

PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

3 Great Dodd from Threlkeld



The summit
of Clough Head

including Clough Head, Randerside and Wolf Crag
ascent 2,750ft/838 m round trip 9.4 miles/15km
ascent time 4 hours round trip time 6 hours

PARK either at the small car park on the old railway approach to the Blencathra Workshops, grid ref. 320 246, or in the large car park off the A66 opposite the eastern access to Threlkeld, behind the Threlkeld Sports Pavilion, grid ref. 325 254.

START no later than 10:30 a.m. in early springtime. Even if the morning looks innocuously blue-skied and bonny, a chill breeze can turn into a dull and murky afternoon all too soon, and detract from an otherwise fun day out.

WALK SUMMARY: Tackling the two most northerly summits of the Helvellyn range, the walk crosses the Glenderamakin Gap to investigate the British Settlement site before climbing onto Clough Head via Threlkeld Knotts. The open sickle-shaped ridge sweeps down to Calfhow Pike then climbs onto the bare top of Great Dodd. Dipping off the north-eastern slope via Randerside, it veers off the ridge path to skirt Wolf Crag and down to the Old Coach Road at Mariel Bridge, at the foot of Mosedale. Journeying back to Hausewell Brow, to retrace the outwalk, Blencathra, ever more impressive, drenched by the golden light of the evening.

MAPS Ordnance Survey Explorer OL5
Harvey's Superwalker Lakeland Central, Outdoor Atlas, and their latest sheet map - British Mountain Maps Lake District.

WINTER WALKING ADVICE - essentials to wear and/or carry in your daypack: first and foremost wear comfortable boots. Then ensure you have a reliable torch and spare batteries, a map and compass, a hot drink in a sturdy flask, energy snacks (with marzipan or Kendal Mint Cake in reserve), thermal hat, gloves, gaiters and gaiters. And walking poles... they have everything to commend themselves, especially during descent, and there are moments of steep descent on this walk, when slick ground is a probable hazard. You don't have to consider them a Nordic walking workout! On the clothing

front, layers are better than relying on just one heavy item (jumper/fleece), being able to add and subtract to suit body comfort and conditions is an immensely sensible habit to cultivate.

A packed day out over Wolf Crag

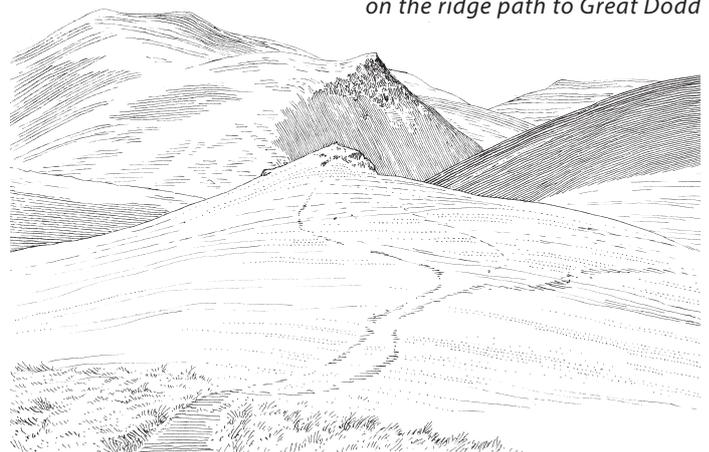
Readily accessible by car on the A66, Threlkeld lies twelve miles from Penrith and three miles from Keswick. Conveniently, the half-hourly Cumbrian Connexion bus service stops outside the Horse & Farrier. The village is the home of the Blencathra Foxhounds; dy'a ken the hunt's memorial just inside the churchyard. Above the village is the Blencathra Centre, a former scarlet fever isolation hospital, now the northern base for the National Park Ranger Service. I'm notorious for my fascination in place-names. Just can't stop scratching under the surface to get a sense of what they originally may have meant. Threlkeld has me enthralled, well therein lies its spell, for it meant 'the slave's spring'... now there's a thing!

By normal convention I admit to a preference of walking alone, but on a clear frosty Thursday morning this January I met up with my old friend Rod Busby from Shipley. We met outside the Horse & Farrier and spent the day in good conversation on a wonderful fell walk. By 'old friend' I have to admit we have known one another since the age of five, so old in this case does mean old!

Another of my pleasures on a day's walk is the impromptu encounter with fellow fellwanderers. We met just two. An outwardly frail lady, consumed in a cag, sheltering on the lee of an icy breeze on Calfhow Pike, she said 'Can't get anyone mad enough to join me'. She looked in her late sixties, one might have deduced from this that all her normal circle of friends were snuggled up by a fire sipping cocoa!

