

Lakeland Haute Route

One step is what made all the difference. Somewhere between lifting my right foot, swinging it forward and placing it back down in front of me the world changed. The erratic sounds and smells of the towns were replaced by a calming breeze, the rich green views of pastures and the refreshing aroma of the countryside. That one step was on the Walna Scar Road, a man-made bridleway linking the Coniston valley to the Dunnerdale valley in the Lake District. It was the moment we stepped out from day walking into long distance paths; the moment we started to sense the magic of Trail's Lakeland Haute Route.

A month earlier I had been in a pub with Trail's Jeremy Ashcroft and Matt Swaine, reminiscing about great days on the hills while trying to work out how to celebrate the magazine's 20th birthday. "When Trail started back in 1990 we definitely did more multi-day backpacking routes," I said. "Drawing the maps, the challenge was trying to fit on the page because they were so long!" said Jeremy. "Europe's haute routes are some of the finest," I said. "Why don't we create one for the Lake District?" Haute route means 'high route', and in the Alps they take in the high mountain passes between valleys and give walkers stupendous views of the major peaks.

Our Lakeland Haute Route would need to do the same thing, taking advantage of Youth Hostels rather than mountain huts, offering ascents of the big-name Lakeland peaks for those who wanted to tailor their route, and making sure that every night would bring us back to great food and public transport links. It would be a celebration of the Lakes: a way to see the area at its very best.

But before we could take our first step we would have to spend months studying maps, working on route options to make sure that our Lakeland Haute Route would meet our expectations.

"We should start this route from an easily accessible town with good public transport and plenty of accommodation," I suggested. "That means either Ambleside or Keswick as the obvious choices," replied Jeremy.

The circular nature of this route allows you to start it from anywhere, but we've based this description on beginning from Ambleside as it is a natural starting point. It offers the most picturesque introduction to the Lakes, and it's also where I've lived since 1989 – with just a 12 month break when I worked at Trail's offices in Peterborough.

Windermere, England's largest natural lake, laps the doorsteps of the tea shops and gear stores of Ambleside. Lofty Loughrigg Fell entices the walker from the town, while the Coniston Fells to the west hint at where you could be by the end of the day. "The bridleway that climbs Loughrigg Fell and leads into Langdale is the perfect start for this walk," I said. As the zigzags were drawing us up and out of the town, our lungs gasped for air and the chance to turn and take in the view over the rooftops of Ambleside was an opportunity not to be missed.

As we traversed Loughrigg Fell Jeremy reminded us that this was a popular route for walkers and mountain bikers. "Before mountain biking starting back in the late Eighties, you'd never see a mountain bike up here, but now it's a classic route." "Thanks in part to your books!" I said. Jeremy's mountain bike guide came out in 1989, when I was working at Ambleside Youth Hostel, having fled my engineering career. It was what landed him his job on the first issue of Trail (then Trail Walker) under its then editor Keith Nelson. Mountain biking and climbing were my afternoon activities, between the morning and evening shift working at the hostel. Meanwhile weekends were the time for longer trips, which involved camping wild, staying in youth hostels and backpacking.

As we reached the high point of the bridleway over Loughrigg Fell, the Coniston Fells emerged in full splendour before us. The curtain of rock and fell known as Wetherlam dominated the scene ahead. In typical haute route style we then began our descent towards Loughrigg Tarn in the mouth of the Langdale valley. "This is what makes this route special and unique," said Jeremy. "We aren't taking in the summits, we are linking the high passes – and that brings a very different feel of journeying to a route like this." Jeremy was right: there was already a great sense of exploration – but there was nothing stopping us from taking in some peaks if we wanted to as well. We could have stepped away from the bridleway and bagged Loughrigg Fell summit easily enough and then returned to the main route.

The following morning we could stroll up to the summit of Coniston Old Man and all of the Lakeland 3,000ft peaks were within striking distance of the path we had planned. In fact we would be able to vary the route and tailor it to our own requirements by adding in as many peaks as we fancied. The footpaths ended for a short distance as we traced the country lanes to Skelwith Bridge, from where a footpath leads to Elterwater. "This is where we join the Cumbria Way," I said. This is the long distance path that travels some 80 miles through the Lakes from Ulverston to Carlisle.

There are plenty of linear routes like the Cumbria Way through the Lakes, but our circular route was something rather ground breaking. It was a route that could be started and finished using public transport, didn't encourage the use of two cars and gave a much broader geographical sweep of the Lake District. As we followed the Cumbria Way to Elterwater we had gently exposed ourselves to another aspect of Lakeland exploration that neither of us were used to. We were walking along the valley rather than clambering up a rocky ridge high in the mountains. We picked our way from Elterwater through to Little Langdale and Tilberthwaite. "There are some great climbs here," said Jeremy. We both climbed here a lot during the early Nineties, before the boom in climbing walls. The tone of the walk was morphing from comfortable valley stroll into mountain adventure. The lower slopes of Wetherlam dominated as we headed out of Tilberthwaite to Coniston – the first overnight stop on our six-day route.

