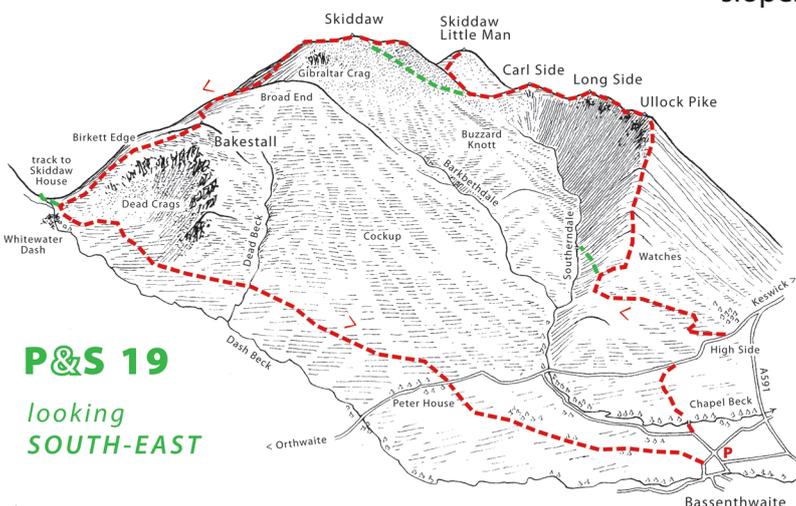


PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

19 Skiddaw from Bassenthwaite



P&S 19
looking
SOUTH-EAST

distance : 19km/12 miles
ascent : 1,045m/3,430ft

time : 8.5 hours
grade : energetic

MAPS (Harvey Superwalker) North
(Ordnance Survey) OL4 North-western area

PARK

Park wisely in Bassenthwaite. Either park in the triangular village centre near The Avenue GR 230322, or on the verge at the junction of School Lane and Burthwaite GR 230321. Alternatively, one might start from the lay-by at High Side on the Orthwaite Road GR 236310, quite the majority do, but they miss the genuine pleasure of the green-pastured out-walk and final setting-sun strides... to the door of the Sun Inn!

WALK SUMMARY

Skiddaw is a much-loved landmark fell, a Munro firth of Scotland. The cornerstone of the northern Lakes, revered down the generations by native and tourist alike as a gracious backdrop, particularly to views from Derwentwater and Bassenthwaite. It is a massif in its own right, with a company of supporting fells leading to an remotely sited summit. Built of slate and therefore almost bereft of crags, its upper slopes are beset with scree. Many who climb the fell do so as a one-off fell-walking event, they see the sleek

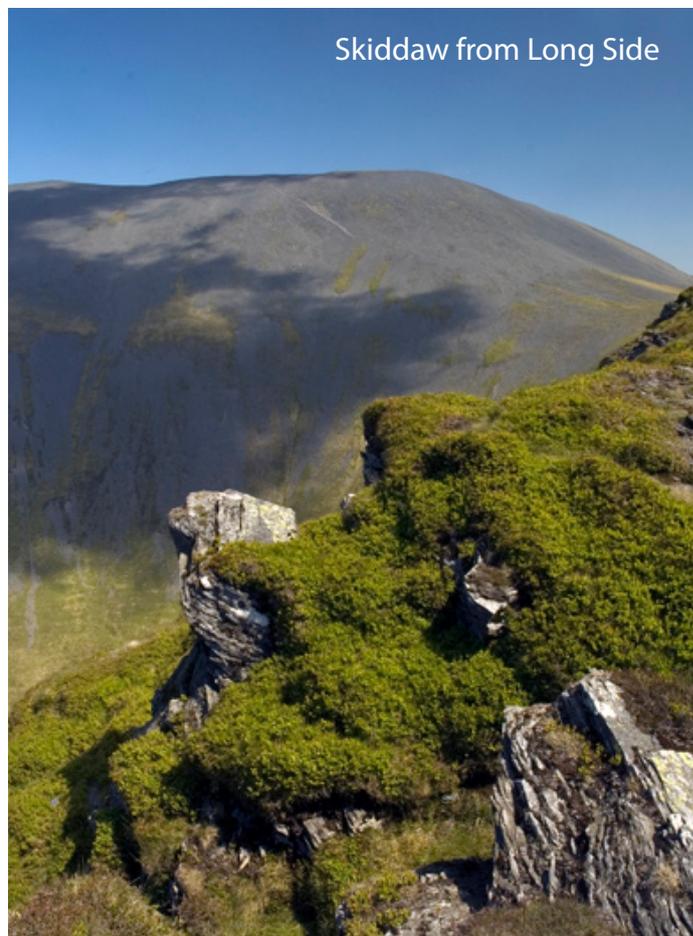
slopes and judge it an 'easy' ascent to a magnificent viewpoint. They are correct. But judgement and a little local knowledge are needed to avert tedium and fashion a memorable day on the fell.

