

## The Two Centre Trek

The Lancashire village of Dunsop Bridge and the town of Haltwhistle in Northumberland both claim to be the centre of Great Britain. I have created a long distance walk between these two places, crossing some of the most scenic landscapes of Britain, including national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Walkers set out from the Forest of Bowland, tread the grassy Howgill Fells, ramble sections of the Yorkshire Dales, hike the remote North Pennines and tramp along historic Hadrian's Wall. The pretty, wooded valleys of the rivers Lune and Eden are also visited. The highest point reached is Cross Fell at nearly 3,000 feet and there are other belvederes with extensive views. The walk is called the Two Centre Trek or 2CT for short.

As a boy in Oswaldtwistle, East Lancashire, I could see the distant fells from my bedroom window. I acquired an Ordnance Survey map (sheet 95) and was intrigued by the tightly knit contours of the Forest of Bowland in the top left hand corner. As a young man, I walked these fells on several occasions, once getting completely lost above Brennand Farm. I came across a clear track but had no idea which way to turn, was it left or right? I chose wrongly and ended up on the far side of the hills in the village of Wray and it was pouring with rain. I found a phone box, called home and Dad drove long miles to collect me. Fortunately, it did not put me off fell walking and after fifty-odd years on the hills I have completed all the 2000 foot tops in England, the Wainwright Lake District tops and numerous mountains in Scotland and Wales. I do not claim to be an accomplished long distance walker but have completed the wonderful Coast to Coast route.

First, the conflicting claims of the two places claiming to be at the centre of Great Britain. A postcard can be bought in Haltwhistle which says the town is on the mid-point of the longest line of longitude that can be drawn through Britain. There is a signpost marking the claim near to the Centre of Britain Hotel.

At Dunsop Bridge a card can be bought describing a walk to the Centre of Britain, giving the grid reference SD63770 56550. A public phone box, nationally the 100,000<sup>th</sup>, stands by the stream. Inside is a plaque recording Dunsop's claim to be at the centre. This was unveiled by the explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes on June 29<sup>th</sup> 1992. In October 2002, BBC News featured Dunsop Bridge's claim and gave the grid reference SD64188.3 56541.43. Readers will note the difference between the two grid references and scratch their heads in confusion - maybe.

Great Britain is the official collective name of of England, Scotland and Wales and their associated islands. Great Britain is not the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland refers to the political union between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Channel Islands and Isle of Man are not part of the UK, but are Crown Dependencies. **British Isles** means the islands of Great Britain and Ireland – including the Republic of Ireland – and the 5000 or so smaller islands scattered around the coasts. While the Republic of Ireland is part of the British Isles, its citizens are not British nationals. Here is what the Ordnance Survey has to say.

### The Ordnance Survey blog

As the national mapping agency for Great Britain, it's our job to survey the features of the landscape – and not to determine the centre of Great Britain, but we still get asked regularly. Views vary widely as people disagree on the definition of Great Britain, how you determine the centre and how accurate the calculations are.

A surveying expert will tell you that there can't be an absolute centre for a three dimensional land mass sitting on the surface of a sphere and surrounded by the ebb and flow of sea water.

So where is the centre? We made a computer calculation based on our 1:625 000 scale mapping to find the centre of Great Britain (including 401 associated islands). The calculation was achieved by linking our 1: 625 000 database with a computer programme based on the standard mathematical principle for determining the centre of a two dimensional irregular object. In basic terms, the principle calculates the point at which the object would balance horizontally on the head of a theoretical pin – its centre of gravity. This is sometimes known as the 'gravitational method' and has been used as a scientific application by everyone from Captain Cook to NASA.

#### **Where is the centre of Great Britain?**

Working on the basis above, the centre is a location 7 km north west of Dunsop Bridge, Lancashire, by Whitendale Hanging Stones on Brennand Farm in the Forest of Bowland (SD 64188.3, 56541.43).

However, as with all such calculations, the level of accuracy is limited by the scale of data used. At the 1: 625 000 scale, the precision of the reference will be to a few hundred metres. Other people say that Haltwhistle in Northumberland also has a claim to be the centre of Britain based around finding the mid-point along the mainland's longest line of longitude. Any claim is open to interpretation and the location of Britain's true centre may never be entirely clear.