Another day, another first step. Coniston is more industrial than Ambleside, less cappuccino and more hard-won beer. It is this gradual shift of emphasis within the landscape that I notice on long distance walks and something that is harder to experience on a day trip. Our route followed the ancient Walna Scar Road around the Coniston range of fells. We were encircling the Coniston massif in the way that the Tour du Mont Blanc encircles the highest peak in the Alps. "Just before Trail was launched I walked the GR5, which is a 400-mile route linking Geneva to Nice and it takes in part of the Tour du Mont Blanc," I told Jeremy. "That was a four week route and I remember that I was knackered on day two, but day three was great and after that I felt fitter every day. I've noticed this on other routes too." "That might be why I feel like a bit more kip then," said Jeremy. "Probably, but that may also be why people are less inclined to follow multi-day routes these days. If you never experience the joy of day three and then gradual immersion into the trip, then you don't know what you are missing either!"

As we walked up the Walna Scar Road the temperature was rising and the views were expanding. The coastline of Cumbria came into view to the south, and the call of a skylark filled the air. A sudden break in the milky cloud put us in the spotlight while Dow Crag looked moody in the shadows. "We used to come here all the time with school," Jeremy said "I've spent years climbing on Dow Crag." The path climbed high above the plains and the wind began to increase as we reached the top of the Walna Scar Road. Within the next stride there was green fell and pasture ahead, then Scafell Pike, the tallest peak in England, appeared. "Yee-ha! There she blows!" I shouted. It's always a magical moment when you reach the top of a pass, but it is better still when a stunning view of a magical mountain like this opens up before you. "It feels like a new beginning, doesn't it?" said Jeremy. "As we go from one valley to the next this really feels like an epic journey." "Yes, it's that feeling of wondering what is just around the corner," I replied, "and that is something that you rarely get on day walks".

As we descended into the Duddon Valley, stone walls, remote farm buildings and the never-ending accompaniment of birdsong were our companions. We did not see many walkers through the Duddon Valley as we followed the path up beside Low Crag above Wallowbarrow. Occasional calls of 'Take in!' echoed around the crags from the climbers that were hard to spot but were clearly there. The path emerged into the open and suddenly the view exploded across the Duddon Valley to the Coniston Fells, and we could see the Walna Scar Road that we had descended earlier in the day snaking down into the valley. "This is spectacular. It's just the sort of highlevel walking we set out to capture with this route, isn't it?" I said. "This type of high-level path is common on haute routes in the Alps, but they are hard to find in the UK."

The route had been planned to take in the best high-level passes between adjacent valleys as well as the best high-level footpaths. The path we had chosen was the product of the knowledge we had gained having written countless features and routes for Trail over 20 years. We walked from Grassguards through the woods that flank Harter Fell, and then once again we had a magical moment as we stepped into Eskdale towards the end of the second day. "Now that is superb," I said. Bowfell, Esk Pike and the Scafell range rose above the green baize of the Eskdale valley. "That is what backpacking is all about. Stepping around a corner, seeing something as stunning as that and then walking into the landscape." We took another step and headed towards our beds at Eskdale Youth Hostel. "I really feel like we have escaped the office now," I said. "Yes, and I feel much fresher today and ready for a great walk," replied Jeremy.

Shouldering our packs, we were both impressed with just how light our gear was. "Kit is definitely less heavy now than it was when Trail first came out," I said. "But in those days people did longer trips and were fitter, so the extra weight didn't stop them! Now we have lighter gear but people do shorter trips. Perhaps folk are less interested in the kind of full outdoor immersion you get with these kind of trips?" "This kind of long distance path is perfect for those who want to stay out longer," said Jeremy. "It's well within most day-walkers' abilities and as there are youth hostels and B&Bs throughout you don't need to take a tent or much gear. In fact, if you wanted to go really light you wouldn't need much more than a credit card and a toothbrush..." "And you could saw your toothbrush in half for good measure!" I added.

With a confident bounce in our stride we set off down the Eskdale road to Boot. As we walked along the bridleway towards Burnmoor Tarn the route once again took on a different feel. The moorland here is wild, unmanicured and ragged. Underfoot mud squelched around our boots as we progressed past Burnmoor Tarn with Scafell dominating the scene while a cormorant performed for our entertainment. "I fished in this very tarn when we came this way with Matt Swaine in 2008," Jeremy recalled. "That was a good adventure too. Bikepacking is a great way to get to remote Munros in the Highlands and the first time we did it in Trail was in 1994." "The great thing about that kind of trip is that you can stay away for day after day with all your kit on bike or on your back," I said. "You don't have to return to the start after a few hours. You just keep on exploring." We kept walking along the windy path that descended into Wasdale.

