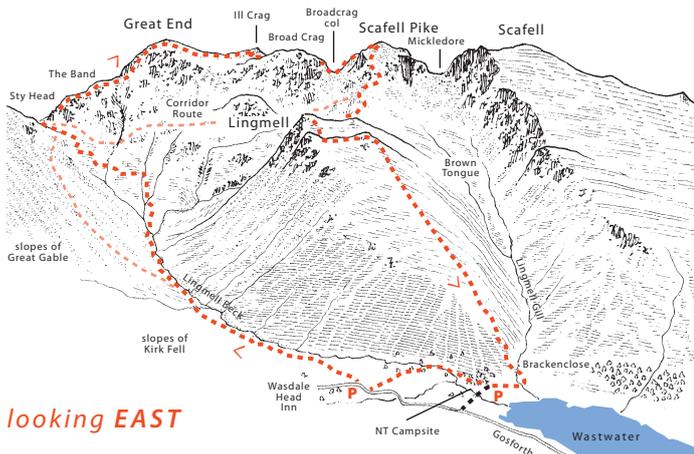


# PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards  
on BBC Radio Cumbria

## 17 Scafell Pike from Wasdale Head



distance : 13.5km/8.5 miles

time : 8 hours

ascent : 1,051m/3,450ft

grade : strenuous

### PARK

By choice use the dedicated and discreet parking adjacent the National Trust's Wasdale Campsite GR 183074, a small tree-shaded area perfectly situated for the purposes of this walk.

### WALK SUMMARY

Quite the majority of walkers attack Scafell Pike on long there-and-back treks from Borrowdale, Great Langdale and even Eskdale. However, the Scafell belong to Wasdale, a natural harmony revealed on this compact round trip. From Wastwater Great Gable and Scafell command attention, from Wasdale Head all eyes rest upon Great Gable; rough, tough and aloof, Scafell Pike resists valley admiration, and has to be climbed to know — Great Gable may be standing by, but this is the Roof of England.

The walk follows Lingmell Beck and the old pony route to Sty Head Pass and quickly steps onto The Band mounting impressively up the north ridge of Great End. The broad stony plateau leads to Broadcrag col and the messy final pull to the top of the Pike. Descending north-west via Lingmell col to claim arguably the day's best moment, the view of Great Gable from Lingmell.

### Route to the Roof of England

Walk through the Wasdale Campsite either via the main entrance passing the reception/shop or follow the farm track left via the gates, the ensuing bridleway fords the pebble beach of Lingmell Beck. Mindful that at times of flood this would be impractical and the valley road followed instead. Gorse as high as an elephant's eye ushers the track through via gates into pasture eventually emerging onto the valley road. Follow the road right, bear off right at the Millennium Village Green stone. Enter the walled lane at Lingmell House passing the little yew-shaded church of St Olaf, patron saint of Norway, affirming the strong Viking link with this valley.

The mass of gathered beck-stone accumulated in thick walls, a feature of the valley enclosures. The bridleway is guided left between the barns at Burnthwaite Farm. From the gate go right, the lane balloons then constricts to a further gate and widens again on course to a footbridge over Gable Beck. As the path begins to rise a clear path forks right, shortly accompanying the becksides wall to a hand gate. Pass on through, keeping close company with Lingmell Beck cross the stony feeder gills with the bristling crags of Great Napes high to the left. Passing the confluence with Piers Gill find an appropriate ford some hundred yards further on, the pony path winding on up the grassy rigg initially close to Spouthead Gill.

Crossing the debris of Skew Gill bear up the fell left to reach the stretcher box at Sty Head Pass, where paths intersect. Turn right (east), cross the stepping stones over the broad marshy depression upon the heavily used path (bound for Esk Hause). Ignore the obvious path right at a large cairn, this is the Corridor Route. But once the craggy end of The Band is passed, and the first good stretch of pitching complete, veer off right ascending the grassy fellside to gain the skyline at your earliest convenience. There is no path to this point. At a shallow nick in the ridge a path draws in from the left, the more regular approach, but that first section of the ridge was certainly worth visiting. The ridge mounts easily, providing numerous gilt-edged excuses to pause and peer over the brink right towards Lingmell, with the head of Skew Gill a classic moment.

The ridge path now steepens tackling a short easy scramble leading onto easier but nonetheless steep ground with superb views down on Sprinkling Tarn. Coming above a gully, a boulder slope spells the approach of the plateau. The second gully is worth

gazing down, this is Cust's Gully, distinguished by a massive chockstone.