To unlock Skiddaw's finest qualities begin your walk from the charming little village of Bassenthwaite, which lies in the vale immediately to the north-west. Eyes turn quickly to the razor-edge leading to Ullock Pike, Long Side and Carl Side. Follow on from these grand-galleried viewpoints to traverse the southern slopes of Skiddaw and gather up Skiddaw Little

Man, possessing the most comprehensive and expensive fell-top view in Lakeland. Backtracking over the main summit, descend via Bakestall to the beautiful waterfall of Whitewater Dash. Follow on down the enchanting Dash valley and subsequent green pastures to the regain Bassenthwaite where it all begun.

Adore Skiddaw all the more

Leave the tree-shaded Avenue at the centre of the village south, follow the road to the junction with School Lane, keep left along Burthwaite, a verge less lane blinkering a view of Skiddaw dead ahead. At the tight left bend cross the stone flag stile and descend the pasture



Skiddaw from Long Side

to the gated footbridge spanning Chapel Beck, it waters draining Barkbeth and Southerndales. Once across bear left rising up the shaded bank to a new fence and stile, spot the Victorian spired parish church down to the right. Cross and follow on with the hedge to the left. As the pasture recesses left, cross the stile ahead, now with a fence right, advance to a stile and curve round left with the next field corner. 60 metres short of the gate, find a stile beneath a mature oak tree, cross and ascend the pasture diagonally to a stile onto the road. Turn right, following the road passing High Side House to reach the start of a bridleway left, at a gate. Note the lay-by just beyond, an alternative starting point for the walk.

Go through the gate, bridleway signboard 'Skiddaw – Barkbeth and Mellbecks' (farms), ford the gill and follow the line of gorse, as an old hedgeline is met bear right with the thorn, continuing beyond, where they have been grubbed, to angle up left to a ladder stile spanning a wall. A green way leads across the pasture to another ladder stile after which the green track curves right with an open view into Southerndale, (which means 'the valley south of Bassenthwaite village'). Arrive at a gate and perilously-perched stile. Cross and, leaving the track, go immediately right, ascending beside the

intake wall. At the brow bear off left onto the ridge path. This rises to an intriguing area of outcropping known as The Watches, time for your first a stop. Rock features are rare on the massif and geologists have paid them attention, as can be judged by several pneumatically drilled bore holes.

The path pursues the ridge which soon starts up more steeply, after being joined by a side path from Ravenstone. Views over the pastures and woodland to Bassenthwaite Lake give heightened pleasure to any moment's pause. Higher the path has been de-commissioned from the precise edge though the new line is taking a pasting too, so further work will inevitably be drawn to this section. A short stair of rock leads onto the first top, leading on to the cairned summit of Ullock Pike at 690m/2,264ft, a worthy place to deliberate on Skiddaw, across the barren headwall of Southerndale, and on a broader front, ridge upon ridge of Lakeland's wonderful fells spread out to the south. The fell-name derives from a combination of 'the pike espied from Ullock' where Ullock (GR 245231) itself meant 'the place where wolves play' from ulfa leikr.

The ridge path dips and rises along a comparatively narrow crest looking down upon the forestry relieved upper dome of Dodd to the right and the



Helvellyn range from Skiddaw Little Man



greater sparkle of Bassenthwaite lake. Rising to the cairn at 733m/2,405ft marking the summit of Long Side attention ever more focuses on Skiddaw, its scree-draped slope suggesting a torrid ascent. The ridge leads down to a depression with the obvious path skirting the edge above Southerndale. Take the opportunity to follow the ridge path direct to the summit cairn on Carl Side at 746m/2,448ft 'the ridge of the old man'. Enjoy the view down the slope to the sub-ridge of Carlsleddam and across the vale to Keswick and Derwentwater.

