encouraging businesses to operate 'payback' enabling their customers to contribute directly to local landscape improvement projects. Local members of the TCP include Hazel Bank Country Guest House, Royal Oak Hotel and Borrowdale Self Catering Cottages in Rosthwaite, while up on Honister Pass both the Youth Hostel and the Slate Mine contribute, the latter donating 25p per ticket to the long-term Wild Ennerdale project.

The descent provides a dream of a view, the perfect end to a day on the fells. Attention drawn into the heart of upper Borrowdale with the distant focus of Derwentwater and Skiddaw beyond the Jaws of Borrowdale. As the path approaches the kissing gate in the wall, Comb Gill offers one last fine exhibition of cascades compelling you to stop and admire the water's crazy antics. Complete the descent through open woodland on a track, latterly swinging left. and as the track vers left again keep the wall close right to reach a kissing gate joining the Thorneythwaite Farm access lane. Go right to reach Strands Bridge, where the valley road spans the River Derwent.

Turn right following the roadside verge by the prominent white-washed Mountain View terrace. Keep to the verge. Directly after the road crosses Comb Gill go through the kissing gate on the right. Follow a footpath leading across a pasture, a tractor track your underfoot guide, en route a pair of grey fell ponies may seek your attention. Pass a stewardship access waymark as you advance to a gate entry into a confined lane leading to Chapel Farm. Go through the yard, and, after St Andrew's, the parish church of Borrowdale, reach the Stonethwaite road. Turn right, pass the primary school to complete the day's walk.

### After-walk refreshment

In pole position is The Langstrath Country Inn at Stone-thwaite. Other hotels include the Yewtree in Seatoller and the Royal Oak and Scafell in Rosthwaite.



*Top falls of  
Stanger Gill*

### Picture Gallery

Thirty-six colour images can be viewed on the BBC Radio Cumbria website, these are a mixture of my most recent visit, in conditions that really did test my new cag and overtrousers (they came through with flying colours), and previous more pleasant fell days of three years ago.

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