The 2CT takes 8 days (more including rest days) and is 177 km long. The itinerary is:

Day 1: Dunsop Bridge to Wray 23km

Day 2: Wray to Kirkby Lonsdale 15km

Day 3: Kirby Lonsdale to Sedbergh 26km

Day 4: Sedbergh to Orton 24km

Day 5: Orton to Dufton 24 km

Day 6: Dufton to Alston 30km

Day 7: Alston to Greenhead 24 km

Day 8: Greenhead to Haltwhistle 11km

Maps to use

OL41 Forest of Bowland and Ribblesdale

OL2 Yorkshire Dales Southern and Western areas

OL19 Howgill Fells and Upper Eden Valley

OL31 North Pennines

OL 43 Hadrian's Wall

Haltwhistle is a suitable point to finish as it is on a railway line and has good road connections; obviously, it would also make an appropriate starting point. The 2CT makes use of various established long distance paths: Pennine Way, Dales Way, Dales High Way, South Tyne Trail, and Hadrian's Wall Path. In places, one or more of these paths follow the same route. It also uses other public rights of way. Some tracks, clear on the ground but not shown on Ordnance Survey maps, cross access areas. Accommodation should be possible along most of the route without having to carry a tent. It might prove difficult to find somewhere to stay close to Wray at the end of day 1, but there is accommodation in the Lune Valley nearby. Parts of the route can be cycled by mountain bike, including significant sections of the first day and most of the South Tyne Trail from Alston. Anyone doing the walk would have to plan their own logistics, including accommodation, keep to rights of way, as shown by the Ordnance Survey, and enter access areas at permitted times. A motor vehicle would be required to get to the starting point at Dunsop Bridge. Some areas are remote, including the Bowland Fells and the North Pennines, particularly around Cross Fell. Pretty villages and towns are visited along the way including Dent, Kirkby Lonsdale, Sedbergh and Appleby. The route is full of scenic splendour, history and geological interest.

### **Day 1: Dunsop Bridge to Wray**

#### **Route**

Start by the river in the village centre. With the café on your right and your back to the river follow the wide track by the east bank of the River Dunsop. After some cottages, the track turns into a path and crosses a bridge to a tarmac road which follows a wide valley into the hills, initially passing other cottages on the left. After a brief climb the route forks around Middle Knoll; go right to Whitendale Farm – it can be cycled straightforwardly to this point. Before reaching the farm buildings, a prominent signpost to Brennand takes you over the river and climbs to marshy ground. It can be very boggy; a small tarn-like feature is found on the right. On reaching a wall turn right and follow it uphill to Far Pasture Brow.

The line of the wall (sometimes a fence) is your guide, turning eventually in a north easterly direction towards Whitendale Hanging Stones. Take a grid reference to locate the centre point. There is nothing on the ground to mark it but, who knows, in time more people may visit and form a path. Locating the centre will involve descent and re-ascent. You could miss it out on the grounds that it was near enough but purists would be compelled to visit. To resume the onward walk, go back to the fence and follow it to White Crag. At the point that this fence reaches a T-junction with another fence turn right (height 480m) following a permissive path past Greenhole Spring into a wide valley. Ascend out of the valley onto the obvious Hornby Road track. The views are far reaching; the position is remote. In mist, good map reading skills will be needed and electronic devices requiring a satellite signal may not be reliable. Follow the clear track broadly northwards to remote High Salter Farm. The most direct route now is to tread the tarmac road to Wray. If the moors have had high rainfall, you will be grateful for something solid under your feet. There are beautiful paths through the Roeburn valley by the river if you prefer to be off the road. If a bike could be left at High Salter it would ease the way to Wray but the route would involve some uphill sections before an exhilarating downhill ride into the village.

## Things to see and do.

Dunsop Bridge is a pretty Lancashire village in the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Before local government boundary changes in 1974, much of the area was in the county of Yorkshire – indeed, the Yorkshire county line followed the River Ribble close to the Lancashire town of Clitheroe. Much of the land belongs to the Whitewell Estate and in season the moors are used for grouse shooting. In Dunsop Bridge, there is a teashop by the river and a car park with public toilets. The centre of Great Britain claim is made at the phone box (in a messy state the last time the author visited in 2017) and also on a notice board at the car park, and the teashop. But look at the signs carefully and note the geographical inconsistencies and errors in the claims. Much of the first part of the route passes through land and facilities devoted to the water industry. The valley is forested in places and many of the previously dominant conifers are being replaced by varieties of native deciduous trees. Once on the higher moorland, the vistas are wide and far reaching over square miles of peat, heather and bog. It can be very wet and parts are eroded and difficult to cross. As seasoned walkers know, dry peat is springy under foot but when wet it can suck you in to a glutinous quagmire. The Hornby Road is an ancient track and in part follows the route of a Roman road. The highest point in the Forest of Bowland is Wards Stone but this is not visited and a detour to it involves a long trek in the wrong direction. Outcrops of millstone grit rock break the flow of moorland at various points. The valley of the River Roeburn is beautifully wooded and full of interest but route finding through it can be complex and challenging after a long day on the fells. The end point is the lovely stone village of Wray, which is full of architectural interest. More prosaically there is a pub, the George and Dragon, and a café. Accommodation may need to be found at a distance from the village although there is currently some B+B relatively near, hence a bike for the last bit to Wray would be handy but this depends on personal logistics. In the week leading up to Mayday the village hosts a scarecrow festival and this is worth seeing. On Main Street, is the flood garden commemorating a deluge in 1967 when several buildings were damaged.

