

PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

39 Glencoyne Head from Aira Force

Five miles — three hours

NATURE OF THE WALK: Firm trod paths almost all the way, though there are moments when the passage of cattle in Glencoyne Park challenge a steady step as too a few strides of peaty sog on the ridge.

MAP Ordnance Survey Explorer OL5
The English Lakes North-eastern area

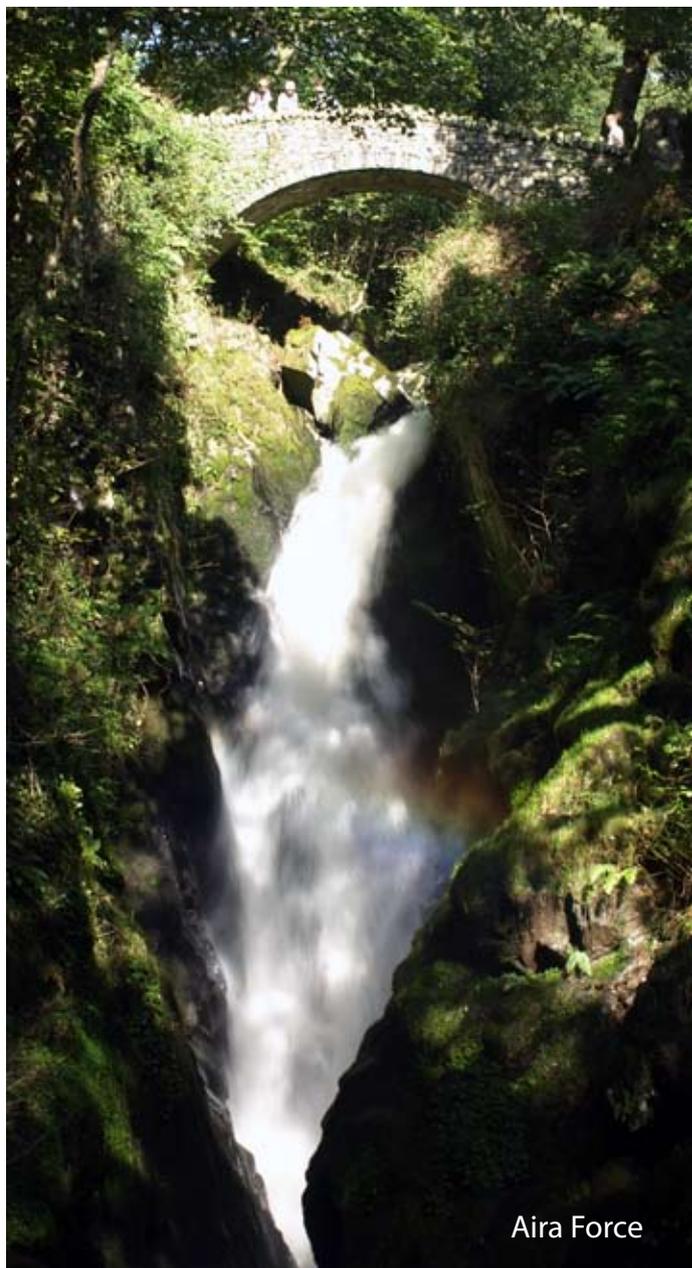
PARK In the large pay&display National Park car park in the village of Glenridding.

This is the penultimate section of the 24-mile long 108 StagePath. Truly this is the scenic crescendo of a marvellous walk. Beginning from the environs of Aira Force the walk undertakes a steady rise across the slopes of Glencoyne Park to reach the high park wall. This is the highest part of the entire StagePath and an exciting section it is too, contouring around the hanging valley of Glencoyne Head on an old miners' path to Nick Head, before descending to the shores of Ullswater to weave through the trees to complete the trip.

