

# PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards

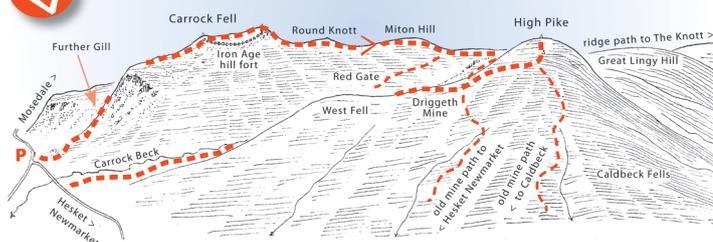
on BBC Radio Cumbria

## 13 Carrock Fell and High Pike

from Stone Ends



*an eagle's eye view of the walk*



distance : 10.5km/6.5 miles    time : allow 5 hours  
ascent : 533m/1,750ft            grade : moderate

**PARK:** An open common extends north from the hamlet of Mosedale flanking the road for a little over two miles in the direction of Hesket Newmarket. Find ample roadside parking some 200 yards north of the access track to Stone Ends Farm GR 354337.

**WALK SUMMARY:** A simple round encircling the Carrock Beck valley in the far north-east corner of the National Park. The tour claims two sentinel summits, the first, Carrock Fell an Iron Age hill top refuge; the second High Pike, the northernmost outpost of the Lakeland fells surveys the land towards the Solway and Scotland.

**MAPS:** OS Outdoor Leisure 5 The English Lakes North-eastern area, Harveys Superwalker Lakeland North, Outdoor Atlas and British Mountain Maps Lake District.

### Worth all England else

Now the new year is upon us, should you feel impelled to stride off the excesses of Christmas – head for the hills post haste. Where better to set your sights than the Caldbeck Fells? Today's trek takes in Carrock Fell and High Pike, two justly popular northern outposts of the National Park. At this time of year these fine fells are certainly "...worth all England else".

The proud boast, coined in Victorian times, referred to the incredible mineral wealth extracted from the mines above Caldbeck for centuries. With an array of long veins striking through and around the fell High Pike lies at the epicentre of this bounty. West to east from Redgill on Brae Fell through to Carrock End, north to south Potts Gill above Nether Row to Carrock in the Caldew. The sheer diversity of mineral species found is unique in England, so much so, that a licensing system for collecting was imposed in the 1990s, outlawing

the casual collecting of 'trophy' rocks from mine sites. Mining in this area is thought to have ancient origins: the first records refer to Roughton Gill in the sixteenth century; in the seventeenth century the rich Driggeth Mine deposits (passed on this walk) brought the area really to life. Most notably the fells were all a buzz from the 1820s, by the end of the century copper and lead mining had ceased, though wolfram and barytes mining continued into the 1940s.

As a rocky ramble this walk holds further interest. Carrock Fell the first high port of call, derives its name from the Celtic *carreg* meaning 'the rock'. The rock may relate to the hill fort retreat, but could well have bearing upon the anti-magnetic volcanic rock *gabbro*, evident in its crag and bouldered east slope.

Navigation is problematic by the crazy effect the *gabbro* has on a compass pointer.

Mountaineers will forgive this minor nuisance, whilst reflecting that this is the self-same rock that pre-dominates in the Black Cuillin of Skye, the finest mountain range in Britain, and it is not found elsewhere in The Lakes. The crags of Carrock Fell harbour no interest for climbers, but its boulders are a regular bouldering playground. In good weather you're as like as not to spot a solo climber with their modern fall mat slung over their shoulder heading for one of several mighty blocks in the rough hillside south of Stone Ends.

### Further First

Eyeing Carrock Fell from the roadside it is apparent that there is a break in its midst, drained by Further Gill. Rake Trod an obvious shepherd's path, skirts the hollow remnant of the old Carrock End Mine and a sheepfold hugging a boulder, making purposefully up the fellside to enter the gill. Pass above a rowan on a crag and below a solitary larch. The steep path is loose in places, narrow and trenched higher up where it reaches the heather moor. The impressive view back during the ascent extends over the lower, though equally ancient rocked, country beyond Stone Ends Farm; the intermediate woods and pastures of Greystoke Forest succeeded by the distant Pennine chain, with Cross Fell centremost.

Nearing the initial brow there are two options, a) follow the eastern edge right, a narrow cairned trod leading close to the craggy scarp edge lending further dramatic opportunities to enjoy that eastward prospect, though from a final cairn the path is lost in the heather. A direct pathless ascent is necessary, the going in rank heather is quite tough though there are a few instances of boulder-fields to give contrast, notice the prostrate juniper colonising these sites. b) The easier line from the top of Further Gill is to keep with the more regular path, bearing half-left then switching right over the headstream of Further Gill to mount to Carrock Fell's prominent east peak cairn, guided by a string of cairns.

