



DISCOVER

THE CUMBRIA WAY

The 70-mile Cumbria Way is an epic walk through England's most picturesque landscape. Provided you take your time, this spectacular, mostly lowland route is less testing than it might sound, writes **Peter Elia**

Climb to the summit of Castle Crag for this breathtaking view of the 'jaws of Borrowdale' – a narrowing of the Borrowdale Valley carved out by receding glaciers over thousands of years. After the First World War, the summit of Castle Crag was given to the National Trust as a war memorial; it is dedicated to 'the men of Borrowdale' who lost their lives in the conflict





TOP A switchback path makes the steep ascent over Stake Pass into Langstrath less strenuous
ABOVE One of the hardest hill breeds, Herdwick sheep have grazed the Lake District fells since at least the 12th century

The enormous vista at Stake Pass exceeds my expectations. It is wild and dramatic – a place uninhabited and without roads. There’s just one meandering path, which starkly divides the bleak beauty of the Langstrath Valley below.

Adventure is often synonymous with struggles and summits, but could I organise one that was relatively stress-free? I wanted a long-distance trail fit for the intrepid hiker, offering less pain and all the gain, so I decided to try the Cumbria Way. With only two major climbs, it would be the perfect trail to limit the more gruelling highs and embrace the lows, but would the lack of altitude diminish the Lakeland hiking experience?

I invited my walking buddy, Lisa, to join me along the 70-mile linear route heading south from **Carlisle** to **Ulverston**. The trail boasts

iconic Lake District gems, including Glenderaterra Valley and Derwentwater, plus the chance to meet Cumbria’s most famous residents, the Herdwick sheep.

A WEIGHT OFF THE SHOULDERS

Starting at Carlisle’s Tourist Information Centre, the skies tease us with a lingering

promise of rain. With waterproof jackets zipped up, we set off carrying our light daypacks – I had arranged a luggage service to transfer our larger bags from each guesthouse on the route. After a

brief stop at the city’s attractive Norman cathedral, the trail continues briefly along a busy dual carriageway – not a place for any budding William Wordsworth. However, the outskirts of a city are never the glamorous part of any trail.

After a tearoom pitstop in the pretty village of **Dalston**, we follow the gentle

“We walk through a landscape of arched stone bridges and rickety stiles”



Caldew River through a patchwork landscape of rustic cottages, arched stone bridges and rickety stiles that leads out to expansive farmland. Our first tentative glimpse of sunshine comes late in the afternoon, with cylindrical bales of hay bathed in warm light. Ahead of us lie the outskirts of the National Park and our overnight stay in the tiny village of **Caldbeck**.

The next day, overnight rain has added to already boggy conditions, but at least we don't have to carry heavy backpacks across country. And despite the Cumbria Way's general low-levelness, today we need to tackle High Pike at 658 metres.

The landscape opens up for the first time, with acres of exposed bracken slanting across the fells. However, we reach the plateau on High Pike with rain lashing down and poor visibility. I deliver a quick prayer that my GPS tracker won't let us down.

Thankfully, just below the summit of Great Lingy Hill we stumble across a bothy, aptly named Great Lingy Hut. For some brave souls, this would be an overnight stay, but we are just grateful to dry out a little, eat



TOP Until recently, wire hawsers held down Great Lingy Hut bothy, bracing it against strong winds **MIDDLE** Drink in the stunning view of Keswick and Derwentwater from the summit of Latrigg **ABOVE** Peter on the path to Skiddaw House, looking forward to a short rest stop



HOW TO PREPARE FOR A MULTI-DAY WALK

- Start training by walking two to three times a week, at least one month before the start of your trip.
- Wear the same hiking boots that you'll wear on your multi-day walk. New boots can cause blisters.
- Carry a weighted day pack on your practice walks. It's always a good plan to replicate your multi-day hike as best you can.
- Ensure you organise a rest day. Your journey will feel more like a holiday and Keswick is a fun place to take a break.
- Feel free to shorten your hiking days on the trail with additional overnight stays.

our sandwiches and watch the moody weather from inside.