Suddenly the view changed once more, Great Gable and Yewbarrow dominated the scene while a trickle from a stream played an intricate fanfare to our arrival in Wasdale where we took a break at the Wasdale Head Inn.

"Back in the 1870s people travelled by horse and carriage to Wasdale to enjoy a week or two of rock-climbing on Gable, Pillar and Scafell," I said. "During the Nineties, when I used to regularly spend weekends in Wasdale, I'd sometimes mountain bike here over the fell bridleway from Langdale." "Before mountain bikes were invented people used to take their road bikes over these passes too," said Jeremy. "The Rough Stuff Fellowship was formed in 1955 by cyclists who wanted to get away from roads, and cycle on tracks and byways." With the thoughts of cyclists hauling their bikes up and over the Black Sail Pass from Wasdale to Buttermere, we finished our drink at Wasdale Head, shouldered our packs and headed off on foot.

The Black Sail Pass feels very much like an Alpine route. A local shepherd was bringing down the sheep with the help of his dogs, while the giant peaks encroached on distant views, so the only choice was to look up to Scafell Pike, Yewbarrow, Pillar and Kirk Fell and gaze in awe of their magnificent dominance of the valley. "There's not many folk about, are there?" said Jeremy, taking a 360° view of the hills. "It is midweek and we are not on the summits," I replied. "That's what is so great about this route. As it is six days long you can enjoy the hills when they are least visited, during the week. Better still it also bypasses the popular summits while delivering great views like this." Our arrival at the summit of the Black Sail Pass was met with a chilling wind. We scampered a short way down into Ennerdale to escape the breeze before finding shelter behind a boulder. After adding a windshirt we descended to the Black Sail Youth Hostel. We were met by Richard Leafe, chief executive of the Lake District National Park Authority, as we were keen to hear about the exciting new plans for the hostel. "Our vision for the Lake District National Park is about it being an example of sustainable development in practice," he said. "One example of our approach is the Black Sail Youth Hostel. We have plans to add solar panels and a small hydro-power station so that the building is sustainable." Richard had been accompanied by Trail's Matt Swaine and Phoebe Smith, who were eager to hear about how our Lakeland odyssey was progressing.

We chatted animatedly as we climbed the steep path out of Ennerdale and got our first glimpse of Buttermere. "So what do you think of our Lakeland Haute Route?" I asked Richard, keen to hear what the National Park's head honcho thought. "It looks simply brilliant," he replied as I traced it out on a map in the comfort of Buttermere Youth Hostel. "What a stupendous route!" At Buttermere we set off with Matt and Phoebe for Borrowdale by tracing the path alongside the north shoreline of Buttermere. "So, GT, how would you describe the route so far?" Matt asked me. "Superb – it's everything we expected," I replied. "It's just so strange to think that we regularly used to do these sorts of routes in the mag. But over the last 10 years we've moved more to bite-sized walks rather than weeklong adventures..." "Do you think people are less interested in multi-day trips these days? That seems odd because 20 years ago, the overnight kit we were all using was a whole lot heavier," said Matt. "But this is just the kind of route that would be a joy to walk with lightweight gear, giving you the freedom to really explore the hills." With that thought in mind we climbed out of Buttermere and up through the mines at Honister. The views back to Buttermere during this section of the walk are outstanding, and actually this is an ideal place to watch a sunset. "What's great about this route, is

that you could spend the night at any number of places along the way and vary the route to match your own interests,” I said. “We could have stayed at Black Sail Youth Hostel last night, or even Honister Youth Hostel rather than in Buttermere.” “And of course there are plenty of places to wild camp or bivvy too,” said Matt. “Yep! Actually there is so much choice will do it in exactly the same way” I replied. “Folk could easily discuss, tweak and plan their own route based on this. That was also Alfred Wainwright’s idea when he wrote the Coast-to-Coast guide book. ”We walked through the Honister mines to Honister Pass and then picked up the bridleway that traverses the west side of Borrowdale past Castle Crag to the Derwent Water shoreline.

Along the way the walk, as it had done on so many occasions already, transformed itself. The wild, rough and rugged mountains gave way to pure Lakeland chocolate box beauty. Skiddaw nagged for our attention while the waters of Derwent Water played on our heart strings. “Fancy a brew in Grange?” asked Jeremy. “It’s a natural resting place before we continue to Keswick.” “How civilised,” chimed in Phoebe. “This is my kinda walk!” We had seen plenty of tea-shops, cafés and pubs on the walk, and this was a feature that we wanted to include. Again it is something that the European long distance paths are good at providing, but it is not always the case with routes in the UK.

This section of the route was easier than earlier days, so a brew in the sun was a welcome opportunity not to be missed – and nothing says Lake District quite like a cup of tea within view of muscular scenery. “We could actually take a boat across Derwent Water to Keswick, you know,” I pointed out as we traced the shoreline of the lake.

