

PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

36 The Loweswater Terraces from Waterend

Five and a whisker miles — 3.5 hours

Nature of the walk : Easy grass paths and fellside tracks

MAP Ordnance Survey Explorer OL4

The English Lakes North-western area

PARK A lay-by at Waterend, Loweswater, identified by its telephone kiosk. Situated a little over 2 miles east of the A 5086 at Mockerkin Tarn — GR 117224.

Many regular visitors to Lakeland have their own treasured locations and tightly guarded secret and intimate places, it is part of the magic of this famous landscape that people identify with its diverse beauties and bring them close to their heart. Here is one exquisite walking round revered and enjoyed in part by many, but seldom undertaken as a round trip in the manner described.

Anyone who has seen the film 'Miss Potter' will have been lifted by the prospect in the opening sequence, there will have been those who will have been surprised by the mountain outlook on Crummock Water and the Buttermere vale it revealed. The vantage for this brief piece of filming was the forward prow of Low Fell, from where the southerly view beyond Mellbreak is out-of-this-world Lakeland. Even so modest a fell requires a bit of puff to climb and so to share the pleasure of this marvellous setting with a wider audience I offer this mid-height circuit. For the main part of the walk attention is directly upon and over lovely Loweswater itself, one of the district's most charming of lakes. Out of the top draw of sane walk plans it has the Kirkstile Inn at mid-point - inn your stride, to use one of my notoriety puns!

During my reconnaissance walk I had an extended conversation with Mr Vickers from Mire Syke. He pointed out that Holme Wood, shading the lake on the southern shore, when viewed from the slopes of Low Fell, takes on the colourful shape of a crouching pheasant, and it is true the head and eye in particular, are very obvious once you focus on the entire form. It

was good to engage with him to pick up the proper pronunciation of various fells. Hen Comb comes out as 'Hencum' and Darling Fell, is 'Durling Fell'. From this one can judge the former takes its name from the skyline brow of the fell was once considered to resemble a hen's head (but it hardly matches the motif on a Kelloggs cereal packet) and the latter comes from a linkage with 'deer' and 'heather (ling)', though you'll search in vain to find a trace of this lovely plant today among the gorse, bracken, slaty scree and tightly grazing moor grass and deer are as common as rocking-horse droppings. Mr Vickers viewed his farming role in the countryside as having purpose so long as he was a stockman, working body, mind and soul in the landscape. The notion of countryside managers keeping a wilderness for its own sake he felt was not sustainable, who would work the hours of a family farmer?

Like a game of football it is a walk of two halves, gaining the mid-height terraced paths and tracks from valley-floor interim points, at all points entirely beautiful. One may even choose to stay low in the second half and wander through Holme Wood at shore level. To be honest whatever you do in the Loweswater locality will bring you joy and pleasure... given the weather! Recent blazing sun heralding the birth of the English summer a case in point.

The WALK

Opposite the lay-by find a metalled lane signed Askill B&B/bridleway to Mosser Fell Road. As the tarmac switches to concrete bear left and smartly right into the green lane rising by gates to meet the Mosser Fell Road. Notice the old Bamford mower embedded in the turf, it must have languished there for fifty years and more, a collector's item as for all the rains endured it looks still fit for purpose, quite amazing. Turn right and follow the gently declining lane, at this time of the year the lining broom plants displaying vivid yellow blooms. The view over the lake sets the scenic tone of the walk. Ignore the steps and stile up the bank to the left, continue to where a seat is found beside a padlocked gate. Cross the stile and follow the level turf track. This passes a old

shallow quarry and continues as a narrow path gently rising to a downward slanting intervening fence. A stile has been placed in the fence below the scree and gorse bank, but up off the strict line of the established path (rather odd). Pass through the opened gap (or over the stile), but by either means keep faith with the developed sheep trod of a path, this ascends steadily passing two cairns and slips over a brow. Now on a slightly declining line through the bracken pass beneath the bank of gorse to ford Crabtree Beck above the conifer copse, for all the maturity of the plantation the woodland is not shown on OS maps!

Maintain direction beyond the woodland fence onto the definite shelf below the craggy slopes of Low Fell. Spot the prominent fang of white quartz above. The path is plain enough soon making a downward dip to level at a fence stile. It continues ever more clear, passing a solitary Scots pine - Laurel & Hardy's song 'The Trail of the Lonesome Pine' comes to mind! The southerly view of Mellbreak, Grasmoor and all those wonderful fells surrounding Crummock Water give constant cause to linger longer. As too the moment's glance back to Holme Wood to fix its likeness to a crouching pheasant.

Coming round below the steep eastern slopes the terraced path crosses a second fence stile. You will notice that there is a path descending from the high skyline beside this fence. There is an associated story to this path. If you hark back to the stile up the steps mentioned earlier in the walk off the Mosser Fell Road lane that marked the western end of the strike of the right-of-way shown on Ordnance Survey maps. It never had basis in fact but was depicted after the Countryside Act of 1949 when definitive rights-of-way were established. The local parish council was given the task of showing where paths existed, often a vicar or someone on the parish council was given the task of indicating such paths and notoriously they often had never walked the paths they claimed - Hence the daft sash-like drape of the path. *If you are holding the OL4 map take a look at an even more bizarre example of the same phenomenon. At GR125123 on Iron Crag, south of the head of Ennerdale Water, a bridleway terminates at the brink of a cliff, it must have been inserted as a sad joke that no one questioned!*

Continue to where the green dashes on the map strike down to the bounding wall in trees, cross the stile and descend the bracken slope fording a gill to follow the lower wall to a stile into the

linear conifer spinney called Whinny Ridding. The path runs on south to emerge via a stile into a pasture, following on along the open green track to a gate/wall-stile into a lane pass on by Woodend and Foulsyke to meet a minor road. Turn right to the road junction where, either turn left to visit the Kirkstile Inn or right to continue the walk. In which case at the next junction turn left following the narrow road down to Maggie's Bridge car park. Should you wish to stay low and explore the shore the Loweswater within Holme Wood then go through the car park and over the cattle grid following the track to Watergate Farm. The wood is swiftly entered at a gate, make a point of visiting The Bothey former charcoal burners' base, which enjoys a special view over the charming lake (National Trust holiday let).

Sticking with plan A - Follow the farm track left leading to and through High Nook Farm yard via gates. The track swings up to a gate in the intake wall and continues to cross a small footbridge over Highnook Back. Now sweeping north under the steep slopes of Carling Knott on a rising track coming above the 'head' of the pheasant the track completes its rise at a gate/stile then declines to cross Holme Beck and curve north and north-west on a marvellous terrace parade. A strategic seat confirming the much appreciated view. Coming through a gate follow the track via three further gates. Espy a white quartz stone standing in the field to the right some four feet tall. One wonders if it is the tooth implied by the farm-name Fangs Brow. Coming by a ladder-stile and bridleway sign 'Loweswater by Hudson Place', cross and follow the track and lane down to Iredale Place (Irishman's valley farm) continuing in the lane by Jenkinson's Place and stiles field-paths to Hudson Place. Go left down the access lane and right at the bottom to the hill via the stile to a valley-bottom boardwalk and stile, linking to the lay-by via the field path and confined path by two further stiles.

After-walk refreshment

One can be torn between the Kirkstile Inn, situated immediately east of Loweswater close to the parish church, or the Lamplugh Tip at Lamplugh. The former has a regional reputation and brews its own lovely tippie, the latter has recently changed hands and is providing good food too. For refreshing teas make a bee-line for The Barn at New House Farm on the road north to Lorton. All three venues have recently been visited by the author, who can attest his approval of the fayre.