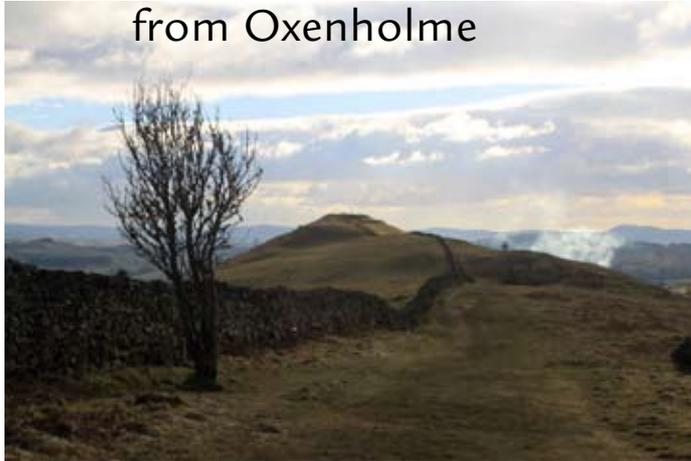


# PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards  
on BBC Radio Cumbria

## 43 The Helm

from Oxenholme



**2.5 miles — one and a half hours**

**NATURE OF THE WALK :** Firm turf paths.

**PARK GR 535900** Lay-by along the Sedbergh Road a few yards north of the Station Inn, or the lay-by at Underhelm Wood on the east side of the hill.

**MAP** Ordnance Survey OL7  
The English Lakes South-eastern area

The auld grey town of Kendal, handsomely straddling the River Kent, is blessed with a near surround of much-loved hills and scenic scarps. Situated to the south-east of the town, directly above Oxenholme railway station, The Helm is one-such landmark hill. Long appreciated by town's people as a place of leisured exercise and peaceful contemplation, the instant you wander along this little ridge-top to know precisely why it is so treasured.

Composed of Upper Silurian Kirkby Moor flags laid down as a marine mud some 430 million years ago, prior to a period of mass extinction, when 60% of marine species were wiped out. This mud was subsequently compacted and tilted, The Helm has sufficiently resisted latter-day glacial erosion to form a defiant north/south aligned ridge. In physical likeness the ridge matches the shape of the upturned hull of a ship, culminating upon a chiselled headland towards the southern extremity. This high point (185m/607ft) found purpose as a natural retreat in times of heightened threat for the local Celtic clan over two millennia ago. The twin ramparts of their hill-fort girdle the top, though there can have been only room for a handful of temporary huts. Present-



Kendal from The Helm

day transitory visitors appreciate the high spot for its captivating 360-degree view. The whole hill is called The Helm, perhaps derived from its likeness to a helmet, particularly apparent when viewed on southern approaches (A65 from Endmoor), while the summit, with its Iron Age defences, is identified by the name Castlesteads.

Approximately two-thirds of the hill is Open Access land. The western slope is open space, with commoner's grazing rights, to which locals have long enjoyed conditional recreational liberty. With the acquisition of the east slope, above Helmside Farm, by the Friends of the Lake District three years ago, the whole hill has gained the same degree of public access. The Friends' land is not formally designated Open Access, but in the spirit of their foundation and under their care and management a similar measured liberty has been extended.

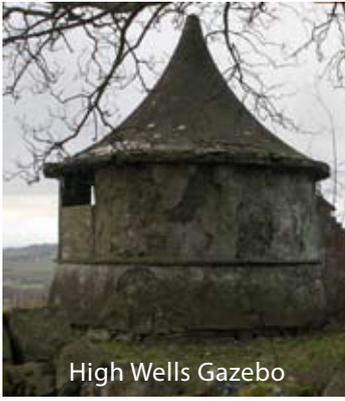
### The WALK

The beautiful simplicity of the walk is apparent from the outset. In effect this is a walk of two halves. The opening southward passage keeping to the western skyline gazes over Kendal to revel in far-flung Lakeland outlooks, while the second, return leg, holds to the eastern hillside backtracking to observe the quiet countryside to the east.

Find an Open Access signboard beside the cattle-grid at the northern tip of the access land, close by the Station Inn, from which you may judge the geography of the little hill as you embark. Thus stepping up off the open road - which runs along the western foot



Arnside Knott and Morecambe Bay from The Helm



of the hill to meet the A65 – follow the clear rising path heading due south climbing 200ft to the first brow, a good spot to first gauge your situation. Looking back north, along the Sedbergh ridge road, towards Benson Knott.



Come alongside the ridge wall and keep it company with Castlesteads' ramparts a striking feature ahead. The outward views are consistently superb, giving every good cause to pause from time to time to look down on Kendal and judge its favoured location, amid a great surround of tantalising fells a view made all the more exciting to the south-west where the silver strand of the River Kent at Arnside draws the eye towards the wider expanse of Morecambe Bay. While to the north-west looking over the ribbon housing of Oxenholme, running along the foot of the hill, and by the further expansion estates you gaze towards the heart of the town, with the Kentmere fells beyond.

At two points along the ridge new kissing-gates have been inserted to link through to the FLD's eastern hillside. Coming to the higher ground the wall is replaced by a fence. Pursue the ridge unfettered to rise through the shallow rampart banks onto the summit, marked by an old Ordnance Survey column, a moment of rich reward. Prominent Farleton Fell to the SE, Morecambe Bay SW, and NW over Scout Scar the serried ranks of Lakeland Fells. You'll notice that the hill-fort ramparts are missing on the west side, long since lost to land-slippage.

Continue south the gradient smartly changes as the path angles down by the rocky ground. Notice the recent wall restoration works, part of an on-going programme of craft skills courses run by the FLD. Coming down through the jumbo growth of gorse, keep to the more obvious path this curves right and coming closer to a wall switches back left with a bridleway. Your attention may be caught by a curious goblin's gazebo, lurking on the far side of the wall. Standing at the top of High Wells land, built, one suspects as an exclusive viewing station facing the Arnside estuary. The path leads south through a gate coming to a crossing of a minor road.

At this point turn left, by the part-fixed metal gate, with attendant Open Access signboard. The path splits at once, but keep uphill through the lighter gorse, bracken and tree growth to climb the steep southern slope of the hill, with a minor rock step beside an outcrop to regain the summit, separated from the OS pillar by the ridge fence. The eastern side of the summit fence rarely grazed contrasts markedly

to the tightly nibbled turf on the west side.

Continue over passing through the ramparts and down to a gate where enter the FLD enclosure. The character of this allotment is inevitably different to that of the west side as a result of different grazing patterns and the difference caused by its aspect, catching only the cooler morning sun. With the ridge wall close left walk on until you come by the first kissing-gate, whereupon drift half-right contouring on what is little more than a sheep trod by a small outcrop. Crossing the base of a downward orientated wall come over a shelf between young gorse to reach a small dam.

Follow on naturally curving up leftwards to meet the wall again at the second kissing-gate. Notice the sheep creep to the left, this low 'hole' was originally built into the wall to give lambs access to additional grazing on the common. Go through the kissing-gate and re-trace the path you ascended at outset of the walk. The place-name Oxenholme meant 'the raised meadow where draught plough oxen were kept'.

### After-walk refreshment

The Station Inn, situated above Oxenholme Station and The Punchbowl at Barrows Green on the A65.

visit: [www.markrichards.info](http://www.markrichards.info)  
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