But of more pressing thought where next to travel. The obvious path up the impending Skiddaw looks less than inviting. Upon seeing universal scree, 999 out of every 1000 will turn with the overly-apparent path, cursing and stumbling to the mid-point on Skiddaw's summit ridge. Whilst from Carl Side the wily orienteering fell-walker will observe the potential for a different scenario. Using simple deduction they will judge the right-hand slope as less steep and sense a more agreeable route to Fox Bield. Thereafter, they might put their faith in trust, but armed with the hindsight of this guide, they will triumph. Therefore, descend to pass Carlside Tarn and rising briefly to an obvious quartz boulder bear half-right on grass, embarking on firm, stable slate scree, rise at a comfortable angle with no hint of a path. Pause upon reaching the large quartz outcropping of Fox Bield, the name suggesting the traditional hidey-hole of reynard. Then bear more acutely uphill for only a matter of forty-five metres

to step onto grass, thereafter follow on a shallow ascending line retaining pasture to the ridge path, how sweet is that?

One may simply turn left to complete the easy-underfoot ascent of Skiddaw, or take this golden opportunity to visit Skiddaw Little Man. Descend and at a fence corner continue with the fence close left to then rise to the conical top. At 865m/2,838ft the cairn sits off the main course of Skiddaw's daily procession yet right at the middle of the most comprehensive view you are ever likely to get of this fabulous mountain district. Given the weather indulge yourself with time to soak up the prospect, out stripping Skiddaw in terms of Lakeland detail.

Backtrack and continue up the south slope of Broad End to the first of a line of cairns leading duly along the slate trail to the summit of Skiddaw at 931m/3,054ft. A topograph, with an inevitably rudimentary fix on detail, wind-shelter and old concrete triangulation pillar form the focus. Being so far back from the southern esplanade, the outlook is more given to the Solway Plain with the distant sweep of Dumfries and Galloway holding the promise of distant high lands. Back o'Skidda's apron of heathery hills fill the foreground with a less than exciting back view of Blencathra, Skiddaw House among its huddle of trees seems a lonely place in the midst of it all.

Pass on by a second wind-shelter winding down the north slope to come beside a fence. Looking



Dead Craggs from Birkett Edge

ahead notice the curious patchwork of heather on Great Calva, cut in irregular strips to provide younger growth for grouse. The fence turns right as the slope breaks north-east this leads down Broad End to reach a saddle containing a dishevelled bield-cum-fold after which veer half-left to reach the summit cairn of the shoulder height Bakestall at 673m/2,208ft. The fell-name like Stool End in Great Langdale suggests a distant (from the north) likeness to a baking-stool, even more enigmatic is the cliffs directly below, why Dead Craggs? Keep right along the heather and bilberry rim to re-join and continue down Birkett Edge with the fence, latterly wall, to meet the Skiddaw House track adjacent to a gate. Turn left paying keen attention to the beck, and as the track begins to bear left find the opportunity to sneak closer to view the handsome waterfall Whitewater Dash, most of the time it well-and-truly lives up to its name. The lower portion is harder to reach, but merits the adventure.

Follow the track below the shadowed amphitheatre of Dead Craggs to join the farm drive from Dash Farm, admiring the intriguing synclinal mass of quartz across the valley, known as Brock Crag, the place of badgers. The backing fell is called Great Cockup, which meant 'the lekking place of black grouse'. The

road passes through four gates to meet the road at Peter House. Cross straight over via the broad gate and pay little heed to the farm track a waymark board guiding slightly left straight across the pasture to a gate to the right of a wood. The bridleway continues by three further hand gates, then makes a passing a line of trees veers half-right down to a gate midway along the fence line making on by further gates into a lane and so into the village centre.

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

The Sun Inn at Bassenthwaite, Pheasant Inn at Dubwath and Snooty Fox at Uldale.

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