

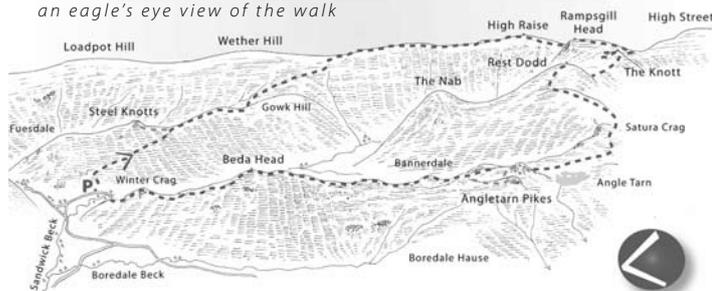
PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

8 Martindale Skyline

from St Martin's Church

an eagle's eye view of the walk



distance : 16 km/10 miles

ascent : 1,012m/3,320ft

time : 8 hours

grade : strenuous

PARK: GR 434184

Tidily on the open space beside Martindale Old Church.

WALK SUMMARY: This natural horseshoe climbs from the Old Church across the flanks of Steel Knotts to the head of Fusedale then up onto the eastern skyline joining the Roman road heading south for High Raise and Rampsgill Head. Break right at the Straits of Riggindale to include The Knott, Rest Dodd and, passing Angle Tarn, claim Angletarn Pikes, before continuing north onto Beda Head. There are no obvious hazards, some paths are heavily used, some pleasantly lightly trod.

MAPS: Ordnance Survey Explorer Map OL5 The English Lakes, North-eastern area; Harvey Lake District Outdoor Atlas and/or their new plastic Mountain Map.

Deerly beloved Martindale

The beautiful steep-sided valleys of Martindale, a sanctuary for man and nature, have long been treasured by discerning walkers. Ullswater takes all the plaudits from passing motorists and steamer-cruising visitors, it gains another accolade from the likes of you and me for its exquisite isolation of the Martindale fells. Landlocked, this north-east Lakes sanctuary retains a semblance of its historic wildness, a countenance superbly revealed in this grand horseshoe walk, which can include seven summit cairns. Approach from Pooley Bridge on the lakeside road, the early activity of the camping ground leads by the entrance to the luxurious Sharrow Bay Hotel to pass Howtown Wyke steamer jetty. The four-mile journey is tortuous, narrow, and should be driven expecting oncoming traffic and the occasional reverse or tight squeeze. Passing the lane to Howtown Hotel the road crosses a cattle-grid then embarks on a series of hairpin turns on the steep rise to The Hause, entry into the cul-de-sac world of Martindale.

Getting into stride

Leave the road on the north side of the churchyard, a path winds up through the bracken beside an enclosure wall to angle diagonally right across the fellside beneath Steel Knotts. Pass through a bridle gateway, almost reaching the ridgetop wall take a backward glance at the inviting summit of Steel Knotts. This fell top may (should) be included in the tour by following the ridge path left clambering over the wall, climbing simply to the prominent crest; the actual summit is a curious rock feature, with an equally curious name, Pikeawassa. As a viewpoint its greatest charm is the prospect of the Martindale Deer Forest centred upon The Nab, with its two flanking valleys Rampsgill and Bannerdale from their the watersmeet flows Howe Grain. The term 'grain' is unusual in the Lakes, it is applied to the watercourse as it resembles the fork tine, much as the River Tyne derives from the term 'tine' itself.

Retrace your climb, rejoin the path beyond the wall, either initially keeping beside the wall or along the edge overlooking the valley and facing the handsome bulk of Beda Fell.

The ridge path drifts from the wall to traverse open fell towards Gowk Hill, then slants left avoiding this pudding-topped ridge, the name 'gowk' means cuckoo, confirmation of the former richly wooded nature of the Martindale valley, remnant alder and birch persist up the valley sides.

Crossing a damp rushy patch at the very head of Fusedale provides a tight view down dale to Howtown, Sharrow Bay and the lower reach of Ullswater. Fusedale is agricultural Norse distinguishing it as 'the valley of the cattle-shed' as distinct from Boredale 'the valley of the storehouse'. Slipping through a wall skip over the beck and pass the ruins of a shepherd's bothy, a significant landmark in mist, a significant reminder of the lost farming life.

The path bears right initially climbing besides a broken wall then slants up a groove along the breast of the spinal ridge of the Far Eastern Fells. Looking down into the Rampsgill valley see the red-roofed holiday lodge 'The Bungalow'. Built in 1910 by the Earl of Lonsdale of Lowther Castle as a special retreat for Kaiser Wilhelm II on the occasion of a deer shooting visit, the exuberant rich orange tiles a startling addition to the green dale. Climbing through a dry gully of Mere Beck, here 'mere' meant boundary stream, as in Mersey and Mercia.

Ignore the gate ahead, keep left completing the climb to quickly meet up with the Roman road coming south from Wether Hill - 'wether = fattening pasture of castrated tups'. Join the ridge wall beside a massive peat hag bank, a landscape reminiscient of the blanket bogs of the North Pennines across the Eden valley.

The open track heads south slipping through the gap in the wall eventually coming closer to a fence crossing the rockless crest of Red Crag before declining to an area of marshy pools skirting the largest Redcrag Tarn. Avoiding the mire quite a challenge, but a low order of hazard! The track passes through the fence at a bridle-gate, keep the ridge wall left as the ground rises over Raven Howe to cross a stile at the wall end. Pass up by

the bridle-gate to traverse the open top enjoying fine views down into the Rampsgill valley – valley of wild garlic (ramsoms). The Roman way naturally glances over the brow avoiding the summit of High Raise, so make a conscious break left through the boulder field to inspect the cairn and maybe shelter in the adjacent windbreak before returning south.