After the rain, we make our way gingerly down slippery heather-clad slopes towards Grainsgill Beck. Finally, blue skies replace the grey cloud and the beck glistens in sunshine that soon exposes the far-ranging moorlands. With our spirits lifted, we quicken our pace towards Skiddaw House, a former gamekeeper's lodge that is now England's most remote hostel.

We move high across the flank of Lonscale Fell, with its incredible views of endless copper-red bracken contrasting beautifully with green pastures in the Glenderaterra Valley. Once Derwentwater comes into view, the descent into **Keswick** becomes a smorgasbord of autumnal hues. We end the day looking out over the dominating slopes of Skiddaw mountain, tinted by the late-evening sun.

“The descent into Keswick becomes a smorgasbord of autumnal hues”

A COOK WITH A VIEW

After a rest day in the market town of Keswick, we are ready to lace up our boots once again. We meet up with mountain cook Harrison Ward, who I had invited to join us for the day, inspired by the tempting outdoor-cooking recipes and images on his Instagram feed (@FellFoodie).

Continuing south, the three of us cross into the woodland on Derwentwater's west shoreline. We enter a labyrinth of deciduous trees with autumn in full display, with both larch and oak trees

decorated in amber leaves. The auburn tones of horse chestnuts and silver birches are punctuated with the occasional cherry tree adding a splash of flaming red to the spectrum of colours. I enjoy the earthy aromas from the musky piles of burnt-orange leaves; honey fungus flourishes on the trunks of old oak trees.



The trail follows the lucid waters of the River Derwent, twisting its way into Borrowdale Valley – a place described by Alfred Wainwright as “the loveliest square mile in Lakeland”. For an aerial view of the valley and to find a cooking spot for a late lunch, Harrison suggests we make our way to the top of Castle Crag, the smallest of all the 214 Wainwrights: the peaks described by the great walker in his *Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells*. The area is popularly known as the ‘jaws of Borrowdale’ – carved by ice and eroded over thousands of years, Castle Crag is one of its ‘teeth’.

By the time we cautiously ascend a path of loose slate to the 290-metre peak, the three of us are ravenous. Harrison goes straight to work, preparing a Moroccan chickpea stew. Although we’re relatively low down, the views from Castle Crag are majestic in the golden light, from the Borrowdale Valley to Derwentwater and Skiddaw. When Harrison declares the stew ready, silence follows as we fill our stomachs with his scrumptious fare.

The sun has disappeared over the fells as we head down to our accommodation in



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Russet-coloured bracken and green fields in the Glenderterra Valley; looking north from the top of Castle Crag, autumn tones colour the view over Derwentwater; Lisa and Harrison Ward pause in woodland among carpets of fallen copper and gold leaves; a flat and easy path that circles its shores makes Derwentwater an accessible lake



Stonethwaite. We say goodbye to Harrison after such a memorable day with fantastic weather. I still dream about tucking in to that delicious stew.

THE LONG AND WINDING PATH

We leave the peaceful hamlet of Stonethwaite via old packhorse roads, then rejoin the Cumbria Way. The Herdwick sheep lie contentedly among the fells. Herdwicks are native to Cumbria; their coarse fleece suited to the exposed and harsh weather conditions.

Lisa and I find ourselves in need some of that Herdwick spirit as the wind and rain returns. The next section, towards Stake Pass, requires vigilance and teamwork and we find playful satisfaction in rock-hopping over countless streams. Every time we slip over on our backsides also gives us a lesson in resilience. Reaching the 480-metre pass is a combination of aesthetic delight and a celebration of endeavour; yet another “break out the Kendal mint cake” moment along this magnificent trail. We descend through the Mickleden Valley with its formidable fells



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Old packhorse roads lead into Stonethwaite, a village of pretty whitewashed cottages; Lisa gingerly picks her way across a stream in the Langstrath Valley as the rain starts to pelt down; the waterfall of Hell Gill tumbles into wild, uninhabited Mickleden Valley, with the fells of Pike O’ Stickle and The Band towering on either side of the vale



on either side. My feeling of connection to the Lakeland landscape deepens as we move further into these wilder uplands. Perhaps the feeling is partly induced by the lack of people – we have encountered very few hikers since leaving Carlisle.

