

WALKING THE LAKE DISTRICT FELS

# CONISTON

THE OLD MAN OF CONISTON,  
SWIRL HOW, WETHERLAM,  
DUDDON VALLEY AND ESKDALE

MARK RICHARDS

CICERONE

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### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1039/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1039/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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*Front cover:* Looking to Brown Pike, Dow Crag, from Torver Beck  
*Title page:* Fox Haw and Caw from Stickle Pike

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## More to explore

## Useful contacts








## A fellranger's glossary

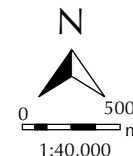
## Alphabetical list of fells in the Fellranger series







































Old dam south of Hodge Close Quarry (photo: Maggie Allan)

## Key to route maps and topos

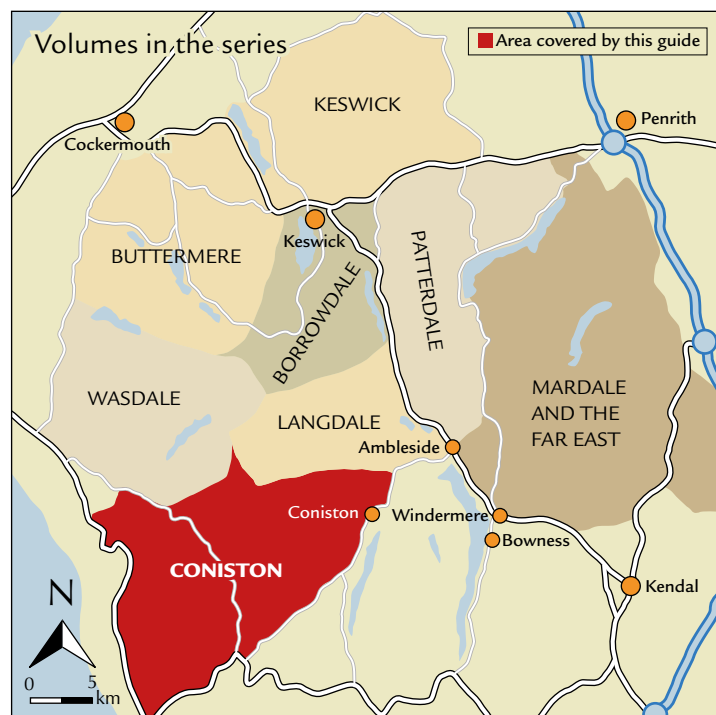
-  **Route on a defined path**
-  **Route on an intermittent or undefined path**
-  **Fell summit featured in this guide (on maps)**
-  **Fell summit featured in this guide (on maps)**
-  **Route number (on maps)**
-  **Starting point**
-  **Route number (on topos)**



## Harvey map legend

-  Lake, small tarn, pond
-  River, footbridge
-  Wide stream
-  Narrow stream
-  Peat hags
-  Marshy ground
-  Contours change from brown to grey where the ground is predominantly rocky outcrops, small crags and other bare rock.
-  Improved pasture
-  Rough pasture
-  Fell or moorland
-  Open forest or woodland
-  Dense forest or woodland
-  Felled or new plantation
-  Forest ride or firebreak
-  Settlement
-  Boundary, maintained
-  Boundary, remains
-  Contour (15m interval)
-  Index contour (75m interval)
-  Auxiliary contour
-  Scree, spoil heap
-  Boulder field
-  Scattered rock and boulders
-  Predominantly rocky ground
-  Major crag, large boulder
-  O.S. trig pillar, large cairn
-  Spot height (from air survey)
-  Dual carriageway
-  Main road (fenced)
-  Minor road (unfenced)
-  Track or forest road
-  Footpath or old track
-  Intermittent path
-  Long distance path
-  Powerline, pipeline
-  Building, ruin or sheepfold, shaft

The representation of a road, track or footpath is no evidence of the existence of a right of way.



## AUTHOR PREFACE

This land of living dreams we call the Lake District is a cherished blessing to know, love and share. As we go about our daily routines, we may take a fleeting moment to reflect that someone, somewhere, will be tramping up a lonely gill or along an airy ridge, peering from a lofty summit or gazing across a wind-blown tarn and taking lingering solace from its timeless beauty. The trappings of modern life thrust carpet and concrete under our feet, and it is always wonderful to walk the region's sheep trods and rough trails, and to imprint our soles upon the fells. This series sets out to give you the impetus and inspiration to make space in your schedule to explore them time and again, in myriad different ways.

However, the regular paths of long tradition deserve our care. Progressively many of the main paths are being re-set with cobbles and pitching by organisations such as Fix the Fells, to whose work you have contributed by buying this guide. But in many instances, the best consideration we can give these pathways is rest. The modern fellwanderer should show a new 'green' awareness by choosing to tread lightly on the land and to find new ways around the hills. One of the underlying impulses of this guide is to protect these beloved fells by presenting a diversity of route options for each and every fell – and also, in this new edition, recommending 'fell-friendly' routes to each summit which are less susceptible to erosion.

Another feature of this latest incarnation of Fellranger, apart from the smaller size to slip in your pocket or pack, is the addition of a selection of inspiring ridge routes at the end of each volume for those of you who like to spend a little longer with your head and feet in the heavenly realms, relishing the summit views and the connections between the fell-tops, as well as some accompanying online resources for readers with a digital bent.

Mark Richards

[www.markrichardswalking.co.uk](http://www.markrichardswalking.co.uk)