## Tearoom at Dunsop Bridge – where are we?





Sign from Whitendale Farm and climbing towards Whitendale Hanging Stones

## **Day 2 Wray to Kirkby Lonsdale**

### **Route**

Compared to day 1, this is a straightforward route besides a meandering river in the beautiful but little known Lune Valley. However, at times the river can be in flood and create some difficulty for walkers. In Wray, locate the old chapel at the edge of the village and opposite take the footpath towards the River Wenning, turning left on the footpath towards Hornby. Through Hornby village, passing the school on the left, take a second left on the Gressingham road to Loyne Bridge. Cross Loyne Bridge and follow the Lune Valley Ramble to Devil's Bridge at Kirby Lonsdale.

### **Things to see and do.**

Hornby has architectural interest and a castle. There is a post office and general store. Gressingham Bridge is a key crossing point on the River Lune and near to it are the remains of a motte and bailey castle – on the right as you approach the bridge. Hereabouts people swim in the river and there are numerous fishing spots. Kirkby Lonsdale is a fine old market town with various facilities including pubs, cafes and a supermarket - it is a good overnight stop. The town hosts a Victorian Fair on the first weekend in September. The Devil's Bridge, a scheduled ancient monument built sometime in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, spans the River Lune and receives many visitors, including motor cycle enthusiasts. Diving off the bridge is now prohibited but swimmers still dive in from the banks of the river below the bridge where there are deep pools. The church of St Mary the Virgin, Norman in origin, is also worth a visit. From here, a path leads to the celebrated Ruskin's View, which inspired the artist Turner. Ruskin, the Victorian painter, poet and art critic described this vista as 'naturally divine.'

## **Day 3 Kirkby Lonsdale to Sedbergh**

### **Route**

Begin at the Devil's Bridge and cross the A683 to follow a footpath to Chapel House and Chapel House Lane (a tarmac road) aiming for Bees Nest Crossroads. From the crossroads, take Fell Road which crosses a disused railway line passing Fell Yeat Farm. This road terminates at Bullpot, an outdoor centre. From here a clear track goes through a gate into access land. The aim is to reach the summit of Crag Hill, at 682 m. The track comes to a second gate which is entered and with the wall now on your right a less clear track aims upwards. At a small cairn the path veers left and the brow of the hill is reached. A stone shelter is seen on the left near a fence and the fence takes a beeline to the top of Crag Hill. Cross the fence, which has a Lancashire Way marker on it, to reach the trig point. Head towards the second and higher summit of Great Coum (687m) keeping the fence you crossed on your right. After crossing a boundary wall, and just before the summit of Great Coum, turn left at a junction of boundaries and head for Crag End. At a second junction of boundaries turn left and head downhill to reach a sheepfold. Here turn right to reach the prominent Green Lane (track) where you turn right and quickly come across the sign post to Flinter Gill on your left. Follow the gill with its stream and waterfalls to arrive in Dent but, on the way, look for the viewfinder on the left and try to spot the wishing tree. From Dent, the road through the village is taken in the direction of Sedbergh and our route soon picks up The Dales Way which takes you all the way to the town.