The trail continues to lead us through the farmland of Great Langdale before arriving in the dark at **Elterwater** village with our headtorches on. It has been a long day but we're grateful that our next section towards **Coniston** will be much shorter. The rain falls heavily all day, making the undulating forest path difficult to grip, but we manage to laugh about it as we make our way to the popular beauty spot of Tarn Hows. By now, hot drinks and warm Coniston accommodation are on our minds. Luckily, we don't have to wait too long, as our cosy inn is just at the bottom of the hill.

REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

Our final day starts with a group of Herdwicks following us to a field gate on the fringes of the town. It is quite a send-off. We say our woolly farewells and walk around the

edge of serene Coniston Water. With clearer skies, I can now see the fell known as the Old Man of Coniston towering above us. The terrain begins to change once again: polished waterscapes are replaced by rugged moorland, with the attractive Beacon Tarn providing an ideal place for lunch. We then approach the end of our hike as we make our way through quiet country lanes towards Ulverston.

Lisa and I were delighted with the Cumbria Way; so many highs experienced on so many low paths, accompanied by a stunning autumnal backdrop. I'd made several trips to the Lake District before this, but its summits can sometimes be a distraction – a chance to tick a box. The Cumbria Way allowed me to appreciate the fells without expectation and perhaps with a little more awareness. ©



Peter Elia is a freelance travel journalist and photographer. He loves to document images on his Instagram account [#themanwhohikedtheworld](#), which has over 80,000 followers.

ABOVE The setting sun casts a fiery light over Tarn Hows – one of the most visited beauty spots in Lakeland. But the tarn is partly artificial, created when three tarns were joined in the 19th century

THE CUMBRIA WAY

The Cumbria Way was initially devised in the 1970s by local Ramblers' Association members. Volunteers and national park staff completed the waymarking in 2007. Many of the signs on the route have become damaged or illegible. However, if you carry a GPS and a map, this linear route is straightforward to follow.



COVID-19

Please abide by Government advice on travel, and remain at home if recommended to do so. The information on these pages is meant to assist you once restrictions have been lifted.

NOW GO THERE

Where to stay, eat and drink along the Cumbria Way, by Peter Elia

PLACES TO STAY

1 The Halston, Carlisle

Set in an Edwardian building, this elegant hotel offers modern and stylish self-catering apartments. There's also a chance to treat yourself to afternoon tea or enjoy drinks and dinner in their in-house restaurant, Penny Blue.

01228 210240; thehalston.com

2 The Oddfellow Arms, Caldbeck

Nestled in the centre of the village, this traditional inn offers comfortable rooms and serves up classic pub fare. The accommodation is a stone's throw away from rejoining the Cumbria Way.

01697 478227; oddfellows-caldbeck.co.uk



3 Sunnyside Guest House, Keswick

A delightful bed and breakfast (above) in a Victorian house with beautifully designed rooms and access to the sumptuous guest lounge. Perfectly situated for shops, restaurants and Derwentwater, this highly recommended stay is ideal for a rest day.

01768 772446; sunnysideguesthouse.com

4 The Langstrath Country Inn Hotel, Stonethwaite

Housed in a 16th-century former miner's cottage, this cosy inn serves up high-quality meals beside the fireplace. The beautifully presented rooms have gorgeous views of the fells.