“Again, it is another option that people can take advantage if they want to.” In the event the temptation to wander alongside what is arguably England’s most beautiful lake – beloved of landscape photographers across the nation – was too much, and we walked all the way to Keswick. The views from the path were superb and it was a sunny day after all, with Skiddaw looming grandly and beckoningly above the north Lakes’ biggest town. The penultimate day, and Jeremy and I were raring to get back on the trail.

Meanwhile Phoebe and Matt clearly wanted to have a late start. That’s the trouble with two day walks – you never really get into your stride. “That is why this is a six-day route as it takes a couple of days to get going and recover from the office before you can really connect with the journey,” I said, by way of chivvying the lazy half of the party into action.

After breakfast we set off out of Keswick by way of Castlerigg, before reaching the A591. “I thought this was a wilderness walk, GT, not a road walk?” protested Phoebe.

“It’s the only main road we have to cross,” I said, “and it marks our transition from the western Lakes to the eastern Lakes. So, on the plus side, it’s a sort of landmark.” Our route carried us through fields on footpaths to St John’s in the Vale, where we joined a bridleway that carried us gently down the valley to Legburthwaite. We then began the climb over Sticks Pass to Glenridding. On each step the sounds of traffic on the A591 became fainter, as the views grew stronger over Thirlmere. It was great to be back on the hill again. “What would this compare to in terms of a European haute route?” asked Matt. “It reminds me of many Alpine walks, as it links valleys by high passes, not peaks,” Jeremy said. “It’s a tremendous feeling, stepping out of one valley into the next.” The weather started to turn as we reached the crest of Sticks Pass. We whipped out waterproof jackets expecting a really heavy downpour, but the Lakeland mountains were playing their usual tricks of promising one weather pattern and then delivering another. By the time we had crossed Sticks Pass and started our descent to Glenridding we were back in shorts again. “This is really different here, isn’t it?” enthused Matt, as we walked through the disused mine workings. “It’s one of the great things about this route,” I said. “People forget how varied the Lake

District really is – a hotchpotch of geologies, landscapes and signs of humans. And we see a fair bit of it – from stone circles to mines to villages.” At that point the views opened to Ullswater and its cluster of cottages, looking perfectly idyllic in the valley ahead. We ended the day sitting in the sun in Glenridding, with a blue sky overhead and the Ullswater lapping at our feet. It felt to me like a restful day in the Alps after walking a high-level path below 4000m peaks. Here the altitude and the language may be different, but there is no mistaking the pleasure of walking through spectacular mountain scenery. “It’s the last day, folks!” I announced over breakfast. For the last time, we gathered our gear and headed for the high passes. Today we were bound for Grisedale. The path from Glenridding sneaked up out of the valley with Striding Edge, Helvellyn, Nethermost Pike, Dollywagon Pike and St Sunday Crag dominating the skyline. “We are on Wainwright’s Coast-to-Coast path now,” I said. “This is probably the best section of that route, and some walkers will take in St Sunday Crag or Helvellyn when they come this way. Equally people following the Trail Lakeland Haute Route have that option too.”

The path through Grisedale carried us gently up the pass. At Ruthwaite Lodge we paused for a brew: the views back down the valley from here were outstanding, and it was one of those places where you felt you could linger all day just drinking in the view.

The final steps to Grisedale Tarn were serenaded by high winds that were being funnelled through this narrow pass between Fairfield and Dollywagon Pike. Ahead the light on the fells was spectacular, once again highlighting the magic of the Lakeland mountains as the sun's rays dabbled splashes of colour in an everchanging pattern of master strokes. "That's the last pass!" I said. "It's all downhill from here." Descending towards the valley with spectacular light shows over Grasmere (the Lakeland weather was finding it difficult to settle on any particular theme), I took a reflective look back over the last six days.

We had set out to celebrate 20 years of Trail, a magazine that aims to inspire people to head for the hills. We'd completed a walk that had captured the best of the Lake District, with a European 'haute route' approach. Along the way we had crossed wild moors, rubbed shoulders with the Lakeland giants and found solitude. The Trail Lakeland Haute Route had also brought into focus how hill-walking has changed over the last 20 years. Gear is lighter, accommodation is more comfortable and information is more readily available than ever before. So were multi-day backpacking trips really less popular now than they were when the magazine was launched in 1990? "No way," said Phoebe. "This route is fantastic... I'd like to go back and walk the half that I missed!" Matt felt exactly the same, and Jeremy was talking about doing it all again with the kids. And that has to be the measure of a really good walk. When Alfred Wainwright completed his Coast-to-Coast route he said he'd 'finished the Pennine Way with relief, the Coast-to-Coast with regret'. We'd all finished this circular tour of the Lakes' high passes with the inspiration to keep walking and explore more. And that is a fitting celebration for a magazine that has spent 20 years doing exactly that for thousands of walkers. Here's to the next 20 years!