## **Things to see and do**

The land around Bullpot is riddled with natural underground passages and the whole area is a haven for potholers. The geology is complex with limestone and millstone grit beds interspersed with the Silurian rocks that underpin the southern Lake District. Geological fault lines mark the landscape around Dent. In Flinter Gill, water flows across limestone pavement. The three counties of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cumbria meet in this area. After Bullpot the vistas open out giving views to the coast at Morecambe and beyond. It is intriguing to think that, although near to what is described as the centre of Britain, the coastline is relatively close at hand. The trig point on Crag Hill is a superb panorama to the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales. The Howgill Fells are prominent as is the beautiful valley of Dentdale, the home of the River Dee where Viking settlement patterns still determine the shape of fields. Dent village has two pubs (there is also a Dent Brewery) cafes and a campsite; there is a beer and music festival in June and a gala day on August bank holiday Monday. Dent was the home of Adam Sedgwick, the prominent Victorian geologist, and a large stone monument in the form of a pink granite fountain sits proudly besides the cobbled road through the village. Dent has a heritage centre and was the home of the 'Knitters of Dent' - men and women who would knit on their way to work the fields in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were known as 'The Terrible Knitters' not because they were awful but because they were terribly good at it. Sedbergh, the finishing point for the day, is dominated by the buildings of its public school which stand in acres of beautiful parkland. The town prides itself as a book town and is well worth a visit for this reason alone. There is accommodation here and various shops and pubs.

## **Crag Hill Top with the rounded Howgill Fells on the distant horizon**





**Flinter Gill and the Adam Sedgwick Memorial in Dent**

## **Day 4 Sedbergh to Orton**

### **Route**

This day follows the long distance path A Dales Highway to traverse the Howgill Fells. From the main street in Sedbergh, not far from a church and the tourist information point, a road climbs out of town carrying the Dales Highway alongside Settelbeck Gill and eventually ascends towards the summit of Arant Haw (not actually reaching it) and thence to Calders and the trig point on The Calf – the highest point on the Howgills. It continues over Hazelgill Knott reaching first a minor road at Bowderdale and then the major A685 which is crossed by an underpass to the village of Wath. Here turn left to follow field paths via Potlands Farm to Kelleth. Follow the road through Kelleth branching right to Raisebeck but at Wain Gap take a bridleway to Fawcett Mill. The road at Fawcett can be followed all the way to Orton where accommodation can be found.

### **Things to see and do**

The Howgills are wide open grassland with few fences or walls. Navigation in mist can be challenging as there are few landscape features and the ridges and hills interlock in complex patterns. This is sheep country par excellence and, on clear days, the views are far reaching with much of the Lake District skyline visible to the west. Be careful not to descend into the wrong valley – the trig point on The Calf is a sure position fixer. Orton is a small village, established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and now on Wainwright's Coast to Coast route. George Whitehead, a founder of the Quaker movement, once lived here. All Saints Church has a 16<sup>th</sup> century tower. At the time of writing there are a couple of cafes including one which houses a chocolate maker – delicious it is too!

### **The Howgills**





**From The Calf looking towards The Lake District**

## **Day 5 Orton to Dufton**

### **Route**

From Orton take the road past the old vicarage but soon bear left and then left again at a signpost to Broadfell. The path follows the beck up towards Orton Scar, eventually reaching the main road to Appleby. You might meet a number of walkers hereabouts as this path is part of the Coast to Coast route (into Orton from Shap if you follow it west to east). At the road, and immediately after crossing the cattle grid, turn right onto access land and climb onto Great Asby Scar keeping a prominent wall to your right. The OS map shows no rights of way on this route but the track is clear and all is access land. You will pass a Victorian monument to your left in the form of a Celtic Cross. Keeping the wall always to the right the track veers leftwards at an angle and crosses the open limestone landscape, with a quarry to the left, till a metal road is reached at a cattle grid. The wall is a sure friend in mist. Follow the road right and over the cattle grid to the pretty village of Great Asby with its meandering stream and beautiful old houses. The Dales Highway is joined again, initially following the road, and taken all the way to Appleby, visiting Rutter Force waterfall on the way – an idyllic spot on a warm, sunny day but in need of a bench or two. Most of the route is through fields and after Rutter Force walkers are accompanied by rippling Hoff Beck. From Appleby the long distance route A Pennine Journey is followed to Dufton. This is located after passing through the town centre and crossing the bridge over the river Eden. It goes uphill, past the railway station and then under the A66 and on to Dufton.

## Things to see and do

Great Asby Scar is a national nature reserve of limestone pavement, one of the few remaining pristine environments of this kind in Britain. From this higher land there are extensive views towards Cross Fell and the Pennines (the next day's route) and to the Howgill Fells and Lake District. Great Asby has lovely old buildings of interest, including an alms house. Rutter Force is a surprise: after following a small beck you will find yourself by a wide river with a beautiful waterfall. There is much to see in Appleby, a market town in the valley of the River Eden, with a castle and exceptionally wide main street. In June, ending on the second Wednesday of the month, the town plays host to the famous Horse Fair, set up by charter in 1685. The Gypsy and Traveller Community meet to trade and celebrate and the town is very busy during the event. Dufton has a hostel, a pub and other accommodation and is on the Pennine Way so it is well to book ahead for a place to stay. One could stay in Appleby and have a rest day the next day before the rigours of crossing the Pennine watershed. But it would make the next section quite long. If this is done it would be an idea at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> walking day to seek accommodation in Garrigill rather than Alston although the choice is likely to be more limited there.