01768 777239; thelangstrath.co.uk

5 Elterwater Hostel, Elterwater

Set in the stunning Langdale Valley, this attractive hostel has clean and simple private rooms plus dormitories. There is a fully equipped self-catering kitchen, communal lounge/dining area and drying room for damp hiking gear.

01539 437245; elterwaterhostel.co.uk

6 The Coppermines Lakes Cottages, Coniston

A great opportunity to hire a small cottage for the



GETTING THERE

By train: A single ticket from London to Carlisle (direct) costs from £31; single from Ulverston to London (via Manchester) from £31. See avantiwestcoast.co.uk or call 0345 528 0253.

night in the idyllic surroundings of the Coniston Fells. Plenty of self-catering options to choose from and many near the Cumbria Way.

01539 441765; coppermines.co.uk

7 The Bay Horse Hotel and Restaurant, Ulverston

Occupying a historic 18th-century inn on Morecambe Bay's Leven Estuary, this charming hotel offers period-style rooms. The highlight is a conservatory restaurant/bar with views across the water.

01229 583972; thebayhorsehotel.co.uk





REST-DAY ATTRACTIONS IN KESWICK

8 Keswick Launch boat cruises
Offering relaxing boat trips every 30 minutes from 10am to 4.30pm around stunning Derwentwater. The excursions last 50 minutes; each boat has both open and covered decking. keswick-launch.co.uk

9 The Alhambra
Delightful theatre-style picture house with a

balcony and a programme of mainstream blockbusters. The cinema has been in continuous operation since 1913.

keswickalhambra.co.uk/in-cinemas

10 Keswick Museum and Art Gallery
A collection dedicated to reflecting life in the Keswick area through aspects of the landscape, history and culture. keswickmuseum.org.uk

UNMISSABLE PUBS



5 The George Hotel, Keswick
This 17th-century pub is one of the oldest in Lakeland and still retains its cosy character. The selection of beer and wine is extensive, and the popular restaurant offers superb local dishes with a modern twist. georgehotelkeswick.co.uk



5 The Old Dungeon Ghyll, Great Langdale
The perfect pint stop for walkers, the interior has stone floors and a roaring fire, so there is no need to remove your muddy boots. Outside you can enjoy magnificent views of Great Langdale Valley. odg.co.uk



5 The Britannia Inn, Elterwater
Set in the lovely village of Elterwater, the pub features wood-beamed ceilings. There's a fine collection of real ales and local beers, plus hearty Cumbrian dishes and homemade pies. thebritanniainn.com



DAYPACK ESSENTIAL KIT

- 25–35 litre daypack.
- GPS unit or GPS app on your smartphone. Always bring a map for back-up as GPS can fail.
- Water bladder.
- Hat, gloves and scarf.
- Waterproof trousers (always needed in British weather conditions).
- Head torch.
- Small first aid kit.
- Bring an extra layer of clothing, such as a fleece, as it can get very cold on the trail.
- Dry bag. Keep the above items in a waterproof bag within your daypack.
- Snacks – dried fruit and nuts are the most nutritious foods to give you energy when hiking. Add your favourite chocolate or some Kendal Mint Cake for an energy boost – you're sure to burn off the calories!

LUGGAGE SERVICES

• Sherpa Van will collect your bags from your accommodation every day, and be there when you arrive at your next stop along the Cumbria Way.

sherpavan.com

• Alternatively, sign up for a self-guided eight-day inn-to-inn walk, including baggage transfer, with Maccs Adventure, from £660. maccsadventure.com

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WALKING GUIDE: *Cumbria Way* by Paddy Dillon, published by Rucksack Readers. An easy-to-read guide with detailed route descriptions, maps and planning ideas.

ROUTE MAP: *Cumbria Way XT40* by Harvey Map Services. Robust, light and waterproof, this map is convenient to use and covers the length of the trail.

USEFUL WEBSITES: For everything you need to know about the Cumbria Way, visit cumbriawaywalk.info and keswick.org/what-to-do/walking-routes/the-cumbria-way