

# PARK & STRIDE

with Mark Richards  
on BBC Radio Cumbria

## 47 Fleswick Bay

from Whitehaven



**8 miles — five hours**

**NATURE OF THE WALK:** Reliable and secure coastal paths and inland pastures, tracks and quiet country lanes, with negligible gradients - nonetheless its always wise to wear stout boots and carry wet weather gear, with a snack and drink to refresh.

**MAP** Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 303  
Whitehaven & Workington

### THE COLOURFUL COAST

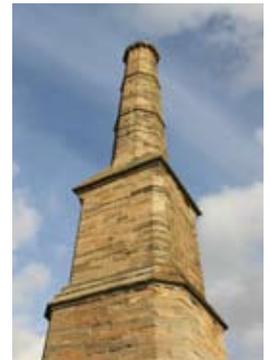
Attracted by the name the Colourful Coast I headed west to Whitehaven this last sunny Sunday and was richly rewarded with a truly wonderful and genuinely colourful walking experience. [www.colourfulcoast.org.uk](http://www.colourfulcoast.org.uk) was set up as a partnership project initiated by Whitehaven town bringing together various agencies and local volunteers. The raison d'être to restore the landscape from the raw effects of past industrial activity. The project has clearly breathed new life into the nature conservation of the cliffs and near coast, building a good network of paths for all to wander more freely and responsibly around this Cumbrian coastal treasure.



The Beacon and Whitehaven

It has long been my view that West Cumbria should be considered Maritime Lakeland, stand on the high ground above St Bees Head and comprehend the relationship of the coastal world with the high fells inland they are wedded, not a world apart. Though one may judge the iron and coal mining and associated industries did their level best to mask the natural landscape unity. **PARK** on the south side of Whitehaven harbour in the all day parking below The Candlestick,

situated beyond The Beacon and Wellington Terrace. With the white-washed coastguard station, this eye-catching chimney stands as a monument and reminder of the awful Wellington Pit. Below the coastguard lodge stands a graphic statue showing a group of miners and adjacent find a plaque reminder of the loss of life caused by methane



explosions in this wretched under-sea colliery. The scene today is one of merry whiteness befitting the town's name – derived from the pale-sandstone outcropping above the harbour, this was the first 'haven' name in Britain. Turn back the pages of history only a hundred or so years and it was very much a black haven, with the dust and grim of a colliery town and place of shipment. A brief wander around the town is warranted, the grid pattern streets are said to have influenced the layout of New York. The presence of a pub called 'John Paul Jones' a reminder of his faltering visitation during the American Revolutionary War in 1778 when this much respected US naval officer was in command of a US force. Despite the Welsh-sounding name, Jones was born at Southernness Point on the Scottish shore of the Solway, and had emigrated to America from Whitehaven, which at the time was considered the second busiest port in Britain.

## WALKING IN MARITIME LAKELAND

Climb the steps towards The Candlestick, taking time to read the several poignant inscriptions on the path and wall-top stones - these being quotes from locals reflecting emotions and personal anecdotes of times past. The coastal path heads on south beautifully waymarked by the new Colourful Coast path furniture and motifs. The Haig Colliery headstock and attendant brick buildings stand intact, if showing hints of salt-induced rust, and is an important museum-piece and actual museum.

The coast path leads confidently south hugging the low cliff-scarp passing above the Saltom Pit (*see view below*). Pause, read and consider the information point. It pulls no punches and clearly should not, in reflecting on the horrid working conditions of those poor people as young as nine years old who were forced to work in pitch dark galleries as far as two kilometres out to sea. This was an exploiting venture begun by the Cumbrian landowning aristocracy the Lowthers in 1729 and run until 1848 - contrast the scene today, a playground of leisure!

