

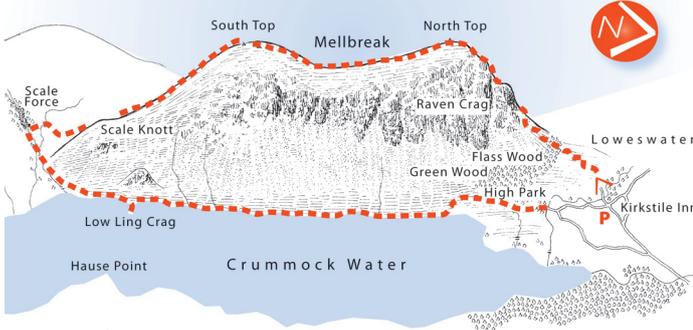
PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards

on BBC Radio Cumbria

14 Mellbreak from the Kirkstile Inn

an eagle's eye view of the walk



distance : 9.6km/6 miles

time : allow 5.5 hours

ascent : 686m/2,250ft

grade : energetic

PARK: GR 139203 Car parking is precious to scarce in this locality. There is room for half-a-dozen orderly parked cars at Church Bridge with a couple more on the verge below the Kirkstile Inn and at the road junction by the phone box to the east. If you intend to patronise the Kirkstile Inn, at walk's end, you could always ask at reception if you can park in the capacious pub facility – pay for a pint of the delicious in-house 'Kirkstile Gold' brew in advance if you want to confirm your honourable intentions.

WALK SUMMARY: From Kirkstile Mellbreak rises like some colossus, a great gable if ever there was. Fear not the climb it's an steady pull despite the loose shards and lack of pitching. With the north top underfoot the hard work is largely done, but the scenic delights roll on and on. Crossing the broad heather-clad saddle to reach the higher south summit then descending towards Scale Beck to visit Scale Force, before heading north-east to follow the lakeshore path beside Crummock Water to complete this an holistic fell encounter.

MAPS: OS Outdoor Leisure 4 The English Lakes North-western area, Harveys Superwalker Lakeland West, Outdoor Atlas and British Mountain Maps Lake District.

Meal break after Mellbreak!

Mellbreak is a real individualist, quite unlike all its neighbours in the greater Buttermere valley. Viewed from Crummock Water it has the appearance of an upturned boat compressed in its middle. Like a pantomime horse, the impressive northern aspect, a characterful head with the higher southern portion, beyond the saddle, the plainer rump. Whatever the analogy, it is a fine stand alone objective with no ridge ties to any other fell. The fell-name is shrouded in more

mystery than would at first appear likely 'the dappled bare hill' is not a conclusive explanation. Loweswater, however, is more clear cut, 'the leafy lake', it would seem the woods that give verdant dappled tones to the vale have long graced this wonderful setting.

Full stride ahead

The walk begins effectively from the most nucleated element of the Loweswater parish close by the church of St Bartholomew and the Kirkstile Inn. Follow the road signed 'No through road' leading right, crossing Church Bridge, swinging from west to south in rising past Kirkgate Farm and the subsequent modern house, bereft of vernacular taste. The bridle-lane rises, and soon becomes flanked by sturdy walls, winding attractively through pastures mingled with cattle and sheep.

At the second right-angle turn in the lane notice a large low square earthwork over to the right. Tradition holds that it was a church site, and it has been postulated to have been a tenterbank covering a henge, but the evidence of this or any other origin remains enigmatic. The views across the valley north feature the woods surrounding the largely unseen head of Crummock Water and the grand heather-clad peaks of Whiteside and Grasmoor.

The lane leads up to and through a gate, now leave the bridle track and head straight up through the break in the plantation strip onto the fell pasture. The popular path climbs up through the bracken, keep to the rising line, ignoring the right fork into Mosedale - frequently used on a shorter return descent from the saddle of Mellbreak.

The path drifts half-left and steps into a trail of loose shards. The going inevitably slows as you concentrate on each step. The path zig-zags with little evidence of modern pitching, though there is some higher up, more is needed on this inevitably much used and enjoyed fell ascent. The view back to Carling Knott, Loweswater and Low Fell will give rise to frequent stops, the prospect enhanced in late summer when the heather becomes a foreground delight. Viewed from below, the scree and crag dominated northern aspect of the fell looks problematic but the path proves no more difficult than any steady plod. Indeed, for all the discomfort of climbing what can feel like a quarry path situations are soon encountered that lift the whole engagement as intermediate shelves are attained giving thrilling views steeply down on Flass Wood, High and Low Park.

The path mounts by two prominent bluffs, the first gives a exciting view down a deep gully while the second gives views running across Raven Crag to Crummock Water. Watch for the next surprise, a short leftward traverse to a sneaky corner with a view over Rannerdale Knotts to Robinson, Fleetwith Pike and Buttermere. The climb might be steep, and the path less than firm in places but there is a certain infectious fun in it and all too soon one arrives on the north top.