# STARTING POINTS

Location		Description	GR	Access	Ascents described from here
1	Mosedale	Verge parking on N side of road	NY 242 017	FP	Hard Knott
2	Hardknott Pass	Small layby E of pass summit	NY 232 015	FP	Hard Knott, Harter Fell
3	Hardknott Castle (Roman fort)	Layby parking E of Roman fort	NY 221 014	FP	Hard Knott
4	Jubilee Bridge	Layby E of cattle grid at foot of pass	NY 213 011	FP	Harter Fell
5	Brotherilkeld	Generous verge parking	NY 210 011	FP	Hard Knott
6	Woolpack Inn	Car park beside pub and café	NY 190 010	FP	Green Crag, Harter Fell
7	Stanley Ghyll	Car park in woods	NY 171 003	FP	Green Crag
8	Birkerfell Road (Devoke Water track-end)	Verge parking beside track to High Ground farm	SD 171 977	FP	Great Worm Crag, Green Crag, Yoadcastle
9	Birkerfell Road (Woodend Bridge)	Verge parking	SD 179 963	FP	Great Worm Crag, Hesk Fell
10	Eskdale Green	Large layby W of Forge Bridge (no parking at La'al Ratty stations)	SD 148 994	FP	Muncaster Fell
11	Brantrake	Modest tree-sheltered layby	SD 145 985	FP	Yoadcastle
12	Ravenglass	Large town-centre car park and station car park	SD 085 964	PP, T	Muncaster Fell
13	Dyke	Layby beside farm access lane	SD 113 951	FP	Stainton Pike, Yoadcastle
14	Corneyfell Road (Fell Lane)	A595 verge S of junction	SD 113 942	FP	Stainton Pike, Whitfell, Yoadcastle
15	Corneyfell Road (Buckbarrow Bridge)	Small layby beside bridge	SD 134 903	FP	Buckbarrow, Whitfell
16	Corneyfell Road (road summit)	Layby parking	SD 150 896	FP	Black Combe, Buckbarrow
17	Bootle	Small car park beside church	SD 107 883	FP, T	Black Combe, Buckbarrow
18	Whitbeck	Parking on old road in front of church	SD 119 839	FP	Black Combe

Location		Description	GR	Access	Ascents described from here
19	Whicham church	Church car park	SD 135 827	FP	Black Combe
20	Beckside	Layby	SD 153 847	FP	Black Combe
21	Hallthwaites	Layby/verge opposite church	SD 178 856	FP	Black Combe
22	Cragg Hall	Verge S of access lane to Swinside Farm	SD 181 872	FP	(Sunkenkirk stone circle – see Black Combe chapter)
23	Brackenthwaite	Verge where track diverges by a gill	SD 179 920	FP	Whitfell
24	Bobbinmill Bridge	Tiny layby opposite cottages on W side of bridge	SD 190 926	FP	Hesk Fell
25	Ulpha	Plentiful verge and layby parking on common	SD 199 919	FP	Stickle Pike
26	Kiln Bank Cross	Layby on common	SD 215 932	FP	Caw, Stickle Pike
27	Broughton Mills	Roadside parking beside bridge	SD 222 907	FP	Stickle Pike
28	Water Yeat (forest gate)	Verge parking beside forestry gate (don't block access)	SD 238 928	FP	Caw, Walna Scar
29	Hummer Lane	Limited verge parking	SD 268 934	FP	Walna Scar
30	Torver (church hall)	Church hall car park (donation)	SD 285 943	FP, B	Coniston Old Man, Dow Crag, Walna Scar
31	Walna Scar Road (fell-gate)	Large parking area beyond fell-gate	SD 288 970	FP	Brim Fell, Coniston Old Man, Dow Crag, Walna Scar
32	Coniston (Lake Road)	Large formal car park; further car park in town by tourist office	SD 308 970	PP, B	Brim Fell, Coniston Old Man, Swirl How, Walna Scar, Wetherlam
33	Tilberthwaite	Generous layby beside beck	NY 306 010	FP	Holme Fell, Wetherlam
34	Hodge Close	Parking area above quarry	NY 315 017	FP	Holme Fell
35	Oxen Fell (High Cross)	Small layby just N of junction with bridleway	NY 328 018	FP	Black Fell, Holme Fell
36	Tom Gill	NT car park off road bend	SD 322 999	NT	Black Fell, Holme Fell



## STARTING POINTS *continued*

Location		Description	GR	Access	Ascents described from here
37	Tarn Hows	Large NT car park with toilets	SD 326 995	NT	Black Fell
38	High Cross	Forestry Commission car park	SD 332 986	PP, B	Black Fell
39	Silverthwaite	Car park	NY 341 037	PP	Black Fell
40	Little Langdale	Roadside parking	NY 319 033	FP	Great Carrs, Holme Fell, Swirl How, Wetherlam
41	Cathedral Quarry	Small layby near ford	NY 315 028	FP	Holme Fell
42	Castle Howe	Verge parking	NY 294 032	FP	Great Carrs
43	Wrynose Pass	Laybys E and W of Three Shire Stone	NY 277 027	FP	Great Carrs, Swirl How
44	Wrynose Bottom	Verge parking	NY 265 022	FP	Great Carrs, Grey Friar
45	Cockley Beck Bridge	Layby and verge parking near bridge	NY 246 016	FP	Grey Friar
46	Birks Bridge	Forestry Commission car park	SD 235 995	FP	Harter Fell
47	Troutal	Small layby for 1–2 cars N of house	SD 235 988	FP	Grey Friar
48	Fickle Steps	Layby just N of road bend	SD 231 974	FP	Green Crag, Grey Friar, Harter Fell, Wallowbarrow Crag
49	Seathwaite	Layby just N of church	SD 229 962	FP	Caw, Dow Crag, Green Crag, Grey Friar, Harter Fell, Wallowbarrow Crag, Walna Scar

FP – free parking

PP – pay parking

NT – National Trust (free to members)

B – on a bus route (in season)

T – on a railway line

*Dow Crag from the eastern shore of Goat's Water*







## INTRODUCTION

### Valley bases

The Southern Fells rise from three primary valleys: Coniston Water to the east, Eskdale to the north and the Duddon in their midst, although there are also numerous quieter approaches from the western seaboard. The greatest drama is to be found in the north, where the rugged fells crescendo towards the Scafells. The Duddon harbours a succession of delightful, wooded craggy aspects – no wonder Wordsworth held such poetic passion for this valley. Eskdale too is a treasure, defended by the passes from the throngs that clog the narrow twisting roads of the Langdales.

In general terms, the promised adventure springs from small dale-floor settlements. Two high motor passes form a bridge allowing access to the Western Fells from Little Langdale via the upper Duddon.

### Facilities

Coniston is a service-centre village, rare in Lakeland, where the visitor and the local can find most things to meet their needs – from launches to lunches, micro-brewing to cultural exhibitions – the principal attraction, the Ruskin Museum, quite the most absorbing of its kind. Here you can not only learn

the robust detail of an agrarian and industrial heritage, but also witness the influence of great people on the locality, from Donald Campbell to John Ruskin himself. Visit and be inspired!

