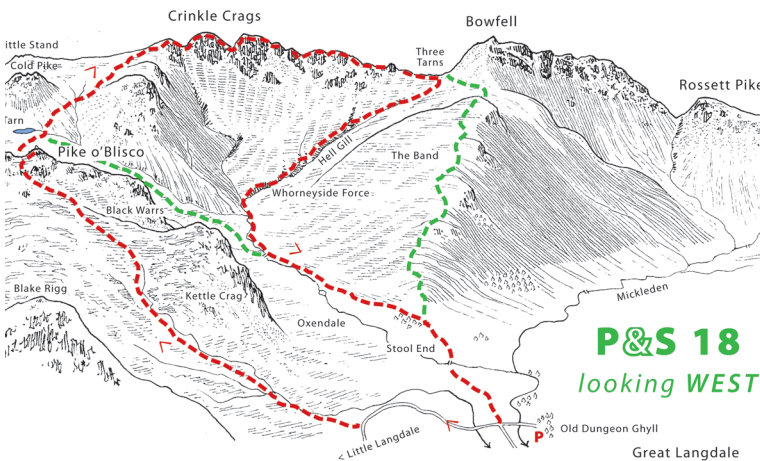


PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

18 Crinkle Craggs from Great Langdale



distance : 13.5km/8.5 miles
ascent : 1,158m/3,800ft

time : 7.5 hours
grade : strenuous

MAPS (Harvey Superwalker) Central
(Ordnance Survey) OL6 South-western area

PARK

The National Park pay & display car park adjoining the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel GR 286061, situated in Great Langdale some 9 miles from Ambleside, from where, during summer months, the Langdale Rambler bus service 516 regularly shuttles.

WALK SUMMARY

Crinkle Craggs are, or is that is, a classic Lakeland ridge walk that fully lives up to the expectations its exciting eastern aspect suggests. Undertaken in conjunction with the highly individual peak of Pike o'Blisco one has the ingredients for a thoroughly rewarding day on the fell. Keen fell-walkers will eagerly mop up Cold Pike and the way round, they might include Little Stand, though if energies are up they will be more inclined to bolster their mountain day with the mighty scalp of Bowfell. The tour concentrates on Oxendale and bring Hell Gill and Whorneyside Force into the equation.

A Crinkle-cut blue chip ridge walk

Backtrack along the approach road from the car park continuing from the T-junction with the Blea Tarn road passing Wall End Farm 'squeezing' by the roadside barn. Crossing the cattle grid the open road begins a winding ascent, avoiding the car fumes as best you can. At the third sharp hairpin bend take leave of the tarmac and set foot on the fell proper, embarking upon the main path up the Redacre Gill valley. The path fords three minor gills en route to the headstream, where some pitching copes with the gullying to the skyline. With Kettle Crag a striking feature to the right, the name has nothing to do with boiling kettle cloud rather has its roots in the Old English term *celtel*, meaning 'the valley with a deep inlet', highly descriptive of Oxendale at the threshold to the valley leading towards Crinkle Craggs.

Reaching the open fell ridge with its diverse habitat of heather and bilberries, one might consider tracing the ridge back left. Be-jewelled with tiny tarns the ridge rises easily onto the headland of Blake Rigg, a marvellous viewpoint over Little Langdale to Wetherlam. Otherwise keep to a westward rising line passing a massive bare slab, en route to the short scramble through a rock-band shielding the square crown of the fell. The summit has two tops, both have sizeable cairns though there is no doubt which is the senior partner, the north cairn at 705m/2,313ft. From here Crinkle Craggs' crinkled skyline is seen to perfection, Bowfell contriving to play second fiddle, in stark contrast to the first impression gained down in the valley where the walk began. Alfred Wainwright described the fell-name as 'swashbuckling', it certainly rings with a sense of pirates and buccaneers. Time has obscured its original associations leaving us with 'the pike of the howe of Blisc', who or whatever Blisc was has may never be determined. Yet the magic in the name and the joy of the fell-top combine to make this a wonderful place to be. Many walkers arrive on the summit from off the top of Wrynose Pass, passing up by Black Crag, a popular summer evening rock climbing venue, a crag that unusually basks in the last sunlit of the day, and despite its high situation is comparatively handy to the road. The pre-1974 Westmorland county mark beat its bounds onto

the south top tracing up from the Three Shire Stone before switching sharply back at a 35 degree angle to the south side of Red Tarn en route to Cold Pike.