Day One

Start Ambleside [NY374043](#)

Finish Coniston [SD302975](#)

Strenuousness  Navigation  Technicality 

Distance 16km (10 miles) Total ascent 575m

Terrain parkland, access tracks, low fells, minor roads, lanes, rough bridleways and cycletracks

Maps OS Explorer OL7 (1:25,000); OS Landranger 90 & 96 (1:50,000); British Mountain Maps Lake District (1:40,000): Harvey Superwalker Lakeland Centre & Southern Lakeland (1:25 0000)

Accommodation Youth Hostels: Ambleside – tel. 0845 371 9620; Langdale – tel. 0845 371 9748; Elterwater – tel. 0845

371 9017; Coniston Holly How – tel. 0845 371 9511;

Coniston Coppermines – 0845 371 9630 or visit www.yha.org.uk

Camping in Elterwater (Baysbrown) and Coniston. Hotels and

B&Bs in Ambleside, Elterwater, Little Langdale, Tilberthwaite, Yewdale and Coniston.

For accommodation listings visit www.golakes.co.uk

The first day between Ambleside and Coniston is a perfect warm-up. It climbs straight out of the village on to the shoulder of Loughrigg Fell to give all-round views that set the scene for the rest of the day. Once Loughrigg Fell is behind you the route sets into a friendly routine of old lanes and tracks interspersed with villages and hamlets. Along the way there is a great selection of tea rooms and pubs so this is a great opportunity to stop, relax and fine-tune your gear.

1. The route leaves Ambleside via Rothay Park then climbs up Miller Brow to gain the col on the east side of Loughrigg Fell.
2. From the col descend the bridleway to join the minor road at Tarn Foot. Turn right on to it, then turn left at the T-junction and follow the lane down to Skelwith Bridge. Across the junction with the A593 and the B5343 head along the access drive to Chesters Tea Room. By the tea rooms and between slate cutting sheds is the start of a path. Join this and follow it along the River Brathay to Elterwater. Along the way don't forget to take a peek at Skelwith Force and the new Woodburn footbridge.
3. Elterwater is an important slate quarrying centre, but most of the quarries are screened by heavy woodland. The Haute Route heads south out of the village then a short distance after the youth hostel it turns south-west and uses some of the old quarry tracks to head over to Little Langdale.
4. Across the Little Langdale road a path leads to the rather fragile-looking Slater Bridge and a track on the other side. Take it and once across the bridge turn left

on the track, which leads to a junction (by a ford and footbridge). The junction is the start of another old quarry track; this is joined and followed south to the road head at High Tilberthwaite.

5. Now follow the road south through the Tilberthwaite valley to the A593 at Yewdale. Low and High Yewdale Farms were part of Beatrix Potter's estate. They were bequeathed to the National Trust on her death.
6. The busy A593 is avoided by following a pleasant cycle track alongside it to Coniston.

Day Two

Start Coniston **SD302975**

Finish Eskdale **NY175008**

Strenuousness ■■■■■ Navigation ■■■■■ Technicality ■■■■■

Distance 20.5km (12.7miles) Time 8 hours Total ascent 950m

Terrain steep road, fell tracks, high mountain passes, valley roads, boggy woodland track and old packhorse tracks

Maps OS Explorer OL6 (1:25,000); OS Landranger 90 & 96 (1:50,000); British Mountain Maps Lake District (1:40,000); Harvey Superwalker Southern Lakeland (1:25,000)

Accommodation Youth Hostels: Coniston Holly How – tel. 0845 371 9511; Coniston Coppermines – 0845 371 9630; Eskdale – tel. 0845 371 9317 or

visit www.yha.org.uk Camping in Coniston, Dunnerdale and Eskdale. Hotels and B&Bs in Coniston, Dunnerdale and Eskdale.

For accommodation listings visit www.golakes.co.uk

Day two kicks off with a sweat-inducing ascent straight out of Coniston and then settles into a steady climb over the Walna Scar Pass to the Duddon Valley. Passing from one valley to the next is one of the main delights of the whole of the Trail Lakeland Haute Route, and each one takes on the same sort of significance as reaching a summit. At each one you can almost feel the individual spirit of the new valley you are entering. This is no more apparent than when passing from Coniston to the Duddon Valley. At almost your first step over the top of the pass you leave behind the bustle of the

Coniston side and descend into the tranquillity of the Duddon Valley. The move to the next pass, Grassguards, is different again, being less marked by human activity and more by the sheer drama of the landscape. The first thing that confronts you as you cross it is the Scafell massif in all its grandeur.