Because Stagcoach's 108 service from Penrith to Patterdale runs fewer buses each day, than occurs on the 555 StagePath route, one has a smaller time window for walk planning. Hence a smart tactic is to use a car too. Drive to Glenridding in good time to meet the bus. Travel down to the Aira Force bus stop. Then you can walk leisurely back along the line of the route at your own pace and enjoy the splendours of the walk as befits this lovely landscape encounter.

The WALK

Wander through the National Trust car park suitably equipped with toilets and a tearoom.



Aira Force

Take a glance at the interpretative panels before striding through the arch to follow the 'passage of thousands' to enter the Aira Force gorge. One will immediately be aware of the stately trees, as indeed it was planted as an arboretum. Cross the broad footbridge and follow the path on the right-hand side of the gorge this ultimately leads over a bridge to the foot of the boiling pool beneath Aira Force. On sunny days a rainbow can constantly hang over the lower section of the falls, quite mesmerising (as can be seen on the photo above). The name Aira Force seems so apt. Indeed, might The National Trust be missing a comical trick in not calling the hand-driers in the loos down at the start 'aira force'! Climb the potentially slick stone steps, they are almost permanently wet. Do glance back a third the way up to see the perspective shown above.



Ullswater steamer along the Glencoyne shore seen from Spying How

At the top of the stair, restored, as inscribed in 1958, turn left and passing a seat leave the wooded enclosure at a hand-gate. The path leads quickly up to a hand-gate entering a spinney which leads via a plank bridge into a car park. Cross the Dockray road at the car access and climb over the fence-stile opposite.

The path has all the scenic virtues, indeed it has a wonderful outlook, but underfoot the poaching of cattle have made some sections less than comfortable. Do not be deterred, the going improves on the steady rise through what was once a red deer preserve, Glencoyne Park. The prospect down to Ullswater is a constant pleasure, you are well-removed from the valley traffic and able to enjoy the great lake's scenic virtues undisturbed (see photo above). Crossing a stile the path winds up by mature beech trees at a spot annotated on maps a Spying How, 'the outlook hill'. One wonders what quizzical watch this may record? Climbing on more purposefully through the bracken with ever more handsome views down on Glencoyne and across to Sheffield Pike to reach and cross a fence-stile set into a wall-gap. This wall demarcated the top of the medieval deer park with Watermillock Common Fell and Swinside Knott above.

Keep left, a contouring path joins from the right, but accompany the wall until the path naturally drifts slightly upwards onto peaty ground, with numerous - if not humorous - hops needed to find a dry-shod way. The path leads to cross wall-stile and enters the upper realms of Glencoyne Head, a wonderful example of a glaciated hanging valley. The path is often called the miners' gallery, as it

contours at a consistent level high above the valley floor and evolved to provide access to the lead mines at the head of the valley and Greenside. It is quite narrow and you do need to pay attention to every foot fall. Stop to spot an old breach stone dam in the valley below.

The upper portion of Glencoyne Beck is appropriately called Deepdale Slack. After passing beneath Scot Crag the path corners the head-head above the adit entry to a lead mine. You

may step down to inspect, but the damp interior is too low for anything other than a fox to get in, one must presume there has been some infilling to inhibit casual access. The path wends south on a gently rising line and as it crosses the brow angle down the ridge over yet more damp ground to gain Nick Head and the obvious downward path into Glencoyndale.

Passing through a gate, below the shadowed slopes cast by Black Crag, the stony path then enters woodland at a hand-gate and continues down above the terrace of holiday cottages, built as workers' dwellings for the lead mine, they have the apt name Seldom Seen. Here join the access track which leads down to the road, with a bus stop at the road-end. But you'll not be ready for the comfy seat just yet, as a delightful path can be joined weaving through the trees at and just above the shore level which ultimately comes out onto the road as it enters the village of Glenridding.

After-walk refreshment

There are several tearooms in Glenridding, the best are Fellbites located opposite the National Park information centre in the main car park and Greystones Coffee House on the lane leading to the village hall. There are several pubs of which The Travellers Rest up Greenside road and Inn on the Lake best merit attention.

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