The whole area has a long tradition of provision to welcome and refresh the walker. Accommodation is available at Torver and, to the south, the Broughton-in-Furness area is reasonably well geared. You can also find some accommodation within the Duddon valley, and certainly camping, notably at Turner Hall. Eskdale rivals Coniston for places of refreshment and lodgings. Little Langdale has just one pub and some holiday lets, but is a stone's throw from popular Elterwater, Skelwith Bridge, Hawkshead and the major tourist hub of Ambleside.

### Getting around

On the public transport front, the Coniston Rambler 505 bus runs from Ambleside to Coniston via Hawkshead, while the X12 plies between Coniston and Ulverston. Buses are otherwise absent in this southwestern fell quarter. The Cumbria Coastal Line can be joined from the West Coast Mainline at Lancaster and Carlisle, but is convenient only for walks from Silecroft and Ravenglass.

Parking is not to be taken for granted anywhere in this popular park. Always allow time to find an alternative parking place, if not to switch to a different plan for your day or just set out directly from your door – perfectly possible if you find accommodation within any of the main valleys. Always take care to park safely and only in laybys and car parks, not on the side of the narrow country roads. Consult the 'Starting points' table to find out where the best parking places (and bus stops) are to be found. Note that although, in general, one preferred starting point is specified for each route, there may be alternative starting points nearby should you arrive and find your chosen spot taken.

### Fix the Fells

The Fellranger series has always highlighted the hugely important work of the Fix the Fells project in repairing the most seriously damaged fell paths. The mighty challenge has been a great learning curve and the more recent work, including complex guttering, is quite superb. It ensures a flat footfall where possible, is easy



*White Pike on Walna Scar from Caw Moss*

to use in ascent and descent, and excess water escapes efficiently, minimising future damage.

The original National Trust and National Park Authority partnership came into being in 2001 and expanded with the arrival of Natural England, with additional financial support from the Friends of the Lake District and now the Lake District Foundation ([www.lakedistrictfoundation.org](http://www.lakedistrictfoundation.org)). But, and it's a big but, the whole endeavour needs to raise £500,000 a year to function. This enormous figure is needed to keep pace with the challenges caused by the joint tyranny of boots and brutal weather. The dedicated and highly skilled team, including volunteers, deserve our sincerest gratitude for making our hill paths secure and sympathetic to their setting. It is a task without end, including pre-emptive repair to stop paths from washing out in the first place.

Bearing in mind that a metre of path costs upwards of £200 there is every good reason to cultivate the involvement of fellwalkers in a cause that must be dear to our hearts... indeed our soles! Please make a beeline for [www.fixthefells.co.uk](http://www.fixthefells.co.uk) to make a donation, however modest. Your commitment will, to quote John Muir, 'make the mountains glad'.

### Using this guide

Unlike other guidebooks which show a single or limited number of routes up the Lakeland fells, the purpose of the Fellranger series has always been to offer the independent fellwalker the full range of approaches and paths



## Appendices

For more information about facilities and services in the Lake District, some useful phone numbers and websites are listed in ‘Useful contacts’. ‘A fellranger’s glossary’ offers a glossary to help newcomers decode the language of the fells, as well as explanations of some of the most intriguing place names you might come across in this area. The ‘Alphabetical list of fells in the Fellranger series’ is a comprehensive list of all the fells included in this 8-volume series, to help you decide which volume you need to buy next!

## Safety and access

Always take a map and compass with you – make a habit of regularly looking at your map and take pride in learning how to take bearings from it. In mist this will be a time-saver, and potentially a life-saver. The map can enhance your day by showing additional landscape features and setting your walk in its wider context. That said, beware of the green dashed lines on Ordnance Survey maps. They are public rights of way but no guarantee of an actual route on the ground. Take care to study the maps and diagrams provided carefully and plan your route according to your own capabilities and the prevailing conditions.

Please do not rely solely on your mobile phone or other electronic device for navigation. Local mountain rescue teams report that this is increasingly the main factor in many of the incidents they attend.

The author has taken care to follow time-honoured routes and keep within bounds of access, yet access and rights of way can change and are not guaranteed. Any updates that we know of to the routes in this guide will be made available on the Cicerone website, [www.cicerone.co.uk/1039](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1039), and we are always grateful for information about discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone Press, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7RL.

## Additional online resources

Summit panoramas for all of the fells in this volume can be downloaded for free from the guide page on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1039](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1039)). You will also find a ticklist of the summits in the Walking the Lake District Fells series at [www.cicerone.co.uk/fellranger](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/fellranger), should you wish to keep a log of your ascents, along with further information about the series.



## 1 BLACK COMBE 600M/1969FT

<b>Climb it from</b>	Whitbeck <b>18</b> , Whicham church <b>19</b> , Beckside <b>20</b> , Hallthwaites <b>21</b> , Corneyfell Road summit <b>16</b> or Bootle <b>17</b>
<b>Character</b>	A great whale-backed maritime fell in the extreme southwest of the district
<b>Fell-friendly route</b>	7
<b>Summit grid ref</b>	SD 135 855
<b>Link it with</b>	Buckbarrow

Embracing the West Cumbrian seaboard from Ravenglass down to the Whicham valley, the Lake District National Park takes in both a fascinating shore and a fine fell massif. Black Combe will forever draw admiration from those who live and work in its near shadow. It has a presence that might even delude the innocent into thinking it greater than the mighty Scafells. Although local lore that it is an extinct volcano has proven unfounded, what it lacks in volcanicity it more than makes up for in solidity, resting squat, resolute and reassuring, a cornerstone bulwark marking the fells’ southwestern limit.

In shape, Black Combe is reminiscent of the Howgills – rounded ridges falling to the west and south with the northern slopes more Pennine in character. Whitecombe Beck etches deep into the southern slope, giving the fell its greatest

↑ *The southern aspect of Black Combe from Kirsanton, with the railway and Brocklebanks old brewery*

dramatic statement – the splintered screes falling into eastern hollows, those nearest the summit most often in shade, giving rise to the fell's titular blackness.

Remote from common fellwalking affairs, Black Combe is deserving of more than a perfunctory inspection. Indeed, many walkers do make regular forays to the top, as the view of land and sea is quite stunning and infinitely variable through time and tide.

