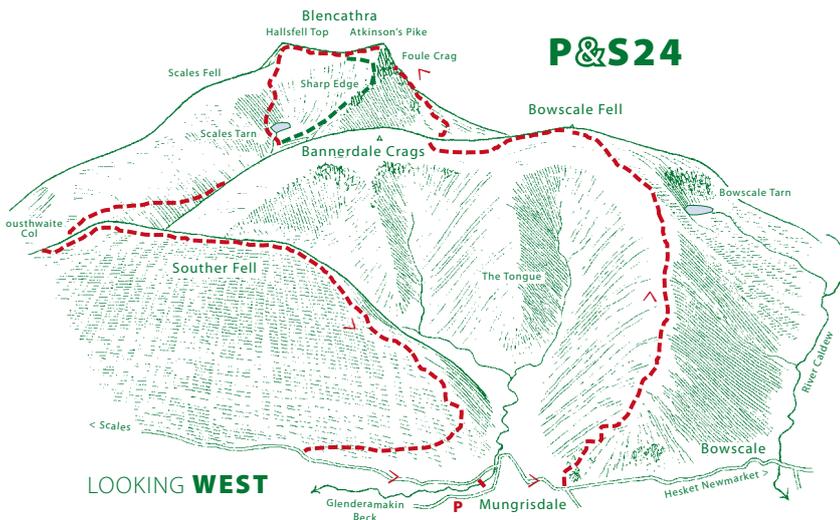


PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

24 Blencathra from Mungrisdale



distance : 14 km/8¾ miles
ascent : 813m/2,670ft

time : 6 hours
grade : energetic

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

PARK

On the sheep-cropped verge south of Mungrisdale village's contemporary Recreation Rooms GR 364301.

A Christmas cracker

By contrast with the normal line of ascent, this walk tackles Blencathra on a more gradual course via Bowscale Fell encircling the headwaters of the Glenderamakin to conclude over Souther Fell (pronounced 'sooter'). The walk is almost entirely on grass, but can include a slice of real mountaineering for the confident hill-goer. If the weather is dry and the wind relents then a scrambling descent of Sharp Edge can be entertained. By a strange quirk of circumstances on the two occasions the author has tackled this famous arete, it was in descent, so can vouch it is little more difficult than the ascent, but it requires a steady head and competence on exposed rock, so most definitely should not be undertaken lightly.

The Route

Follow the road passing the Recreation Rooms, noting the old limekiln tucked into the bank behind, a sure indication of the near proximity of mountain limestone. Also spot the old mill-race falls tumbling from the north side of the Mill Inn. Let's hope you will not yourself be tumbling from the Mill Inn later, though you'll no doubt relish tumbling in at the end of the walk! The road swings right through the village passing the diminutive church of St Kentigern's. The dedication is to an early British missionary, alternative name St Mungo, hence the village-name.

Turn left where a lane begins, immediately after the Hutton Roof junction. Go through the gate and step onto the fell to the left of the old quarry. A clear path climbs quickly through the gorse onto the steadily rising ridge soon bracken is replaced by heather with spacious views north over the Caldew valley to Carrock Fell. The contrast between the fells and the country to the east very apparent, though geologically that lower lying land is composed of ever more ancient rocks. Having crossed the subsidiary summit make a point of stepping down right momentarily to view Bowscale Tarn in its wild hollow, before heading on to the summit of Bowscale Fell, with its cairn and wind shelter at 702m/2,303ft.

The path continues south, along the broad damp ridge, though its worth making a point of bearing briefly left to the edge overlooking the deep trench of Bannerdale. One can continue with the edge path to visit the summit of Bannerdale Crag, though the prime route veers right south-south-east declining to the small saddle at the head of the Glenderamakin. Glenderamakin Beck, is a main feeder of the Greta and thus the River 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 British 'glyn' and 'moch'.

Cross directly over and climb the prominent ridge by the intermediate peak, where the ridge path from Mungrisdale Common meets the ridge at a wind shelter. The final steep climb of Blue Screens onto Foule Crag is quickly achieved, a marvellous moment and one of decision.

The natural choice is to cross the broad saddle, from which the fell's modern name Saddleback derives, though it should be noted that the ancient name Blencathra similarly meant 'valley-head seat', which is to all intents the same thing. A pool frequently occupies the saddle, pass the quartz cross set into the slope and rise to the ultimate ground, find no cairn but a circular plate marking the Ordnance Survey spot height at 868m/2,848ft - and what a spot! The stupendous view south to the Helvellyn range and the fell surrounds of Thirlmere and Derwentwater encourage one to linger long in the breeze. The view down Hall's Fell equally as impressive, while to the west and north lie the great rolling mass of fell Back o'Skidda, at the source of the River Caldew, with considerable tracts of heather lending rich mosaic tones of purple in late summer. Descend east watching for a half-left fork off the newly well-graded path, a path materialises making down into the hollow beneath Sharp Edge. to reach the outflow of Scales Tarn. One can, of course, simply follow the graded path down Scales Fell to Mousthwaite Col, revelling in the views over the scarp edge into the Doddick and Scales Beck valleys.

The alternative route to the tarn outflow is to descend directly off the top of Foule Crag down the excessively steep slick slabs onto Sharp Edge. To be quite blunt the name is not exaggerated and

demands the utmost care and respect. There are a variety of problems not the least, one might say the crux coming early on with a narrow cockerel's comb arete, sometimes termed the post box, upon a smooth tilted platform. Suffice to say that by a mixture of steady steps and always having one's hands (even bum) at play one may make light of the process, but there are few weak-kneed copped-out options, so stay well clear if you doubt your skills. The path sweeps easily down to the tarn outflow, from where the path follows the beck and fords it contouring above the Glenderamackin onto the broad saddle of Mousthwaite Col. One of only two cols in The Lakes, Broadcrag Col being the other. Follow the ridge path straight on rising onto Souther Fell, swinging north along the plain damp summit ridge, the only cairn lies off the spine of the ridge, on the west. A fine spot to consider the dark wall of Bannerdale Crags, and particularly its short east ridge in its midst. There are no other cairns on the gently undulating ridge the summit at 522m/1,713ft identified by the merest scrape of bedrock. The ridge path steps easily down to the north-east, but is denied its natural destiny, the bull's-eye on the Mill Inn, by landowner resistance. At a wooden way-mark post veer right descending to the enclosure wall which is followed amid dense bracken due south until at last the open road can be accessed. Go through the road gate left, to finish the walk, via the footbridge below the Mill Inn.

After-walk refreshment

The Mill Inn at Mungrisdale... to try a pie and pint, though sadly doors are closed on Christmas and Boxing Days.

(Copyright: Mark Richards December 2007)



Blencathra from Mungrisdale