1. Up at the top end of Coniston is the Sun Hotel (famous as the first home of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, and for lodging Donald Campbell during his record-breaking speed attempts on Coniston Water). Head past it and climb the steep tarmac of the Walna Scar Road.
2. At the fell gate the Walna Scar Road turns from tarmac to a track. Continue along it, heading west as it climbs first past the junction for Bursting Stone Quarry, then over Cove Bridge and finally up to the Walna Scar. The top is a few metres over the 600m mark but misses the magic 2,000ft mark by bang on 10ft. The Walna Scar Road was in regular use for horsedrawn and packhorse traffic until the arrival of the internal combustion engine.
3. The descent of the Walna Scar Road into the Duddon Valley is smooth to start with then roughens up as height is lost. At the bottom you join a lane at a fell gate above Long House. This lane is then followed down to the main valley road.
4. Head south down the valley road for 800m to a path on the right. Just a little bit further on is the Newfield Inn if you fancy a pub lunch. This quiet, unassuming inn has a rather dark past. During the construction of the Seathwaite Tarn Dam, which was completed in 1904, it was the scene of a minor riot and the shooting of a 'navy'.
5. From the road a path first crosses Tarn Beck by a footbridge then crosses the River Duddon by an impressive stone arched footbridge and leads to High Wallowbarrow Farm.
6. A steep bridleway climbs past the impressive buttresses of Wallowbarrow Crag to gain a delightful high-level terrace track that leads to Grassguards Farm.
7. Things change dramatically past Grassguards Farm as a bridleway heads north-west over Ulpha Fell in the shadow of Harter Fell. This route is an old packhorse route but its course has in the past been overplanted by forestry, and as a result it is narrow and boggy in places.
8. The summit of the Grassguards bridleway is a real eye-opener, with the whole horizon filled by the towering peaks of the Scafell massif.

9. The bridleway gradually improves on the descent into Eskdale and you can see in places where it has been built up with drystone embankments. At the bottom it joins the Hardknott Pass road at Jubilee Bridge.
10. Once on the Eskdale valley road follow it west for the Youth Hostel, campsites and other accommodation.

Day Three

Start Eskdale **NY175008**

Finish Buttermere **NY174169**

Strenuousness ■■■■■ Navigation ■■■■■ Technicality ■■■■■

Distance 20.5km (12.7miles) Time 8 hours Total ascent 1055m

Terrain lanes, fell tracks, exposed moorland, valley roads, high mountain passes, remote valley head, steep pitched bridleway and lakeside woodland

Maps OS Explorer OL6 & 4 (1:25,000); OS Landranger 90 (1:50,000); British Mountain Maps Lake District (1:40,000): Harvey Superwalker Lakeland West (1:25,000)

Accommodation Youth Hostels: Eskdale – tel. 0845 371 9317; Black Sail Hut, Ennerdale – tel. 0845 371 9680; Buttermere – tel. 0845 371 9508 or visit www.yha.org.uk

Camping in Eskdale, Wasdale and Buttermere.

Hotels and B&Bs in Eskdale, Wasdale and Buttermere. For accommodation listings visit www.golakes.co.uk

Another day of contrasts from the intimacy of Eskdale with its rich mixture of crags, woods and fields to a roller coaster walk over three high passes. The first pass over Burnmoor Tarn takes you across the broad western shoulder of Scafell and down into the rugged mountainringed Wasdale Head. From here the ancient packhorse route over Black Sail Pass takes you into Ennerdale, the remotest valley in the Lake District. To finish, the rocky jaws of Scarth Gap spit you out into the sublime beauty of Buttermere with its three shining lakes.

1. From the old mill buildings at the top end of Boot a steep section of bridleway carries you past the ruins of peat storage huts to the broad open col occupied by Burnmoor Tarn. The lodge on the southwest corner of the tarn is privately owned

and was once the shooting lodge of Lord Leconfield who owned the Eskdale estate.

2. Burnmoor Tarn holds a good head of fish including trout, pike and perch. From its north-eastern corner a path climbs up Hard Rigg to the summit of Scafell. If you are in good time and fancy a bit of a diversion the summit could be taken in. If you opt to climb Scafell a bit of time can be saved by descending to Wasdale Head via the Green How Path.
3. The bridleway from Burnmoor Tarn descends past the top of Fence Wood then in front of the FRCC climbing hut at Brackenclose to reach the valley road near the National Trust campsite.
4. The Wasdale Head Inn is ideally situated for a morning coffee or lunch depending on your timing. It is widely regarded as the birthplace of rock-climbing as members of the academic community and of the Alpine Club used to spend holidays here. During their stays, as well as walking, they explored the surrounding crags and climbed for pleasure rather than just as a means to reach summits.
5. The old packhorse route over Black Sail Pass takes the line of least resistance over to Ennerdale. In its heyday it saw trains of horses up to 40 strong carrying all sorts of goods between Borrowdale, Buttermere and the coastal plain and the port at Ravenglass. It is also famous for the exploits of Lanty Slee and his contemporaries who used to smuggle illicit alcohol and the graphite (wadd), which at the time had a higher value than gold!
6. Ennerdale is in the process of being allowed to return to a wilder state. The ranks of conifers are being slowly harvested, and planting of more natural mixed woodland is being encouraged by both self-seeding, some planting and the removal of sheep to be replaced by less damaging cattle. Black Sail Hut makes an ideal alternative overnight stop to Buttermere if you fancy experiencing the peace and quiet of this remote valley head.
7. A short, sharp ascent from Black Sail Hut leads to the top of Scarth Gap Pass. If you have overnights at Black Sail Hut an alternative to dropping down into Buttermere is to cross the summit of Haystacks and follow the high-level path over the col at Dubs to reach the top of Honister Pass.
8. The descent down the Buttermere side of Scarth Gap is rough in parts but it follows a well-graded course so it shouldn't play too much havoc on tired knees.