Most visitors climb the fell by the Whicham path (4); however, the fell's Christmas-pudding shape means that anyone seeking to make a circular outing invariably chooses to advance up the Whitecombe Beck valley (6), wending to its head then leaving the summit by one or other of the ridges flanking Blackcombe Screes (7–8). Few walkers climb from Bootle, although there is a steady grassy way (11–13). There is only one northern and one eastern approach (12 and 9 respectively), of value in grand traverses but awkward when it comes to making a tidy circuit. Walkers interested in ancient sites should make a point of visiting Sunkenkirk stone circle (10), potentially at the start of a full linear traverse of the fell.

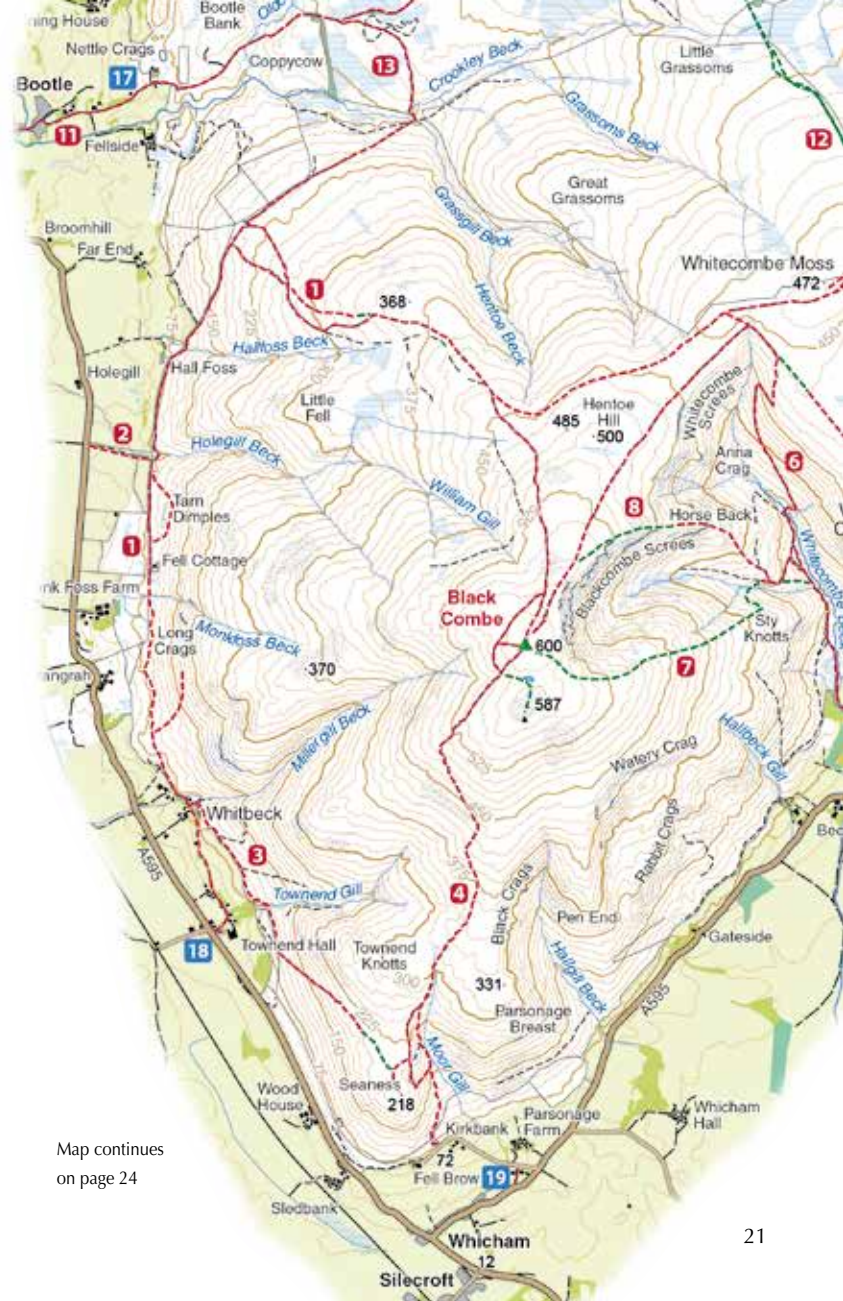
## Ascent from Whitbeck 18

Via the north ridge → 7km/4¼ miles ↑ 570m/1870ft ⌚ 2hr 20min

*A really pleasant, seldom-trod grassy plod to the top*

**1** Follow the lane by **Townend Hall**, passing the fascinating, sensitively renovated old mill at the foot of **Millergill Beck**. The bridleway continues, north-bound initially, with the intake wall close on the left. It then crosses an undulating section, a clear way firmly striking through the dense bracken, with the hint of a shepherds' path veering right at the first rise to climb onto a natural shelf of the near ridge. (This may be a good direct line of ascent or descent but has not been tested.) The route instead keeps faith with the lower path, passing the derelict **Fell Cottage** and a curious ridge feature with an even more intriguing name: **Tarn Dimples**. Just before the path fords **Holegill Beck** a footpath (Route **2**) enters from the field-gate left.

Cross the ford. The ruined **Hall Foss** can be seen over the wall to the left as the path next fords **Hallfoss Beck** and begins to rise beside the wall, then a fence, onto the fell. Go right, up the ridge, as the ground levels opposite a gate in the intake wall. Route **13** from Bootle joins at this point. The





main ascending path winds up the shallow ridge eastward, mounting above a ruined fold and all too briefly through heather, onto **Hentoe Hill** and thence to the summit of Black Combe. (Just before the summit of Hentoe Hill, a lovely old shepherds' path breaks left across the northern slopes by the ruined square of Charley Fold, enabling you to take in the full sweep of Whitecombe and Blackcombe Screes in an extended ascent if you so wish.)

**2** This route begins at a gate off the busy A595 opposite the Barfield Tarn lane. The path traverses the cattle pasture and goes through successive gates to reach the open fell at the ford, where you join Route **1**.

**Link to Whicham path via Seanness** → 2.3km/1½ miles ↑200m/655ft ⊕40min

**3** An alternative option from Whitbeck starts out with Route **1** but turns immediately before the mill. Rise up the garden edge almost to the pond to veer right on a clear path above the enclosure wall. Ford **Townend Gill**, then continue beside the fence on a firm farm track which duly angles up the slope, petering out on the fell shoulder; a quad-bike track dwindles to a sheep trod as you reach **Seanness**. Visit the first cairn; however, the southernmost cairn has the loveliest view down the coastal margin to the cluster of wind turbines adjacent to Haverigg prison. Bear left, regaining a clear path to join the popular path (Route **4**) rising north from Kirkbank.