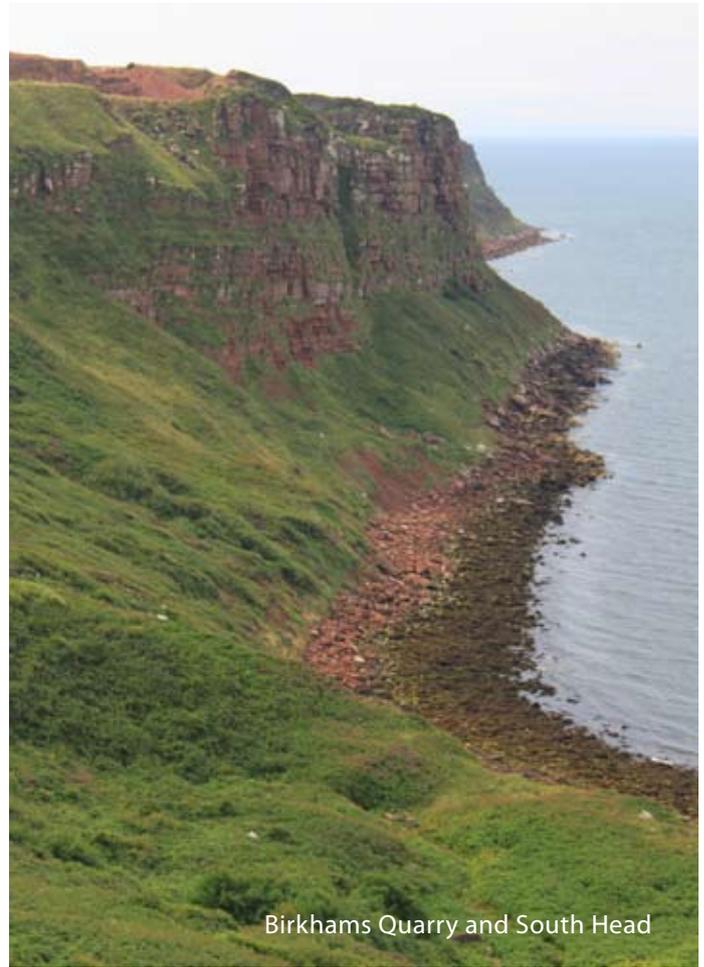


Saltom Pit shaft-top engine house

Passing beside a field of waving almost ripe spring barley, the trail comes to a fork keep forward up the slope and veer half-left then right to join an under-scarp path. Part way along find a plaque recording the opening in 1985 of this

first and most impressive section of the Cumbria Coastal Path. The slope below was once quarried for alabaster and gypsum, hence the overgrown tracks that run down the bank towards the shore. Ahead handsome sandstone cliffs catch the eye. There is frequent evidence of old quarrying but reaching the bungalow one encounters a still active sandstone quarry, Birkhams. Here too the path joins Wainwright's Coast to Coast Walk.

The path is ushered by fencing to the right beside the cliff edge, and gains a marvellous view back over Saltom Bay and an intimate view into the stepped quarry, notice the quirky pale banding in the rich red sandstone, caused it is thought, by water percolation. The cliff-top path is now really exciting - with the heather in full bloom, a diversity of other wild flowers fighting for prominence and a blue sea and



Birkhams Quarry and South Head

sky the branding notion of a Colourful Coast is ever more real and exalting. During my walk I spotted two common blue butterflies mating (see the title photograph), or to be more accurate I think they are that species - can anyone shed further light?



Saltom Bay from St Bees North Head

The path skirts further evidence of old cliff-edge and inclusionary quarrying via kissing-gates to run alongside a fence signed RSPB Reserve at St Bees North Head. Pass on below the St Bees Lighthouse passing the redundant, forward perched, coastguard hut, to come by a famous birders' viewing point. Observing the cliff perches of a range of often raucous sea birds from a safe station. The name Cloven Bard



St Bees Lighthouse



Fleswick Bay

is attributed to this spot and is interesting survivor of the older name for the headland 'Barugh head' (berg), meaning 'the split-rocked unassailable cliff'. They say that two heads are better than one, and so it is with St Bees Head as there are two - North and South Head. The latter lies south of Fleswick Bay, quickly coming into view as one strides beside the necessarily tight-fenced cliff-top within the cattle pasture.

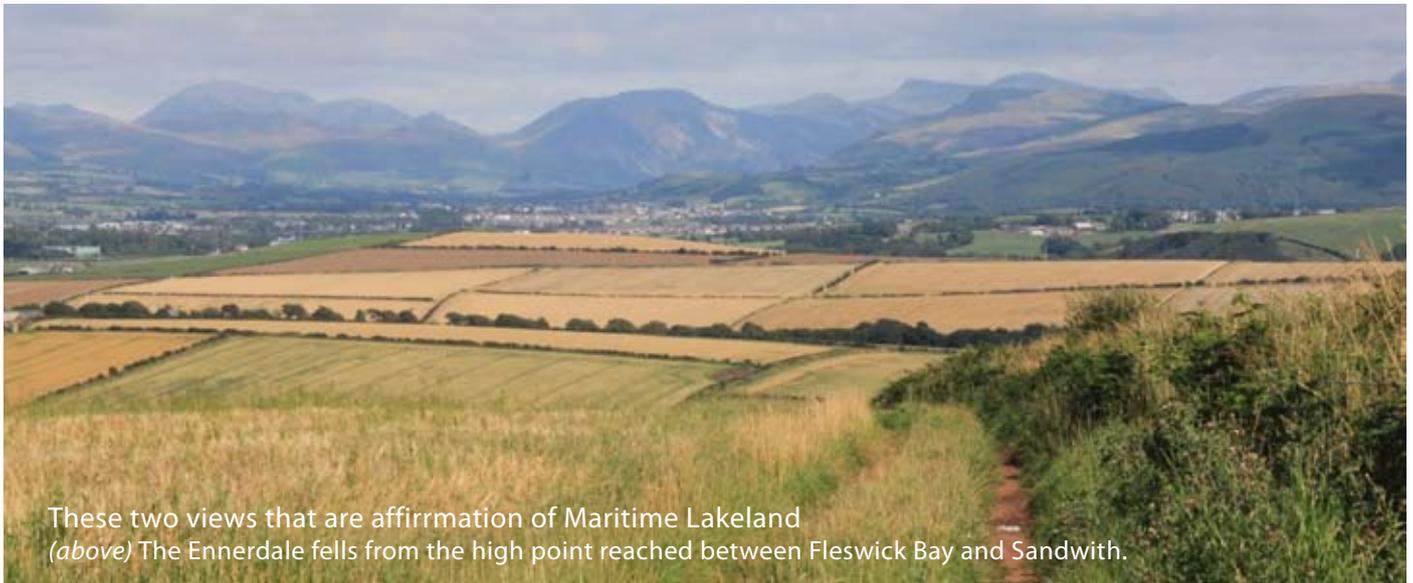
The path angles into the re-entrant of Fleswick Bay slipping through via kissing-gates and a rising line of intermittent steps. Fleswick Bay is both tautological and unique in Cumbria. It is replicated on the Isle of Man, where there is a Fleshwick. The first element means 'flat slabs', well evidenced within the confines of the beach, many recipients of graffiti inscriptions. A beach it has to be said that has been a popular haven for leisured visits for many a year. While the term wick is Viking, and meant 'bay', and exists within the word Viking itself, 'the bay-dwellers', and is not evidenced anywhere else in the county.