Visitors to this fell top have two thoughts uppermost in their minds: the promising view, and the desire to inspect the stone ramparts of the Iron Age hill fort. There are only a few instances of such forts in Lakeland, usually identified by the term Castle Crag. This scarcity of hilltop refuges might indicate either a relatively small tribal

population or, appropriate to our present National Park designation, that it was indeed a tranquil place to live – perhaps a dubious proposition. In the centuries before the Romans marched into this realm, the scattered Celtic communities at times of food shortage and tension will have made life difficult for neighbours and to ‘head for the hills’ had other connotations; periods of retreat up here aiding survival through hard times. The scale of the stone ramparts, even today, suggest a highly organised community. It also leads one to think the walls were used during and after the Roman period.

If you trace the ramparts round on the south side you’ll encounter a large sheepfold. Conventionally shepherds’ chose more sheltered sites that were nearer the valley floor with good geography for sheep gathering. So to find such a facility neigh-on the felltop is most unusual. The reason is plain to see, there was a handy source of neat rock and scope to steer the flock on the southern flank then temporarily hold within the hill for itself.

The rampart is an intriguing jumble with hints of structure and is great fun to explore. A complete tour, all around the tilting plateau, is heartily to be recommended, there are gaps, but the sense of history marches with your every stride. Normally walkers plod straight up the middle to the west top cairn marking the summit at 662m/2,172ft. On my late summer visit the cairn was the fenized seat of a wasp swarm, my photographic mission given a nervous edge! The view is excellent particularly south-west into the vast bowl at the source of the Caldew – once considered as a likely place for a reservoir!

The ridge path dips off the short western scarp and weaves along an oft marshy moor, peaty patches and soggy moments unavoidable. Over to the left off the line of the ridge path a cairn sits invitingly upon Round Knott, and may be reached through a labyrinth of small pools. The continuing path strides west-north-west over the grassy featureless Miton Hill to be joined by Red Gate an old miners’ path arising out of the Carrock Beck valley. Keep on, skirt the deep headstream gulleys of Drygill Beck in swinging north towards High Pike. In so doing crossing a further miners’ track coming across the eastern slopes of the fell.

High Pike 658m/2,159ft is not the conventional ‘pike’, rather it is an unabashed dome, akin to the Howgills. The summit composes a novel three-piece suite of ragged hollowed wind-shelter cairn, stone-built OS column and stout flag seat – formalised from the wrought-iron garden ornament Wainwright drew in 1960. The seat is a clue to a much admired view. In fair weather the outlook is amazing, though you’ll not be too keen to sit too long in normal winter conditions. The sense of being detached from the normal Lakeland outlooks is understandable, so doubtless you’ll be pleased to pick out the High Street range from Loadpot to Ill Bell, and through the Glenderaterra Gap, the major fells make a tantalisingly distant guest appearance from Bowfell and the Scafells to Great Gable. Elsewhere, attention is drawn in the northern arc across the Solway Plain to Criffel, and round by Roan Fell, Christianbury Crags and over the Roman Wall to the Pennine range due east, it’s a beginning as well as an end.

You will notice on the website gallery that I met a dear

lady on horseback, she used the slate seat as a convenient mounting block, she said the northern fells were great for the rider, it was a lovely harmonious sight, a cross-country course befitting Zara Phillips.

In leaving High Pike summit visit the northern cairn before turning north-east pathless down the grassy slope to meet the miners’ track. Follow this left encountering the upper rake of the Driggeth Mine. Pass a small enclosure defending an old open shaft. Where the track forks, go down right into the Carrock Beck valley crossing spoil scree associated with the main area of the Driggeth Mine. The track has its damp moments but leads simply down the valley. Keep right (straight on) where it too forks to reach the minor road on the common. Turn right crossing the footbridge by the road-ford. Where the road swings left to a junction, keep forward along a connecting track onto the continuing road following the verge back to the start.

### After-walk refreshment

Inevitably the star attraction is the Old Crown, Hesket Newmarket, a village co-operative pub with a separate co-operative ownership of the in-house brewery far famed for its collection of tastely ales: Great Cockup Porter, Blencathra Bitter, Skiddaw Special Bitter, Helvellyn Gold, Doris’ 90th Birthday Ale, Catbells Pale Ale, Old Carrock Strong Ale with always a guest beer too. But one cannot overlook the excellent merits of the Mill Inn, Mungrisdale, a Jennings haven, equally adept in satisfying the appetite for good eating and drinking.

### Picture Gallery

Forty evocative colour images can be viewed on the BBC Radio Cumbria website. They all were taken this year past in early August when the heather was at its zenith.

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