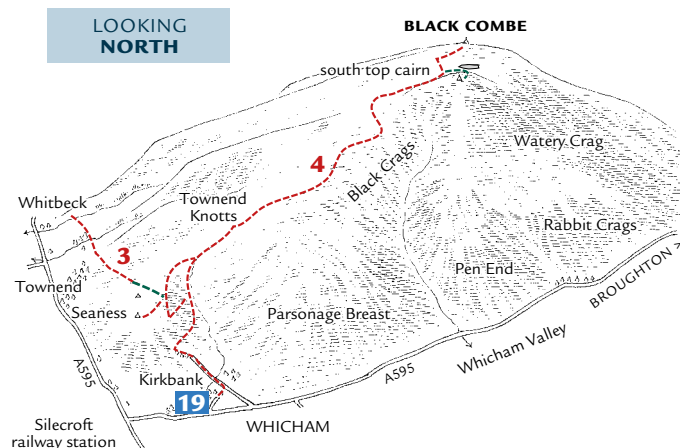
*White Combe and the pastoral Whicham valley from above Po House*

## Ascent from Whicham church 19

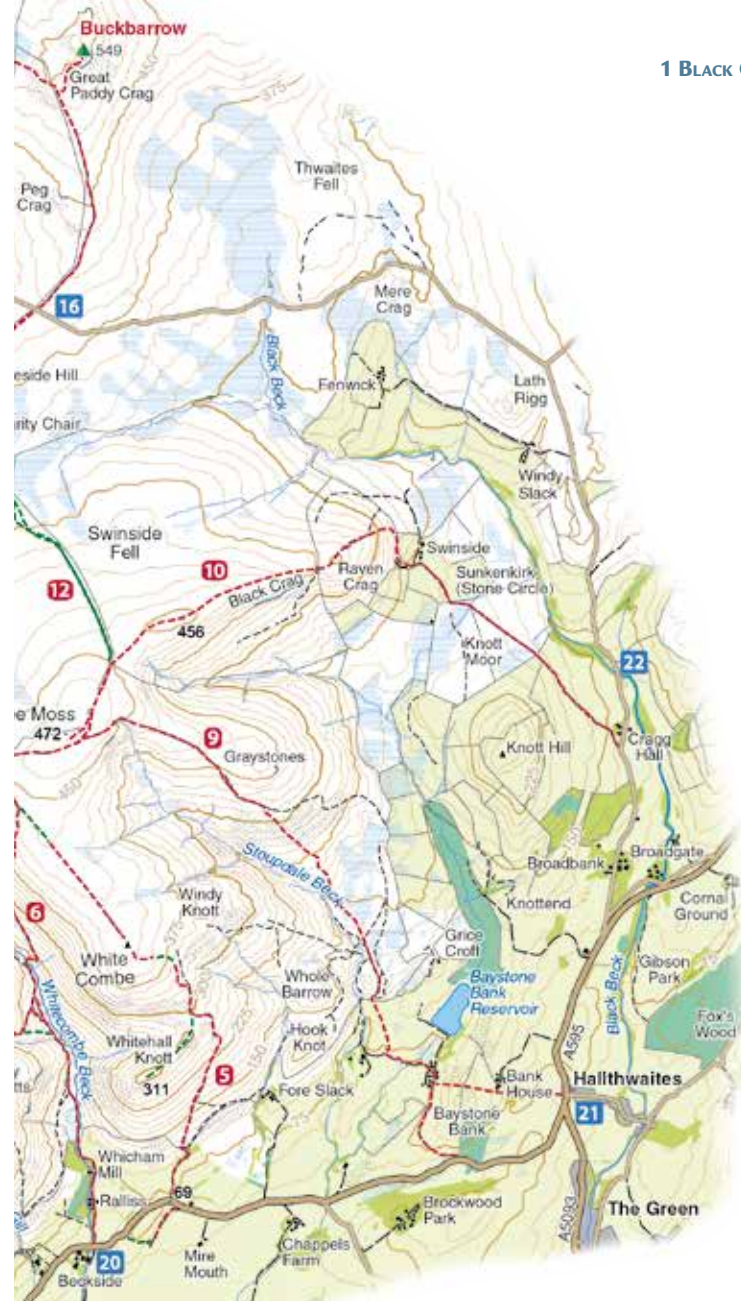
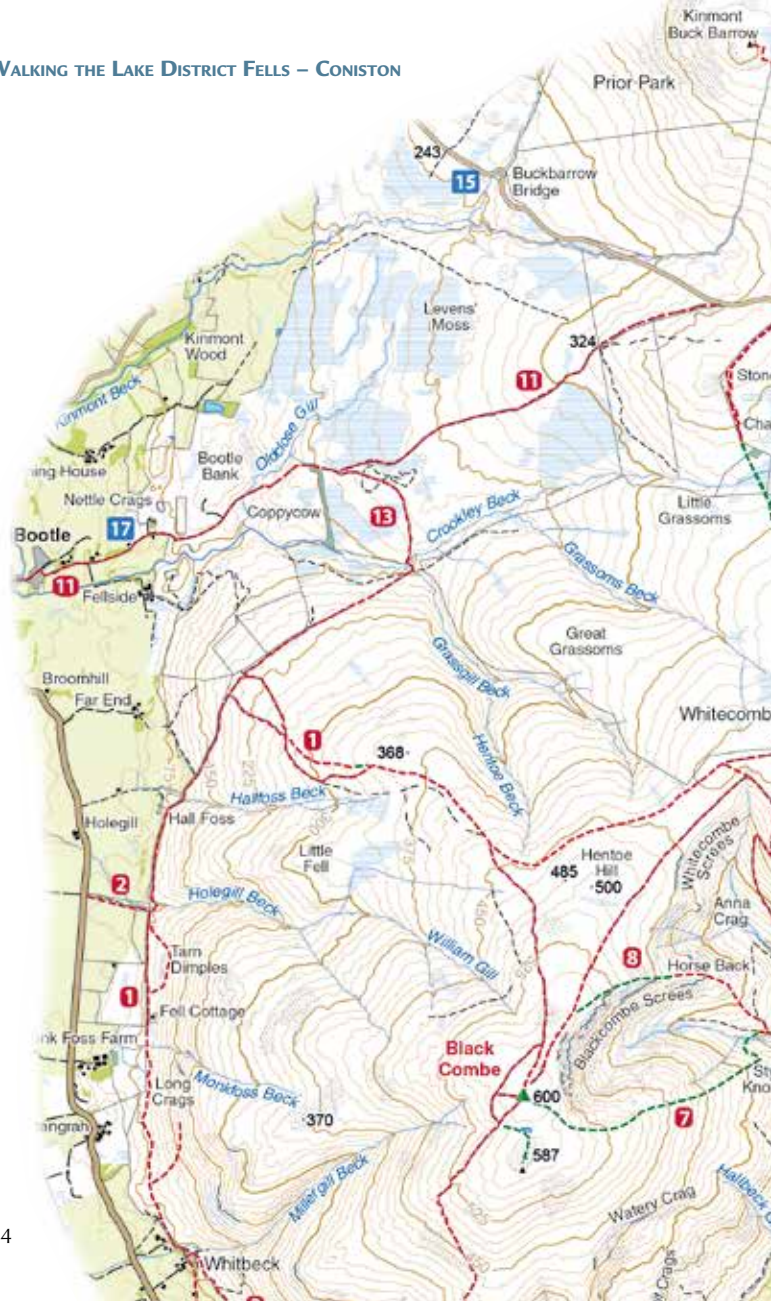
**Direct** → 3.2km/2 miles ↑565m/1855ft ⊕1hr 20min