Visit the western top before tracing the northern scarp to the stunning cliff rimmed view of the Langdale Pikes and reach the eastern top. The western top has the better situation, the rockier eastern top is the highest point by a whisker at 909m/2,982ft. All told the fell top is one of the most satisfying viewpoints in Lakeland. It is ignored by the majority of walkers who unwittingly pass it by on the Calfcove path from Esk Hause, a mere inconvenience with Scafell Pike their singular intent.

Head south, keeping to the middle of the broad plateau for easiest going down to the junction with the Calfcove path, enjoying the view east to Esk Pike. The popular path underfoot boulder hop onto the next narrower ridge before descending into the dip between Ill and Broad Crag. The scenic virtues of Ill Crag make it a worthy addition, the moss and stone mingled ground easily crossed. There are two rock castles to visit, both provide magnificent views into Eskdale, the higher commanding a fine view over Little Narrowcove to Pen and of course the wildest, craggiest facade of Scafell Pike.

Regain the main thoroughfare and rise onto another travail of boulders before descent to the small gap of Broadcrag col. The path rising south-west from this point is piacular (i.e. in a horrid state), pity the minions who are forced to descend it.

The roof of England duly arrives 977m/3,206ft; from eleven till four on any normally welcoming day it is invariably as crowded as a city street. Which promptly brings to mind William Blake's poem "Great things are done when men and mountains meet, that are not done whilst jostling in the street" – through exceptions are poetic rules proved. In bitter conditions choose to harbour in the sturdy square Victorian 'open to the sky' shelter to the east, at other times the more solitary will wander off to the near outcrops to the east or west. While most will bide their time queuing to step up onto the summit rostrum. Not the viewpoint one might have hoped, Scafell trumps it. But then there is satisfaction in arrival and on this particular walk a better viewpoint awaits Lingmell, also there is far less tough walking en route back to base than most other visitors will have to contend.

A chain of cairns guides west, the characteristic stony ground sustained. The path is never excessively steep, though it tilts down a slab at one point. Watch for the point where the Corridor Route branches right, follow this, but immediately it shapes to

descend, bear off left through outcrops. Cross the broken wall in the Lingmell col depression and ascend the largely grassy slope north-west. Make a point of keeping a right-hand bias as height is gained to revel in the stunning view peering down the vertical gully into Piers Gill, the portal pinnacles making fine photographic subjects framing Great Gable. The rotund summit cairn set upon a fine outcrop very soon arrives at 807m/2,649 ft.

After the congregations of Scafell Pike the solitude is exquisite. The view of Great Gable is matchless, the impressive facade of crags, the Great Napes, seemingly spilling scree vertically to Lingmell Beck far below. Looking back south Pikes and Scafell Crags form a magnificent focus above Hollow Stones. Invariably the day will be waning and the softer light of early evening playing on the fellsides give the scene a magical air. Evidence of heather has long since departed this fell, for all the implications in its name. Follow the edge naturally down in small steps to reach a spindly cairn marking the piece de resistance Great Gable, with the fells girdling Mosedale, Kirk Fell, Pillar and Red Pike prominent, what a triumphant spot to conclude your mountain day.

Leave the cairn half-left south-west aiming across the slope to the high ground crossing a broken wall to join a clear path which now embarks on a long descent of Lingmell's west ridge. As the slope steepens an initial set of stone steps flatter to deceive, for they are followed by unrestored loose gravel is met and if you've avoided using walking poles hitherto, then they'll now prove their worth. The grassy slope is joined with much relief (one suspects that shortly after this guide is published the Fix the Fells project will have stabilised this path). The view left up Brown Tongue to Scafell Crag is spellbinding. Continue down via a ladder stile, crossing a transverse path with sporadic bushes and trees. As a fence is neared bear left to the kissing gate on the Brown Tongue path pass on naturally via a stile and footbridge to passing Brackenclose, a club hut of the Lakeland's elite Fell and Rock Climbing Club. Join the Wasdale Head Hall farm track, cross a bridge and grid to complete the walk.

#### After-walk refreshment

The Wasdale Head Inn at Wasdale Head itself, The Scree and Strands Hotel at Nether Wasdale some four miles down the valley, and the Bridge Inn further two miles at Santon Bridge.

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