9. The path through Burtness Wood and along the shores of Buttermere is the perfect end to the day. The going is easy, and regardless of the weather it is a delightful path with ever-changing views of the lake through the sturdy stands of trees.

Day Four

Start Buttermere NY174169

Finish Keswick NY265234

Strenuousness ■■■■■ Navigation ■■■■■ Technicality ■■■■■

Distance 22.6km (14 miles) Time 7 hours Total ascent 770m

Terrain valley roads, packhorse track, high open col, quarry workings, old tramway, high pass, stony bridleway, village lanes, lakeside woodland, wooded gardens and riverside pasture

Maps OS Explorer OL4 (1:25,000); OS Landranger 90 (1:50,000); British Mountain Maps Lake District (1:40,000); Harvey Superwalker Lakeland West (1:25,000)

Accommodation youth hostels: Buttermere – tel. 0845 371 9508; Honister Hause – tel. 0845 371 9522; Longthwaite, Borrowdale – tel. 0845 371 9624; Keswick – tel. 0845 371 9746 or visit www.yha.org.uk

Camping in Buttermere, Seatoller, Grange, Keswick. Hotels and B&Bs in Buttermere, Seatoller, Rosthwaite, Grange, Portinscale, Keswick.

For accommodation listings visit www.golakes.co.uk

The transit from Buttermere to Keswick is marked by a short, steep climb over the high plateau-like col of Dubs and the road pass of Honister Hause, and then a long, slow descent down Borrowdale and alongside Derwent Water. The climb up to Dubs is a rocky and moody affair along an ancient packhorse track that skirts the fellside in a precarious manner. After this the route weaves its way down the quiet side of Borrowdale and sneaks into the lovely little hamlet of Grange alongside the wooded banks of the River Derwent. The final leg follows the easy course of the Cumbria Way alongside Derwent Water with busy activity of boats accompanying you all the way into Keswick.

1. Leaving Buttermere, the Trail Lakeland Haute Route follows the path around the northern shores of Buttermere lake. Along the way it passes through a weird lakeside tunnel constructed so that the original owners of the big house at Hassness did not have their view of the lake disturbed by walkers!
2. From Gatesgarth the Warnscale Bottom bridleway is followed as it traverses in an ever steepening course across the south-western slopes of Fleetwith Pike. Some of the original built-up sections of this packhorse route are still visible.
3. The expansive col of Dubs has seen much quarrying activity over the years. The first obvious feature along the bridleway is the old hut, now a bothy, closely followed by a long, straight cutting that climbs east across the col. This is the bed of an old cable hoisted tram way which is followed over to Honister Hause.
4. Partway down the Borrowdale side of the Honister Pass a bridleway breaks off left. This is followed down the western side of Borrowdale towards Grange.
5. The bridleway passes between the main fell side and the steep natural ramparts of Castle Crag. On the eastern side of Castle Crag is a slate cave which from the Twenties until just after World War Two was the summer residence of the Borrowdale hermit Millican Dalton.
6. From Grange the Cumbria Way is followed through Manesty Park and alongside Derwent Water and all the way into Keswick.
7. Beatrix Potter took her summer holidays at Lingholm for a number of years. The vegetable gardens were the inspiration for The Tale of Peter Rabbit.

Day Five

Start Keswick NY265234

Finish Glenridding NY386169

Strenuousness ■■■ Navigation ■■ Technicality ■■

Distance 19km (11¾ miles)

Time 7 hours Total ascent 900m

Terrain roads, lanes, pasture, valley bottom bridleway, steep packhorse track, high open col, high remote corrie, steep side gill, mine workings, rocky valley and village lanes

Maps OS Explorer OL4 & 5 (1:25 000); OS Landranger 90 (1:50,000); British Mountain Maps Lake District (1:40,000); Harvey Superwalker Lakeland Central (1:25,000)

Accommodation youth hostels: Keswick – tel. 0845 371 9746; Greenside, Glenridding – tel. 0845 371 9742; Patterdale – tel. 0845 371 9337 or visit

www.yha.org.uk

Camping in Keswick, Dale Bottom, Legburthwaite, Glenridding and Patterdale. Hotels and B&Bs in Keswick, Legburthwaite, Thirlspot, Glenridding and Patterdale. For accommodation listings visit www.golakes.co.uk

The first part of day five weaves a devious course across the open farmland east of Keswick and then dives off down the subsidiary valley of St John's in the Vale. This ducking and diving provides an interesting start with a visit to the megalithic stone circle at Castle Rigg then a pleasant amble underneath steep valley walls. After this the route turns east and climbs the northern end of the Helvellyn range by the old packhorse route of Sticks Pass. The eastern side of the pass descends a high hanging valley then drops down to Glenridding through the fascinating old mine workings at Greenside.