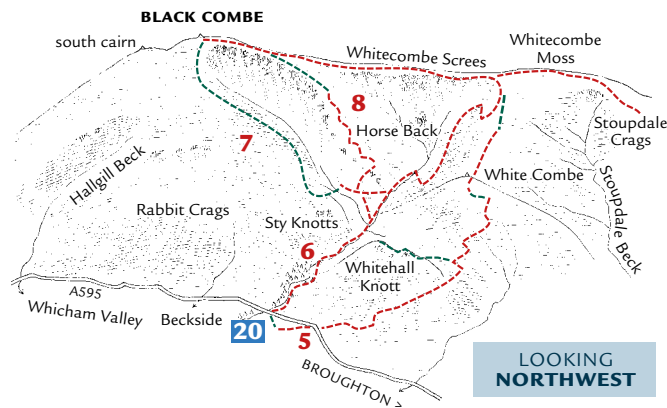
*The way of the many*

**4** Begin from the church car park. (Should a service be in progress, there is a layby just before the turn into the church.) Slip through between the old school and the church to join the byway beyond. Go left to rise behind **Kirkbank**, as the road becomes a track. Find a gate/stile after a fenced recess to gain access to the open fell. Ascend the shallow combe, merging with the Seanness path, for a pleasant steady plod on firm turf. When you get to the head of the **Millergill Beck** valley take the opportunity to break right to the tarn, and then veer back right and south over stony ground to reach the plump **cairn** on the south top for the perfect bird's-eye view over the Millom and Barrow district. Backtrack to the fell summit, from where the northward prospect of Lakeland will tantalise.









## Ascent from Beckside 20

*Get right to the dark heart of the fell with these, the most impressive but less-frequented routes.*

**Via White Combe** → 5.6km/3½ miles ↑555m/1820ft ⌚2hr 15min

**5** From the generous layby close to Beckside Farm head east, taking full advantage of the field-path via Cross Bank to the south of the verge-less main road, newly equipped with hand-gates. As you regain the road take the leafy lane from a gate at the bend above Fox & Goose Cottages. The lane leads to a gate onto the bracken slope of **Whitehall Knott**. Go up left then diagonally across the slope on a grooved track, mounting onto the northern shoulder. (The short ridge of Whitehall Knott is worthy of a detour. It's a fine spot from which to peruse the Whicham valley and consider the fat ridge of Sty Knotts climbing to the top of Black Combe.) As the drove-way continues up by stunted gorse shrubs it gleefully fends off the bracken, but it does not go to the ridge-end summit of **White Combe**. Watch to break left on a path which peters out. The shelter-cairn at the summit is a fine place to halt and delve into your rucksack for a bite to eat, with the great scoured hillsides of Blackcombe and Whitecombe Screes the focus of attention. A narrow ridge path leads purposefully northwest from here, fading as it approaches the junction with

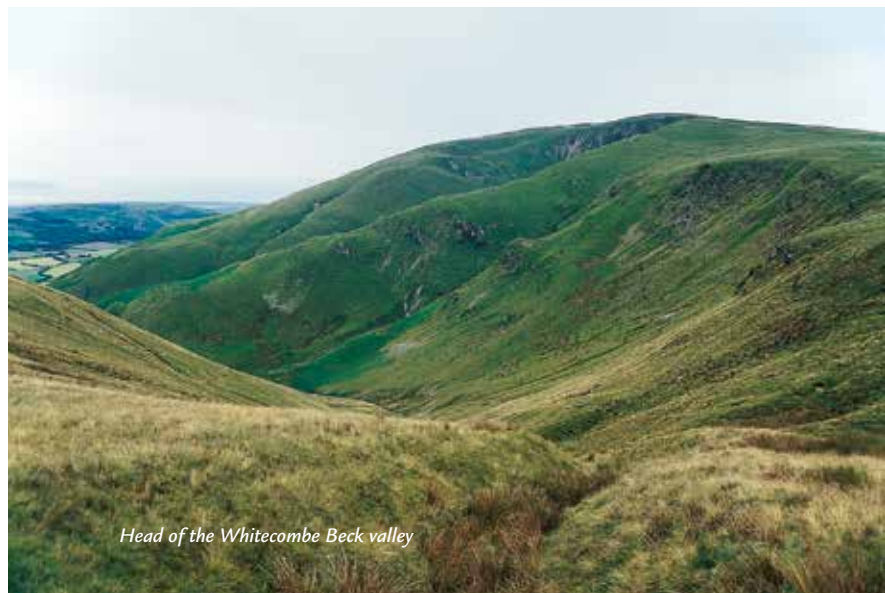
the path at the valley head. Curve naturally around the rim and make the final good mile of ascent southwest over easy ground.