On Clough Head, we met John Stratton from Silsden - which is quite near Rod's home in West Yorkshire. He was on a personal mission. Years of loving the fells had seen him make the journey hundreds of times, but he had not 'done' all the fells, returning to favourite haunts and heights time after time as they always seem a different countenance each visit. Retirement from the coal industry, (a surface job, not exposed to the debilitating effects of coal dust) he now has the time to take the fells by the scruff of the neck. He was clutching a little guide defining thirty-six round trips that accumulated all the fells described in AW's Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells. That's three day-walks a month for a year, he was already on his third outing and loving every minute of it. He'd never been up this end of the Helvellyn range before.

Calfhow Pike backed by Skiddaw
on the ridge path to Great Dodd



And so to walk

Either, stride out along the tree-shaded old railway trackbed passing the Blencathra Business Centre, once the concrete flagstone works, breaking out onto the Threlkeld to Newsham byway just short of the bridge at a gate on the left.

Alternatively, starting from the large car park behind the sports pavilion. Follow the footway beside the A66, a matter of yards, to go left along the minor road signed to Newsham, beside the concrete channelled beck. Look back over the pavilion to the soaring heather-clad slopes of Blencathra: this great brown wall of fell will dominate attention for much of the early walk as we cross the Glenderamakin Gap.

The road leads over the willow-fringed Glenderamakin Beck, a main feeder of the River Greta and thus the Derwent. The romantic name just might intrigue. As is so often the case we witness a watercourse bearing a really old name, in fact pre-Viking, it means the 'valley where swine forage' - from the Celtic 'glyn' and 'moch'.

Next, cross the old railway bridge, connecting with its trackbed trail. Enthusiasts still harbour ambitions to re-open this line from Penrith to Keswick, a lovely journey especially as a steam run, it would be popular, but there are physical obstacles to the idea that just might prove insuperable.

Follow the lane up to the isolated stone house of Newsham, bear right via the gate into the rough pasture. A diminishing track leads on with the tree-screened banks of the old Threlkeld Granite Quarry close to the right. Cross an open gill to reach a gate in a fence - the metal latch a neat piece of idiosyncratic blacksmithing.

Now you have a choice. Either simply bear up left, keeping to the right of the beck, to join the Old Coach Road. Or, with a sense of history, head straight ahead on a rising line onto the prominent pasture shelf on Threlkeld Common.

Your eyes might first register on a small group of large erratic boulders, then a long rubble wall, beside what appears to be a old grass trackway. This leads to a pronounced plateau patterned with square and round walled enclosures. Again on first sight you might think this is a comparatively modern ruined sheepfold complex. But you would be wrong. For these are the remnants of a Bronze Age farming community, incredibly unsullied by the long intervening centuries of pasture farming. Dating from the period before 200 B.C. the prehistoric farmstead consists of hut circles with an associated irregular aggregate field system, a cairnfield and two trackways.



hut circle at the edge of the prehistoric farmstead complex

To give some sense of proportion, Castlerigg Stone Circle, which comes into view as the walk climbs onto Clough Head, will have been the 'cathedral shrine' when this pastoral community was first created. One can only guess how many other contemporary farms once existed, to be swept away by the march of farming on the lower slopes. How grateful archaeologists must be that the granite quarry did not extend to this height: to my mind every bit as precious as Castlerigg, and similarly graced by the magnificent backdrop of Blencathra. Walk south up the slope, spotting further evidence of the extensive prehistoric cairnfield, some of the gathered stones have yielded evidence of cremation sites.

Joining the Old Coach Road go left. Modern 4x4 recreational vehicles are being actively discouraged from using this rough track, and many other similarly exposed old tracks in the county. Approaching a gate, bear off right onto an obvious quad-bike path, keeping left of the large sheepfold. This path ascends almost entirely on easy grass pasture, though one might choose to veer off right, above the fold, to follow the little stony canyon onto the crest of Threlkeld Knotts, a peach of a viewpoint for Blencathra.

Keeping to the quad route, come over the stony saddle to meet up with the old shepherds' drove above a west-facing combe. The path now diagonally switches left, then right, in traversing the steep stony slope. The earthy scree can be slick, it's certainly better when frozen. The views continue to give you cause to pause. Eventually the brow is reached, suddenly you are on tranquil pasture. The obvious path can be followed directly to Calfhow Pike but this is to deny yourself the treat of the view from the summit of Clough Head. For this go left at will, keeping right of the edge, a path only truly materialising late on in the ascent, approaching the old Ordnance Survey column. (as depicted in the line drawing).