And so now to the main event Crinkle Craggs. A clear, part pitched, part loose gravel path works its way down the comparatively steep western slopes from between the two summit blocks of Pike o'Blisco. Reaching the depression some hundred metres north of Red Tarn, the route crosses straight over the path intersection. The right-hand path, rising from the head of Browney Gill, has some contemporary interest. Not only it that you may decide to abort the grand plan here stepping down this way to Oxendale, but in the construction of the pitched path itself. For decades this has been a popular path. The modern era of path pitching began with the National Trust observing the construction of old pitched paths they made every effort to replicate them in their work. The flaw they didn't recognise was that they were witnessing the wear of many decades often heavy use, so the steps that originally will have been pitched up, were now tilted down. The transition to the most modern construction occurs part-way down this path when the original team leader retired and new thinking was brought to bear. The latest news from the FixtheFells team is that this older pitching is to re-constructed to bring it up to the modern spec!

The journey resumed heading west on a rising path crossing the northern slopes of Cold Pike above the upper ravine of Browney Gill. Intrepid walkers will relish leaving the regular path making onto the adjacent top of Great Knott following the broken edge to Gladstone Knott, though the crooked pinnacle of Gladstone's Finger is out of sight, only seen from below, the knott itself provides the most superb view across Great Cove to the two main Crinkles separated by the gap of Mickle Door. The majority of walkers will be more than content to follow the defined way, higher up corralled by stones to resist re-broadening the wear. Mounting onto the first Crinkle, otherwise nameless, where the Crinkle Craggs ridge proper begins, as too the fun.

Each crinkle has its own cairn, an understandable circumstance, as each has the bearing of a separate fell. The path dips through a small grassy depression to meet the only real challenge of the day. The natural ascent works up a scree gully headed with a massive choke of stone with a three-move scramble up a rib to the right the only recourse. If you cannot face the sequence of moves (inevitably harder in descent) you can bear left at the depression and ascend a grassy rake on an inevitably worn trod.

Face-saving in every way, both routes come together on the crown of Long Top at 860m/2,822ft. The second Crinkle may look compact from Gladstone Knott and all points east, but from Eskdale it has the appearance of a flat-topped mountain, in striking contrast to Bowfell's slender peak.

The next depression is Mickle Door 'the great gap' this leads onto the third crinkle and then weaves on via crinkles four and five, this latter Gunson Knott cradles a large in-nominate reed-filled tarn. Ahead Bowfell forms an impressive backdrop to the ridge, the peaked summit rising above the gullies of Bowfell Links, the walk all along the ridge an unending chain of delightful changes in outlook and terrain, superb in any measure. Further small tarns are encountered en route to Shelter Craggs with further rough dips leading by the final blunt rocky knott short of Three Tarns. To make the trio one has to include one of the pair of delightful rock-girt pools entangled in the slabs just short. To the west see the more famous Mickledore, separating Scafell from Scafell Pike, invariably by this stage in the walk backlit be a lowering sun sending streaks of golden light across the shallow tarns. Reaching the saddle the impressive Bowfell Links loom, with a steep path mounting for the summit.

However, our route turns east and almost at once bears right tracing down by the emerging stream Buscoe Sike. A definite path emerging along the edge as the sike steepens into the deep ravine in the process becoming the altogether more treacherous Hell Gill. The path steepens coming down to the foot of the ravine on pitching. There is little or no scope to enter the ravine and certainly no route up through. The path continues down to the top of Whorneyside Force, a gracious waterfall. After which the path carefully negotiates a scoured slope from where the waterfall is seen at its best. Crossing a footbridge the path enters Oxendale, passing on down by gates to Stool End Farm following its approach road to the ODG road-end (Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel).

After-walk refreshment

Old and New Dungeon Ghyll Hotels and the Stickle Barn, all in the upper portion of Great Langdale, in the immediate shadow of the Langdale Pikes.

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