From the kissing-gate on the south side of the inlet, one may continue with the regular coast path heading on to the village of St Bees and a possible return train journey back to Whitehaven.

In the interests of a circular excursion leave the path sharp left now upon a footpath that crosses a field boundary stile at its projecting corner and rises with the boundary bank close right. Coming beside a double-stile - where the footpath angles half-left - here cross this new piece of path furniture installed as part of a new access path structure linking to access land previously inaccessible - to judge by the state of the path furniture I was the first genuine user of the new path!). Continue uphill with the field-bank now to the left. At the top corner turn right within the same pasture field currently grazed by a merry mix of cattle and sheep and go through an intervening gateway to and through a gate on the left in the ridge-top field boundary bank. One is at the highest point on the whole St Bees headland at 141m/463ft confirmed by the OS pillar some 60m to the left on the east side of the field boundary bank (a legend attached states it to be a monument forming part of the Ordnance Survey's GPS network). The impressive view east should cause the walker to pause awhile from Skiddaw to Black Combe, with Grasmoor, Pillar and the Scafell's, all tantalisingly in view (on a fair weather day).

RSPB viewing station on Cloven Barth (left)  
Midtown Farm, Sandwith (below)





These two views that are affirmation of Maritime Lakeland  
 (above) The Ennerdale fells from the high point reached between Fleswick Bay and Sandwith.

Follow on down the field-edge track, go through the gate at the bottom corner and immediately through a new kissing-gate beside the adjacent field-gate. Continue down still keeping to the right-hand field edge to cross a double-stile into a muddy lane. Go left with the rutted track to enter the small common. Spot the solitary waymark post to the right guiding into a wooded dell, a sequence of posts lead down (these await the attachment of waymark arrows) vying with a stream to reach the road at the foot.

Turn left, following the gently rising by-way into Sandwith Newtown. One may continue to Midtown, at the nucleus of Sandwith (which meant 'the sandy ford'). The Dog & Partridge pub lies at the northern end and is the only place of refreshment, lacking the enchantment of the traditional rural hostelry to the greater disappointment of Coast-to-Coast walkers, who alight upon it and move on hoping for better luck in Cleator (which is another Viking term meaning 'the stony pasture' - and now pubs!).

One may follow the lane left at Midtown, or better earlier at Sandwith Newtown. This latter by-way becomes a green lane uniting with the Tarnflatt/Trinity House access road, where turn right and first left with the narrow, part-sunken, road leading to Birkhams, *dasa vu*. Turn right at the bungalows, and, for variety ascend the short flight of steps and follow the brink path flanked by heather to cross a stile at the wall-end. The path leads on through the pasture via a gate in skirting an old quarry gloriously rampant with heather, continue to where the security fence of the old Albright & Wilson plant is met, here descend the scrubby bank. The concrete roadways within the old chemical works, removed with the last decade, make a bizarre sight. Veer left with the path at the foot of the bank, waymark posts aiding route choice to link up with the outward course of the walk in an area that was once a sorry sight, covered with the spoil of iron smelting, how well nature works to make good the harsh effects of industrial man.

visit: [www.markrichards.info](http://www.markrichards.info)  
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Th northwardis view shows Whitehaven across Saltom Bay, with the high Lakeland fells on the right-hand skyline