So you're sweating, but the feeling is great and the view quite stunning. The fell has two summits, the south top is the higher by ten feet (ok, three metres!), but is inferior as a viewpoint. Two two cairns grace this north top, that to the west being the higher by a whisker at

509m/1,670ft. Don't race off, even if the wind is whistling over the brow, the opportunity to revel in a special high point in such an exalted fell domain deserves that extra time to absorb the view. The special relationship is with Crummock Water and that means the mighty Grasmoor. To comprehend them both fully walk east, a little way off the top.

When viewed from the road on the eastern shores of the lake Mellbreak is dominated by its dark eastern scarp and while one can make along this edge, the rank heather gives tough going with little more than the occasional narrow sheep trod for encouragement. Better to stay resolutely to the main summit ridge path - unlike the writer who chose the way of sheep, being something of a zealot for good photographic situations!

The one kilometre journey across the saddle, treading through wonderful heather, linking the north to south summits may come as a surprise, it is as though they are separate fells. Nearing midway one may choose to follow the simple safe descent west (right) which keeps to firm ground on a clear path running across and down the west flank of the fell to re-connect with the ascent path above the plantation, mentioned earlier. But given that the conditions are right to continue, keep ahead along the ridge to step onto the south top. A very modest cairn marking a very modest summit, but at 512m/1,680ft it can hardly really be all that modest, for the scenic setting has everything to commend it.

For the best views head south-east as the ground breaks away and enjoy the fantastic view over the head of Crummock Water with Buttermere and its spellbinding surround of fells causing you to linger pleasurably with Fleetwith Pike, High Stile and Red Pike strong elements in the view. Directly below is Low Ling Crag (doesn't it sound oriental?) projecting into the lake towards Hause Point on Rannerdale Knotts, shortly we'll be down there dipping our boots in the lake - hoo? yu an mee!

Backtrack across the southern top to rejoin the ridge path, now beginning its steady unflustered descent. There are no hazards, the path takes its own confident line down a basically grassy slope, in Wainwright's day the habit was to aim for Scale Knott, but not today, the path drifts right, over the shoulder of the knoll to meet a light fence. Many walkers step over and drop directly down to Black Beck, while others, more thoughtfully, bear right beside the fence to a gate, on the line of the Mosedale footpath. This descends by a fence to quickly meet the old Floutern Pass bridle-route, linking Buttermere with Ennerdale Water.

Ahead lies Scale Force, a slender free fall of 120 feet, the tallest in The Lakes, tucked into the dark wooded ravine. To visit go through the adjacent gate descend to ford Black Beck clamber up the bank beyond to join the traversing path leading left to the foot of the falls. Having furtively peered at the chasm, follow the path leading straight down to the Scale Beck footbridge amid the chaos of flood boulders to re-connect with the bridleway.

The clear path leads through rank bracken and by a large fold to meet up with a well-used track emerging from a gate on the right. The path now swings left (north) with much evidence of solid path maintenance, ensuring a firm footing over intermittently damp ground. The shores of Crummock Water came close and soon too the Low Ling Crag peninsula, which inevitably invite a visit. Perhaps you too will share the low rocky knob with gulls and ducks. The contrast of being sky high at one moment and then the next looking straight across a sheet of reflective water is an amazing sensation. The fells actually look lower from lake level.

Follow the obvious path along the shore passing the lonesome Iron Stone, sitting a few yards into the lake. Continue until a kissing gate, but don't go through. Instead, ascend beside the rising wall, then pass beneath the open Green Wood on a clear path, coming to a tiny fenced-off enclosure, where bear half-right down to a wall stile. Join the track leading via gates by High Park becoming a metalled road in crossing Park Bridge. At the road junction turn left to conclude the walk.

After-walk refreshment

If you like to make a start to your homeward journey before halting for a post-walk snack then of course the Wheatsheaf Inn at Low Lorton or Fish Hotel at Buttermere may catch your custom. However, top billing for this walk goes to the Kirkstile Inn at Loweswater, far-famed for the output of its own micro-brewery. Other tipples include the 'Melbreak Bitter' - the single 'I' deliberate, being the name of the local pack of Foxhounds. 'Rannerdale Best' and 'Grasmoor Dark'. The nourishment both liquid and plated are top notch!

The magical image below was taken this last Christmas Eve by Kenny Turner of Carlisle revelling in a temperature inversion from the summit of Red Pike. The islands amid the sea of white cloud are Great Borne, Blake Fell, with the nearer isle of Hen Comb. Mellbreak lies shyly just out of shot to the right of the view.

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