

PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards

on BBC Radio Cumbria

23 Stybarrow Dodd from Glenridding



distance : 13½ km/8½ miles

ascent : 813m/2,670ft

time : 5½ hours

grade : energetic

MAPS (Harvey Superwalker) Central
(Ordnance Survey) OL5 North-eastern area

PARK

National Park car park in the midst of Glenridding (pay & display £5). The Glenridding Information Centre, at the entrance, can provide priceless advice on the day's weather.

Sticks and Stones

Most fellwalkers leave Glenridding with their minds filled with the anticipation of Helvellyn, but today's expedition turns face on the ancient Sticks Pass to traverse Stybarrow Dodd, backtracking via the handsome rocky summit of Sheffield Pike. At 2,420ft Sticks Pass, for all its simplicity, is the highest historic foot pass in the Lake District.

This walk takes pleasure in following the steady eastern approach of this old route from Glenridding, via the remnants of the old Greenside lead mine. Stepping onto Stybarrow Dodd, to revel in fine views from this 843 metre height, the first of the Dodds, enjoying extensive views along the Helvellyn range, as too north and westward. The walk then turns tail following the grassy ridge east onto Green Side and down by

Nick Head from where mounting the notable rocky crest of Sheffield Pike. Begin the descent by visiting the subsidiary top of Heron Pike resplendent with heather and commanding a sumptuous view over Ullswater. Now venturing helter-skelter down towards Glenridding, via the south-east ridge. At Rake Head one has the option of stepping onto Glenridding Dodd, providing a notable bird's eye view upon the village, a joyous scene in any season of the year.

Let's make strides

Leave the car park at its upper end passing the health centre. Notice the sign decreeing 'no smoking anywhere'. Quite right, not here, not on Stybarrow Dodd, not anywhere! Joining the village street turning left up by the Travellers Rest. The pub-name a reminder that this is an age-old thoroughfare, traversing the Helvellyn range via Sticks Pass, venturing westward into the Thirlmere vale.

The present sturdy cottages built as homes for lead miners, follow their ghostly clogs on up the metalled way, bearing up right passing a terraced row and cross a cattle grid. Follow on by a further two rows upon what is known as Greenside Road. Concrete tracks ensure a level way for traffic heading up to the former mine complex. Notice several stone piles in the pasture across the valley, like the walls themselves, the labour of farmers gathering the litter of natural stone to make better pasture. The valley-name Glenridding is of pre-conquest origin, and means 'the valley beset with bracken', some things don't change!

However, the Greenside mine has changed. In its heyday one of the largest lead mines in Britain. A going concern from 1820 until 1962, at which point the Atomic Weapon Research Establishment exploited its ultimate closure, conducting a series of trial explosions in the depths of the mine. One can deduce those galleries are now a little less accessible. Mind you the mine was 1,400 feet deep, reaching below the level of Ullswater. Just think of the lives of those miners, we sweat in just walking up past their workings, they had to clamber up and down repeatedly on a diet of bread and lard. Those buildings that were in a viable state survived the mine's demise, one is a self-catering cottage, another became the Helvellyn Youth Hostel and two others outdoor pursuits lodgings for the youth of Blackpool and Bury. See the huge spoil banks, those beneath Glenridding Screes though grassed over at its top, the sides have broken requiring the installation of multiple retaining boards. Woe betide the day a cloudburst undermines them and releases a body of the lifeless mass, this will smother the hostel environs utterly. Swart Beck cascades in a turbulent chaos of stone, an impressive sight looking up from the bridge.

Wander on by the ski club car parking area, guided by the waymarks sign 'Brown Cove, Whiteside Bank and Sticks Pass'. The track zig-zags. Then as it turns purposefully towards the valley break off right onto the Sticks Pass path proper. Climbing cross an old wall-lined leat enjoying the exception views up the valley to the soaring peak of Catstycam. As juniper shrubs threaten to engulf the path the trail veers right making its rough way, passing beyond a crag-end, watch for the sharp left turn. Either follow this for sure progress, or continue with the less trod way leading to the upper realms of the Swart Beck ravine. A dramatic place, though the path is in a very poor state. Take the impromptu path that steps up left before the timbers and tiny walled pens. Follow on in harmony with the beck, taking a few moments aside to look at the cascades, with further traces of mine architecture and rusting effects, advance to cross the small wooden footbridge. The wasteland of lead smelting ensures little growth underfoot. At this point the walk can be happily halved by bearing half-right up the damp fell pasture to Nick Head. At the remnants of a cairn bear right from the pass onto the easy rising fell, a clear path leading to the summit of Sheffield Pike, making a round walk of 5½ miles.

Follow on with the ancient path passing the 'dry' reservoir, the curved dam a fascinating site/sight.

The bridle-path heads up the valley of Sticks Gill east below the steep slopes of Green Side, beneath the two massive gashes, quarried mine caverns.

The pass, marked by a cairn is a prominent cross-paths. In times past evidently sticks were strategically set up to define the trail to obviate against travellers getting lost in winter mists or snow. A similar practice to the Stake Pass, the name differentiation for clarity one from the other. Turn smartly right following the clear path mounting onto Stybarrow Dodd's south top. Quite the best viewpoint from this wonderful fell. A great expanse draws the eye round the Lakeland fell heartland from Blencathra to Helvellyn. The ridge clings to the western rim, hence to reach the actual summit one has to make a conscious move right. A small cairn at 2,766ft is set upon the gentle domed top, with a short length of wall just beyond, acting as a defensive shield to the unseen brink of Deepdale Crag, a rather ambitious name for a steep rotten slope, not worth falling down all the same. Tend down the south-east slope traversing the shlaow damp ridge to the small cluster of cairns on White Stones.

At this point the ridge takes a sharp left turn bound for Hart Side, but our mission is east then south-east avoiding the broken rim of Glencoyne Head and, during the grassy descent the exposed edge of the upper of two quarries. In most this is dodgy, so walk with your sense of self-preservation a foremost facility. A clear path materialises as the slope steepens, leading simply done into the peat hags of Nick Head. Head straight on eastward rising onto the summit of Sheffield Pike at 2,215ft. Apparently this derives its name from a corruption of 'Sheep Field Pike'. A modest cairn clustered around a boundary stone inscribed with the letters M and H, dating from 1830, this defined the meeting of the lands of Howard of Greystoke Castle and Marshall of Patterdale Hall. Walk south-east to visit the top of Heron Pike, marked with a metal stake, also bearing the estate letters, from where descend the prominent south-east ridge to Rake Head and then the steep grassy bank right to re-gain Greenside Road.

After-walk refreshment

For a welcome bar patronise either the Travellers Rest (in upper Glenridding), the Inn on the Lake and Glenridding Hotel (beside the main road); for a welcome cuppa visit Fairlight Cafe (at the exit to the main car park) open 8am to 6pm every day. Less certain the centrally sited Fellbites Cafe, situated opposite the Glenridding Information Centre.

(Copyright: Mark Richards November 2007)