A small wall grasps the pillar to give visitors some relief from any breeze. You'll be hard pressed to leave: the view extends to the Conistons and Scaffells and almost all else that is grand and noble in Lakeland, with Blencathra reigning supreme. Anyone who likes to ring home using their mobile phone can be assured of good reception here. John Stratton rang his wife because he'd forgotten his own camera to record of his visit. I took a shot and subsequently sent him a jpeg, so his Wainwright Year album can be more complete!

A clear path heads almost due south, declining to the broad saddle beneath Calfhow Pike. The broken marsh is the result of peat cutting, the old workings of a Mr and Mrs Fisher from Bridge House, situated down in St John's in the Vale; hence Fisher's Wife's Rake on Wanthwaite Crag - a perilous pony-hauled sledgate used to convey the dried fuel.

Calfhow Pike, a welcome halt on the two mile long trek to Great Dodd, means 'the tor of red deer fawn'. Hereon the ridge path climbs steadily south-eastward over Little Dodd onto the bare dome of Great Dodd; a small cairn marks the north top. To reach the shelter cairn on the south-east top one crosses the true summit, devoid of cairned recognition. To the south, the serried summits of the range culminate on Helvellyn.

Backtrack to the north top and find a line of small cairns guiding north-west down to Randerside, the name means 'the edge of the pasture'. Continue beyond the single cairn, down the broadening Matterdale Common, be watchful, take a left (northward) turn, after two hundred yards or so

though there is no actual path to follow. Traverse the featureless pasture aligning with Souther Fell to reach the broken edge of Wolf Crag. The name a reminder in folk memory of what must have been one of the last medieval wolf pack territories, persecuted to extinction. Keep left as the ground breaks away, a steep, but simple, slope leads down to the Old Coach Road.

Go through the gate and cross Mariel Bridge at the foot of Mosedale. Follow the track, spot the old rail freight wagon perched high on the slopes of White Pike above, conveyed by helicopter to act as a forage store for sheep.

Descending from Hausewell brow go through a second gate, bear off the Coach Road, following the beck down to the gate to complete the circuit backtracking by Newsham Lane.



wind shelter on the south top of Great Dodd

After walk refreshment

In Threlkeld two hostelrys vie for your post-walk custom, The Salutation and the Horse & Farrier - the latter has the distinct advantage of being open all day and I can vouch they draw a lovely pint of real ale too!

Threlkeld Mining Museum

It would be most remiss not to take this opportunity to sing the praises of the adjacent mining museum which has been steadily growing in content and stature. The inspiration of mining enthusiasts, Ian & Jean Tyler and Ian Hartland, who have set out to show to visitors precisely how and why mining has been so important to the economic and social development of upland Cumbria. This is private enterprise to applaud and support.

Situated in a disused microgranite quarry, the museum has been open now for ten years and takes full advantage of its position within the Northern Lake District. It is close to many of the classic, well-documented sites used by geologists for their excursions. The quarry itself is a RIGS site and displays contacts between the "Skiddaw Slate" and the granite intrusion, as well as other fascinating features.

The Mining Section

The museum now has a new mining section which has been developed with the help and cooperation of the Cumbria Amenity Trust Mining History Society and a number of individuals.

The Mining Room

The Mining Room contains artifacts, plans and photographic records of explorations of many local mines, which, in this area, exploited copper, iron, lead, zinc, tungsten, graphite, barites and fluorite. A representative display of local minerals can be seen and there is a new section on lighting, drilling and explosives.

The Quarry Room

The Quarry Room explains the relationship between the geology of the Lake District area and the quarrying of local limestone, sandstone, granite and slate. Samples of rocks from all the important local formations are keyed to a large table map. Photographs and rock samples from more than fifty old and more recent quarries are displayed to illustrate the special features of each.

The Quarry Site

The extensive quarry site has ample space for the display of the unique collection of vintage excavators and old quarry machinery. The 2ft gauge mineral railway has been relaid and will eventually provide a ride into the inner quarry for visitors to view the faces in safety.

Guided Tours and Panning

A 45-minute guided tour through a reconstructed lead/copper mine is one of the highlights of the extensive museum. Mineral panning is also available, as an extra.

Opening Hours

The Museum is open daily and all Bank Holidays from March to October. 10.00am - 5.00pm

Admission Charges

Underground Tour of the Mine Adults £5.00 Children £2.50

Museum Adults £3.00 Children £1.50

Address and Contact:

Threlkeld Quarry and Mining Museum, Threlkeld, Nr. Keswick, Cumbria CA12 4TT Phone: 01768 779747

Mark's picture gallery and guides

There are 27 colour images from this marvellous walk posted on the Radio Cumbria website. A good half from my most recent frosty visit, the remainder giving perspectives from a greener season.

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