**Via Whitecombe Beck** → 5.2km/3¼ miles ↑555m/1820ft ⌚2hr 10min

**6** This path starts from the foot of the valley. Follow the gated lane direct from the main road at Beckside. Pass the old farmhouse of **Ralliss**, keeping right to avoid the immediate environs of **Whicham Mill**. As the woodland ends a gate leads into the combe's inner sanctuary. The path skips over a plank footbridge, keeping to the west side of the beck until an obvious switch right over a broader plank footbridge. The path switches left again as it begins to climb up the valley-head slope, zig-zagging towards the end. At the top, turn left to join Route **5** for an easy stroll to the summit.

*Two ridges take in Blackcombe Screes; Horse Back (Route 8) is the better climb and Sty Knotts (Route 7) the better descent.*

**7** To ascend either of the two ridges, follow Route **6** to the ford of Blackcombe Gill, cross, then look left to join the first path that keeps above its north bank. Just after the point where Route **8** breaks right on a faint path, turn left to cross the beck. The **Sty Knotts** route is barely visible on the ground, so the only



*Head of the Whitecombe Beck valley*





Looking northeast into the heart of Lakeland from Blackcombe Screes

advice is to devise a line that avoids the worst of the bracken to climb south to gain the ridge and then proceed west up to the summit.

**8** For the **Horse Back** ridge, start out with Route **7** then seek a faintly evident path mounting above a small fenced area. As the ridge narrows the path threads up through rocks and climbs impressively in steps – exciting situations abound. Curve naturally left, following the brim of **Blackcombe Screes** over pathless ground, to join the path from White Combe (Route **5**) for the final approach to the summit.

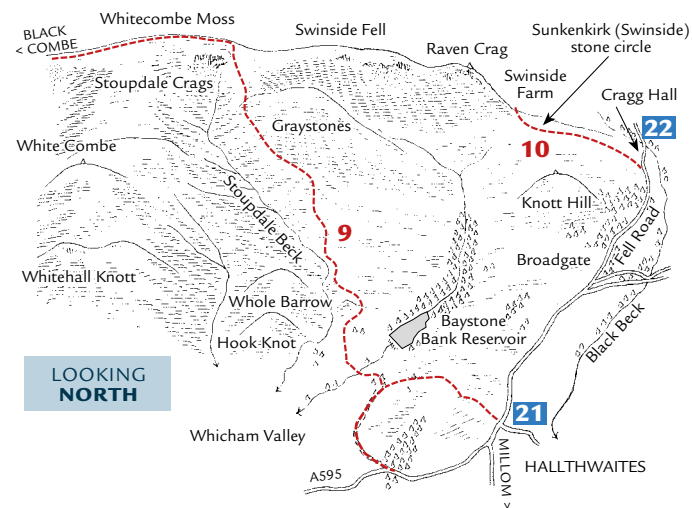
## Ascent from Hallthwaites 21

Via Graystones → 6.8km/4¼ miles ↑615m/2020ft ⌚2hr 30min

*A rewarding linear journey*

**9** From Hallthwaites traverse the intermediate ridge on a footpath served by ladder-stiles via **Bank House**. The view from above **Baystone Bank farm** is a delight. After joining the farm roadway go right at a stile. Follow the lane

towards Whirlpippin. Short of the cottage find a footpath signed right. Go through the gate and brief lane opening into a pasture, the invisible path keeping close company with the wall on your left. Towards the end go through a dip, and cross a ditch and then a ladder-stile onto the open fell. For all its best endeavours bracken fails to subsume the path. Slip over the wave-like knoll of Force Knott and keep on along the top of the bank to the east of **Stoupdale Beck**. Marshy ground makes the going soft to begin with but firmer ground eventually arrives and the path rises purposefully onto the western slope of **Graystones**. The facing fellside, known as Leadmine Breast, is a reminder of the days of small-scale prospecting, for copper as well as lead. The path passes by gorse, rising onto the ridge high above Stoupdale. At the dale head a small broken slope bears the ambitious name of **Stoupdale Crag**s. The path skirts the top of the gullies and you are rewarded with a fine view down the valley before you head over the peaty plateau of **Whitecombe Moss**, slightly south of west, to meet and follow Route **5**. (In mist, keep within the fence that runs along on the north side of the plateau.)





## Ascent from Cragg Hall 22

Via Sunkenkirk stone circle → 6.6km/4 mile ↑500m/1640ft ⌚2hr 30min

*The opening leg for a comprehensive linear traverse of Black Combe*

**10** Follow the farm access lane (no private cars) to **Swinside Farm**. Close to the farm buildings find the Bronze-Age **stone circle**, comprising some 40 or 50 stones (everyone comes up with a different number). Follow on to the left of the farm buildings via two gates, on a track coming up through a hollow to run close beside a wall. As the track levels find a faint path left; this quickly dissolves on the pasture bank, but an easy ascent ensues, avoiding the bracken, to a cairn on **Raven Crag**. Continue to where a sturdy wall strikes over the fell. Either squeeze through the hogg-hole or carefully use the projecting wall-stile immediately to its left to cross the wall. The grassy ridge of **Swinside Fell** continues, with an opportunity to glance left into the upper Whicham Beck valley. Come up to a stile at a fence junction. Cross and initially follow on with the fence, crossing the brow of **Whitecombe Moss** to be drawn naturally onto the edge path above **Whitecombe Screes** to complete the ascent with **Route 5**.



*Long view of Black Combe over Caw, from Brown Pike on Dow Crag*

## Ascent from Bootle 17 or the Corneyfell Road summit 16

Via the Old Road → 9.7km/6 miles ↑655m/2150ft ⌚3hr

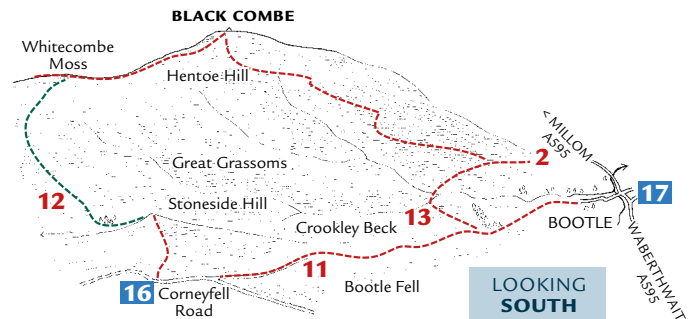
*A grassy byway, useful in creating a circular outing beginning from Whitbeck*

**11** The Bootle Fell byway gives a grand insight into the style of roads before the advent of tarmac: where feasible it is flanked with neat ditches (or a fosse) to allow run-off and minimise wash-out. After **Route 13** has curled up the fell to the right, from a stile/gate the road becomes confined as it progresses to reach the Corneyfell Road, heading on up to the road summit where the fell opens up once more. Here join **Route 12**.