The ridge path dips into the pool-filled depression and forks, the lefthand way leading to Kidsty Pike, while the Roman trail heads up the facing slope over the brow of Rampsgill Head. Again the path misses the best view from the cairn over to the right, viewing the length of the Ramps Gill itself. Notice the buttress arete falling from near the summit, framing the valley view. Rejoin the Roman track which skirts the edge over Twopenny Crag to reach the wall, above the Straits of Riggindale, in so doing revel in the superb views into Riggindale, to Haweswater and Rough Crags and the mighty form of the fell High Street with the continuing Roman road tripping high across its western slope on course for Thornthwaite Crag and the Troutbeck valley.

Turn right, following the wall on the much-beaten path. Take the opportunity to visit the neat pimple of The Knott, by simply following the wall up left. The cairn, quickly reached, occupies a fine vantage above water. Follow on with the wall descending as straight as a die, crossing the regular path. The wall points directly to Rest Dodd, though some walkers will forego the pleasure opting to keep to the popular path, the passage of Coast to Coast hikers.

Resolute types will gird their loins and keep faith with the wall's destiny down through the marshy depression and up the slope of Rest Dodd. Open for the final feet, the summit cairn is hardly a treasured viewpoint, a broad peaty hollow separating it from a second smaller cairn. The fell-name suggests transferred association with an unspecified traditional place of transcendent rest during the age-old wearisome journey from Patterdale to Mardale.

To the north the ridge takes a great sweep down through peat hags to rise onto the rounded tongue of The Nab. This lonely height lies at the heart of the Martindale Deer Forest. Peak-baggers implused to venture this way must religiously retrace their steps back up onto Rest Dodd. But I must stress the effort is not to be condoned, being unsympathetic to the care and preservation of the unique herd of red deer that find sanctuary about the fell. The Dalemain Estate owns and sensitively manage all of these fells and are right to discourage fellwalkers from casually wandering within these deer breeding grounds. For this herd is the only pure red deer blood-stock in England, with no Sika cross-breeding and on those grounds alone we ought to keep a respectful distance at all times.

The path continues initially heading north-west, then, before confronting the cross-ridge wall it swings west to re-unite with the popular path enjoying views of Gray Crag, then through a gap beside Satura Crag into Bannerdale, then across to Brock Crags before working down to the shores of Angle Tarn. The name a clear reference to former stocking for fishing sport. The peninsula often attracts backpackers as an appealing pitch location.

NB: Back from this point it might be noted that a path begins that slips over the ridge and down across the western flanks of Heck Crag into Bannerdale, its upper course exceedingly narrow, traversing a steep scree slope. Having recently sampled it I am well placed to slap a cautionary comment to its use, though the peregrine falcon nesting on Satura Crag added audible excitement to my painfully slow and deliberate steps.

The main ridge path to Beda Fell branches right off the Patterdale path in the proximity of Angle Tarn, anyone considering including the double-summitted Angletarn Pikes to their day may either begin with the Beda Fell ridge path breaking left to choice through the undulating rocky hillocks, or continue with the Patterdale path to climbing directly onto the western top, either way – good visibility is essential. The two summits are separated by an area of eroded peat, the passage of walkers definitely not to blame in this instance. There is a superb outlook towards Red Screes beyond Brothers' Water, to Fairfield through Deepdale and the bold profile of St Sunday Crag, Grisedale, the very head of Ullswater, and Place Fell.

The grassy ridge path strides north-east most pleasantly above Heck Cove passing a stout cairn then descend to step over the bridleway emerging from Bannerdale linking Martindale with Patterdale via Boredale Hause. Should conditions dictate one may choose to slip right at the dishevelled cairn down this easy grass trod heading for Dale Head Farm and the valley road. This path having the distinct advantage of coming close above the high-fenced valley enclosures, the repose of the red deer herd. In the evening you'll hear what sounds uncannily like the calls of a distant shepherd 'yoy', 'yoy', during the day deer drift onto The Nab seeking grazing and this form of communication re-unites them with their calves.

The ridge path crosses Bedafell Knott descends again then steadily rises along the simple ridge to Beda Head. This is a lovely viewpoint, intimate with the whole Martindale scene. The continuing path trends leftwards via a prominent cairn then right, slanting down a grooved path pitching more steeply above Thrang Crag, another nesting site of peregrine. It is splendid way to end the day traversing the rocky knot of Winter Crag to reach a seat, paths splay three ways. Go sharp right down to meet the road beside Wintercrag Farm, crossing Christy Bridge to complete the round.

After walk refreshment

The closest walk-inn is the Howtown Hotel. Otherwise the four-mile drive to Pooley Bridge is unavoidable to sample the fayre at either the Sun (Black Sheep) or Pooley Bridge (Jennings) Inns. Having committed to the drive then for the sake of just two more miles one might consider the Queens Head at Tirril, famously associated with its own fine ale popular with CAMRA buffs – since 1999 Tirril Brewery has been located at Brougham.

Picture gallery and guides

Thirty four colour images can be viewed on the website evoking the character and romance of this walk.

Walkers with a fascination in the historic environment may also seek out my new guides to **Hadrian's Wall Path** (cicerone.co.uk) and **The Roman Ring** (theromanring.com).