**Above – Cross on Great Asby Fell, view from the fell, limestone pavement, Rutter Force and the River Eden at Appleby**

## **Day 6 Dufton to Alston**

### **Route**

This is a long day across challenging country, particularly in harsh weather. It crosses the highest point of this journey on Cross Fell - 893 m at the trig point – pretty close to 3000 feet. The route follows the Pennine Way throughout. From Dufton the Pennine Way climbs to high ground and continues over Great Dun Fell and Little Dun Fell and on to Cross Fell. Be sure to turn right (east) after descending Cross Fell and keep to what is the clear path of the Pennine Way. When the village of Garrigill is reached you will be thankful for a rest. From here the Pennine Way goes on to Alston.

### **Things to see and do**

In clear weather, the North Pennines (AONB) provide splendid walking in an open and remote environment with distant horizons and extensive vistas. In mist and rain it is challenging and can sap the energy but on completion of this day there will be a feeling of exhilaration in a job well done. Along the way, there are many mine workings as the area was once a centre for the extraction of numerous minerals, particularly lead. Great Dun Fell (848m) is home to the Civil Aviation Authority's air traffic control radar and the white domes can be seen from miles away. In mist, they have an eerie feel to them. Cross Fell is the source of three great rivers, the Tyne, Tees and Wear, all of which have their origin near to the summit. Cross Fell is subject to the Helm wind in Spring as it blows up often suddenly from the Eden Valley. In the past, the fell was believed to be the home of demons and was known as Fiend's Fell; on windy days it feels as if the fiends are still around. Garrigill is a pretty village and the long distance cycle route C2C passes through it. The George and Dragon pub, post office and store provide supplies and services. Alston, on the River South Tyne, claims to be the highest market town in England at about 1000 feet above sea level. The steep cobbled street has numerous interesting stone buildings including the Angel pub dating from 1611. Alston is the starting point for the South Tynedale Railway, England's highest narrow gauge system. The A686 from Penrith passes through the town and is classed by the AA as one of Britain's ten great drives as it climbs over Hartside Pass at 1904 feet.

## **Day 7 Alston to Greenhead**

### **The route**

The South Tyne Trail follows the old railway line and is our companion for most of the day. Much of the trail can be cycled. For us, the trail starts at the old railway station in Alston but our route will not follow it all the way to Haltwhistle as we divert to take in Hadrian's Wall. We leave the trail at Lambley and take the route of A Pennine Journey and then the Pennine Way to cross the A69 shortly before reaching Greenhead.

### **Things to see and do**

There are fine examples of railway architecture in the form of bridges and viaducts, the one at Lambley being particularly notable. Greenhead has tearooms, accommodation and a pub. There is a farmer's market on the second Sunday of each month. Coal mining was a key activity in this area and keen observers will spot drift mines along the route. Just north of the village is Thirlwall Castle, strengthened using stones from Hadrian's Wall.

## **Day 8 Greenhead to Haltwhistle**

### **Route**

Our path follows the Tiplal Burn to Holmhead where three long distance paths join forces i.e. the Hadrian's Wall Path, Pennine Way and A Pennine Journey. We follow this route to Burnhead to find a quarry and car park. Take the road from Burnhead to meet the B6318. At the crossroads, continue on the road towards Haltwhistle until a path is seen signed on the right; this takes you down into Haltwhistle following the waters of Haltwhistle Burn. It comes out near the centre of the town and the end of our journey.

### **Things to see and do**

Most of the way is in the Northumberland National Park and follows the great Roman construction of Hadrian's Wall which has featured in the landscape for hundreds of years. The wall stretches 73 miles from the banks of the Tyne to the Solway and is a World Heritage site. There is much to see and the wall is dotted with antiquities such as milecastles, barracks, forts and ramparts. There are museums, like the Roman Army Museum (Carvoran) and various events are held at different times of the year. Some research prior to the visit is essential to make the best of this wonderful area. Haltwhistle is on the Newcastle to Carlisle railway line and has cafes, pubs and sources of accommodation. Together with Dunsop Bridge, it claims to be the geographic centre of Britain and is the end of our journey.