

Lakes and Passes of Borrowdale and Buttermere

Introduction

This walk will take you on a journey through some of Lakeland's finest scenery, linking Keswick, Buttermere and Borrowdale Youth Hostels. The hostels at Honister and Derwentwater also offer alternative locations for accommodation.

This 26.5 mile route along footpaths and ancient packhorse trails guides you through the impressive, but contrasting, Central and North Western Fells. Views of Derwentwater feature prominently on day one and day three, and Buttermere and Crummock Water dominate the second day. All three Lakes are shown at their absolute best.

This is a fairly strenuous route, suitable for people with some experience of hill walking. It is recommended that this booklet is used together with a suitable map. The Ordnance Survey 1:50000 Landranger map No. 90 (Penrith & Keswick) covers the whole route. OL4 (NW) of the 1:25000 Ordnance Survey Explorer Range of maps provides a more detailed alternative. The 77/77 A Honister Rambler bus service and Derwentwater Launch may prove useful. Please refer to the notes on page 6 in this booklet on mountain safety and ensure that you are adequately equipped for mountain walking.

Keswick to Buttermere 9.5 miles/15Km

Impressive views of Skiddaw beckon as you set off from Moot Hall in the centre of Keswick on this three day journey. However, Skiddaw must wait for another day as you follow the newly resurfaced path to Portinscale. The Howrah's path as it is known locally, now forms part of the Coast to Coast cycle route. The suspension bridge takes you safely across the River Derwent. If you prefer to delay the start of your walk a little longer, the Derwentwater launch will whisk you across the lake to Nichol End or Hawse End. The delightful Newlands valley is soon crossed as you head for the distinctive Rigg Beck House. From here, the footpath contours cleverly through the North Western Fells following Rigg Beck, Sail Beck and Mill Beck before descending into Buttermere.

Buttermere to Borrowdale 7.5miles/12Km

Although shortest in distance, the second day sees the highest point reached on the route. Buttermere and Crummock water are beautiful lakes, and the surrounding fells are often reflected perfectly in them on a crisp, still morning. Today's walk starts gently along the far shore of Buttermere. The main climb of the day starts from Gatesgarth Farm and makes its way up the eastern flank of the imposing Fleetwith Pike. Some care will be needed with route finding, should you find yourself in hill fog, as you head over the plateau to Honister Hause. The direct path up to the summit of Fleetwith Pike presents a much more challenging option, whilst the road over Honister Pass provides a safer alternative if the weather is very poor. Refreshments are available at the recently re-opened Honister Slate Quarry. You are now past the halfway mark on your walking tour and a very scenic downhill descent along the old packhorse trail guides you safely down to Borrowdale Youth Hostel. Be careful when crossing the rocks by Longthwaite Pool - chains have been provided to assist when the rocks are slippery.

Borrowdale to Keswick 9.5miles/15Km

You have three routes to choose from on the final stage of your journey. One route is low level and follows the River Derwent through The Jaws of Borrowdale to Grange. Wainwright considered this to be the loveliest square mile in Lakeland. If you have time and energy to spare, you might decide to take a detour to the top of Castle Crag. To quote Wainwright once more - "if a visitor to Lakeland has only two or three hours to spare, poor fellow, yet desperately wants to reach a summit and take back an enduring memory of the beauty and atmosphere of the district .let him climb Castle Crag!" A second and shorter alternative crosses the fields into Rosthwaite, before picking up the old packhorse route over to Watendlath.

The third and more strenuous alternative takes the steep steps up to Dock Tam and onto the upland hamlet of Watendlath. Careful attention to route finding is required when navigating your way in mist from Dock Tam to Watendlath. Tea, Cakes and Ice Creams are available during the season from the farmhouse. Take the path along Watendlath Beck and continue on to Surprise View. A few more steps takes you to the famous viewpoint at Ashness Bridge which provides a good stopping place for lunch. From here, the path starts to climb once more and takes you to the lofty summit of Walla Crag. This is the last, and arguably the best viewpoint on your walking tour. If time allows, you might like to spend a few minutes here to reflect on all you have seen and done during the past three days, and take the opportunity to plan future expeditions into the Fells. The end of the walk is now in sight and within a few minutes you will be back at Moot Hall having completed the Lakes and Passes of Borrowdale and Buttermere.