1. The A5271 is followed out of Keswick alongside the River Derwent to join the A591 at Brigham.
2. The A591 is then joined and followed east (left) across the junction towards the A66. After 100m turn right and follow minor road for Castle Rigg Stone Circle.
3. After viewing the stone circle head south-south-west along Castle Lane to join the A591. Follow this south-east (left) up Nest Brow for 250m to a path on the left. This is followed east through farmland to join a minor road. Follow this east for 500m to a bridleway on the right just after the church.
4. Follow the bridleway all the way down St John's in the Vale to join the B5322 after crossing Sosgil Bridge. Follow the B5322 past Legburthwaite and then take the short lane to Stanah.
5. This is the start of Sticks Pass. It climbs to a fair height as it breaches the main backbone of the Helvellyn range. It was not much liked by Wainwright as he regarded it as being "tedious and drab". His one crossing of it must have been on a dull day, though, as in clear conditions it is far from dull and affords magnificent views, particularly of Skiddaw. It gets its name from the sticks that were used to mark its route.

6. The mines at Greenside, which were worked – with a few interruptions – from 1690 until 1961, have had an amazing history. During their life they have produced over 350,000 tons of lead and 35,000kg of silver. They have suffered catastrophic floods due to a dam collapse, experienced collapses of up 110,000 tons of rock, been set on fire, been worked by POWs and even been the site of experiments by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment

Day Six

Start Glenridding NY386169 F

Finish Ambleside NY374043

Strenuousness ■■■ Navigation ■■ Technicality ■■

Distance 18.6km (11½ miles) Time 7 hours Total ascent 750m

Terrain lanes, low wooded fells, long steep-sided valley, high-level tarn, open corrie, high mountain pass, steep corrie and ghyll, main road, minor roads, wooded hamlet, valley side track and parkland

Maps OS Explorer OL5 & 7 (1:25,000); OS Landranger 90 (1:50,000); British Mountain Maps Lake District (1:40,000): Harvey Superwalker Lakeland Central and Lakeland East (1:25,000)

Accommodation youth hostels: Greenside, Glenridding – tel. 0845 371 9742; Patterdale – tel. 0845 371 9337; Grasmere – tel. 0845 371 9319; Ambleside – tel. 0845 371 9620 or visit www.yha.org.uk

Camping in Glenridding and Patterdale. Hotels and B&Bs in Glenridding, Patterdale, Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside. See www.golakes.co.uk

The deep glacial trench of Grisedale cuts right into the heart of the Helvellyn range and provides a natural route from the Eastern Fells over to the Central Fells. The Trail Lakeland Haute Route exploits this high thoroughfare to regain the start at Ambleside via Grasmere and Rydal. A neat little footpath over the viewpoint of Lanty's Tarn gives direct access to the mouth of Grisedale, from where a steady climb heads between the steep flanks of Striding Edge and the towering rocks of St Sunday Crag. The high point of the route is capped by the dark, brooding waters of Grisedale Tarn. Things soon lighten up however as the path down the sunny south-west-facing Tongue Gill let you

down into the welcoming arms of Grasmere. Easy walking along the A591 and the Coffin Route then lead straight back to Ambleside.

1. Take the lane in front of the shops by the river and follow it to the houses at Westside. From here a short, steep path leads up to Lanty's Tarn. From here you get one of the best views of Ullswater, so it's worth having your camera at the ready.
2. A short descent leads to the Grisedale bridleway, which is then followed as it climbs south-west along the valley. The bridleway is fairly easy, only steepening up as it approaches Ruthwaite Lodge.
3. Ruthwaite Lodge is an old shooting lodge that has been converted as a private mountain hut.
4. Just off the bridleway below the outlet of Grisedale Tarn is the 'Brothers' Parting Stone'. This was inscribed by William Wordsworth and his brother John at their last parting. Sadly John drowned in 1805 and William never saw him again.
5. The zigzags above Grisedale Tarn were developed to carry the first tourists to the summit of Helvellyn by pony.
6. On the south side of Grisedale Tarn Hause Gap provides the link over to Grasmere. From here quick diversionary ascents of both Fairfield and Seat Sandal can be made by those with excess energy.
7. From the A591 on the south side of Grasmere (mini-roundabout) a lane leads off left. It passes by Dove Cottage, Wordsworth's first house in the area, and then climbs on to White Moss Common.
8. The Coffin Route that traverses high above Rydal Water was used to transport bodies for burial at St Oswald's as it had the only consecrated ground in the area.
9. On his marriage Wordsworth moved from Dove Cottage to Rydal Mount.