From the road summit → 5.2km/3¼ miles ↑290m/950ft ⌚2hr

*The high start negates much of the ascent, although wet ground may hamper progress.*

**12** From the summit of the Corneyfell Road join the ridge wall over **Stoneside Hill**, a really good viewpoint for Buckbarrow, and, from the depression beyond, follow the ridge fence onto **Whitecombe Moss**. As a barbed fence intervenes step over the plain fence and keep to the west side of the continuing fence to avoid the even wetter ground on Swinside Fell indicated by the rushes. The semblance of a path descends to cross a tall fence at a fence junction. Follow the fence south-southwest to join **Route 9** and advance to the summit.



## Ascent from Bootle 17

Via Crookley Beck and the north ridge → 6.7km/4¼ miles ↑ 605m/1985ft

⌚ 2hr 15min

*A quiet grassy way*

**13** Park in the village off the main street opposite the church or, failing that, with due sensitivity, on Fellgreen, above Fell Gate Cottage (SD 116 885). The road running up from the village is a pleasure to tread. From Fellgreen the old Bootle Fell byway proceeds through a gate. Passing **Nettle Crag**s, winding up then down through the **Oldclose Gill** dell, spot Gibson's Spout over to the right in Crookley Beck. The old road climbs to pass the top end of **Coppycow**. Immediately beyond the trees find a huge granite erratic known as the Resting Stone. (There is a fat finger-sized hole in the upper south side, presumably an example of Bronze-Age cup-and-ring symbolism. The open fell flanking the byway also has Bronze-Age field systems, but there isn't much to see.)

As the open track bends left take the second green path rising right. This crosses over the bracken bank and slices through a cross-paths to avoid the broad sphagnum marsh. Descend into the **Crookley Beck** valley to ford the beck, passing over the hurdle gate, smartly followed by a concrete culvert of **Grassgill Beck**. Now heading southwest, keep to the higher of the two subsequent green paths slanting across the fellside, duly coming alongside the top of the enclosure wall. As a field-gate is spotted, just before the path begins to descend, take the obvious path left, up the gently rising ridge, with Route **2**.

### The summit

Retiring and something of an enigma, the gently domed top of Black Combe ensures that, even from afar, the actual summit is barely perceived and only hoves into view at the last moment of any ascent. Seen from the south, notably from Kirksanton, the portly south cairn pricks the skyline as the sham summit, the convex slope hiding the true top. Coming upon the shallow domed table-top with the wind whistling off the ocean the crude wind shelter is of greater value than usual. The OS column gains permanent benefit from



*Black Combe from the Giant's Grave standing stones, Kirksanton*

this humble huddle of boulders. The majority of such pillars have become redundant but this one still serves cartographers as a strategic point in the network of the global positioning system.

The view worthiest of admiration lies to the northeast, with the 'Four Threes' (fells over 3000ft) – Scafell, Scafell Pike, Skiddaw and Helvellyn – all in view. Surveyed from the summit the working world of south and west Cumbria displays a historic industrial scene, from the Walney shipyards and the old Millom ironworks, swinging round north beyond the Calder Hall/Sellafield complex to the headland of St Bees, which shields the former marine coalfields of Workington and Whitehaven.

### Safe descents

The immediate concern when descending Black Combe is the broken precipice of Blackcombe Screes, which lurks unseen close under the eastern lip of the summit plateau. As the majority of visitors will have come via the Whicham path (**4**) their minds will naturally turn to a straightforward retreat, although many wisely make a circuit upon the continuing bridleway down the broad north ridge (**1**), cutting back S to Whitbeck (and Seaness (**3**), for

Whicham church). Those who have come up the Whitecombe Beck valley may be lured into descending either side of Blackcombe Screes (7–8). In mist beware of the fall of the ground.

## Ridge route

**Buckbarrow** →7km/4¼ miles ↓290m/950ft ↑230m/755ft ☉2hr 10min

Follow the emerging path leading NE, watchful to keep a safe distance from the profound declivity overlooking the Whitecombe Beck valley. As the ground levels a narrow peaty trod draws close to a wire fence traversing Whitecombe Moss. As a barbed fence intervenes cross the left of the two stiles over the plain fence and keep to the west side of the continuing, gently descending fence, with little encouragement of a path across the marshy moor. The semblance of a path descends to cross a tall fence at a fence junction. Head straight on, keeping just left of the dwarf-conifer shrubbery, coming up to the netting fence beside the rising wall. Climb to the stony top of Stoneside Hill. Descend, keeping the wall to your left and advancing to the summit of the Corneyfell Road. Cross directly over, keep the wall close left and clamber over Great Paddy Crag before slanting half-right, weaving through boulders and outcrops to reach the summit cairn.



Looking back from Whitecombe Moss



## 2 BLACK FELL 322M/1056FT

<b>Climb it from</b>	Tom Gill <a href="#">36</a> , Tarn Hows <a href="#">37</a> , Hawkshead, High Cross <a href="#">38</a> , Oxen Fell <a href="#">35</a> or Silverthwaite <a href="#">39</a>
<b>Character</b>	Coy backdrop to Tarn Hows, clothed in trees and walled allotments
<b>Fell-friendly route</b>	7
<b>Summit grid ref</b>	NY 340 016

Lying within the triangle of Skelwith Bridge, Hawkshead and Coniston, Black Fell forms the northerly backdrop to the comparatively low, intrinsically wild, undulating ridge on which sits the ever-popular Tarn Hows. A perfect embodiment of the picturesque, enhanced by unabashed human intervention, this magical mix of trees, rock and water was the brainchild of James Marshall, a wealthy linen magnate and Leeds MP who moved to Monk Coniston in the 1860s. Today this wonderful place has been made thoroughly accessible for all visitors, from the wheelchair-bound to lively imps. The National Trust has embarked on a programme to recreate James Marshall's original vistas, having acquired the estate thanks to the generosity and farsightedness of Sir Samuel Scott, who purchased it from Beatrix Heelis (née Potter) in 1930.