

How long will it take?

Most walkers complete the full distance of 184 miles (296 km) in 12 to 16 days. Part 3 presents the walk in 16 sections, each one a feasible day's walk for most people. However some fit and hardy folk complete it in as few as 8-10 days, and others spread it over as many as 18-20. Check the altitude profiles and maps for each section before deciding. The table shows distances for a 16-day walk. If you combine sections 6 and 7, you could make a 15-day walk at the price of a 20·4-mile (33 km) sixth day. Similarly, you could combine sections 12 and 13 to make another 20·4-mile stretch and save a further day. There's lots of accommodation throughout the route, so itineraries are easy to plan, especially if you are flexible about where you sleep.

You may like to take a little extra time to follow some or all of the rituals associated with the C2C. You can dip the toe of your boot (or your bare toes) in the sea at St Bees. Later, at Robin Hood's Bay, follow Wainwright's instructions: 'Go forward and put your boot in the first salt-water puddle. By this ritual you will have completed a walk from one side of England to the other.' By tradition, some carry a pebble from St Bees' shore and deposit it on the beach at Robin Hood's Bay – which will mystify ocean geologists of the future! There's also a C2C log book you can sign in the Wainwright Bar of the Bay Hotel on the sea front.

Saturday is the most popular starting day, so it's prudent to start on a different day if you have a choice. Book accommodation well in advance, remembering that many providers in Robin Hood's Bay and the Lakes will not take bookings for a single night at weekends. Also the weekend tariff may be higher than that for weekdays.

You can split your walk into two or more separate trips. Although Keld is nearer to halfway in distance, it's better to break the route at Kirkby Stephen or Richmond. Both have good public transport connections, and at least two companies offer minibus transfers and car parking to simplify the logistics, with an option to link with mainline rail services to/from Darlington station: see page 123.

Throughout this book we give distances in miles with kilometre equivalents. The maps have scale bars in both units, but to avoid clutter, distances along the route are shown by red mileage dots alone. For short distances in directions, we use metres: a metre is only 10% longer than a yard and you won't go astray if you start looking for a turning slightly too soon.

	miles	km
1 St Bees to Ennerdale Bridge	14·9	24·0
2 Ennerdale Bridge to Rosthwaite	14·0	22·5
3 Rosthwaite to Grasmere	7·4	11·9
4 Grasmere to Patterdale	6·7	10·8
5 Patterdale to Shap	16·0	25·7
6 Shap to Orton	8·0	12·9
7 Orton to Kirkby Stephen	12·4	20·0
8 Kirkby Stephen to Keld	10·8	17·4
9 Keld to Reeth	11·7	18·8
10 Reeth to Richmond	10·4	16·7
11 Richmond to Danby Wiske	14·1	22·7
12 Danby Wiske to Ingleby Cross	8·9	14·3
13 Ingleby Cross to Clay Bank Top	11·5	18·5
14 Clay Bank Top to Blakey Ridge	8·8	14·2
15 Blakey Ridge to Grosmont	13·4	21·6
16 Grosmont to Robin Hood's Bay	15·0	24·1
Total	184	296

Distances are measured only along the line of the route. Extra distance will be walked when going to village centres for shops and pubs, and at day's end to accommodation

Each end of the route is clearly marked: there's a stone pillar and information board overlooking St Bees beach, and a sign outside the Bay Hotel on the seafront at Robin Hood's Bay. Although signage, websites and other guidebooks quote the route's length as anywhere between 182 and 192 miles, our distances have all been measured accurately, and they add up to 184 miles/296 km. Let that not belittle the task: in practice, including detours for food and accommodation, most walkers will cover at least 200 miles.



Which direction?

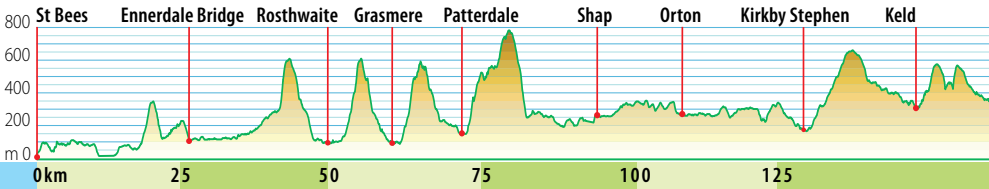
The vast majority of walkers travel from west to east, as the signs at St Bees and Robin Hood's Bay suggest. The prevailing winds tend to come from the west, and this puts them behind you. Formal waymarkers recognise that walkers travel in both directions, although the informal ones often do not. Our advice is to follow the founder's footsteps eastwards.

Elevation and pace

According to the Long Distance Walks Association, this route involves a total ascent of 8681 m (28,480 ft) – nearly as much as climbing Everest from sea level. A high proportion of this challenge is met in the Lake District, but there are also short, steep climbs, often in quick succession, across the North York Moors. The altitude profiles at the start of each section are all shown to the same scale. They reveal sharp contrasts in the gradient and altitude gain between different sections.

Depending on the recent weather, sections of the route may be boggy, in places very boggy, especially across moorland. In the Lake District, parts of the route are rough, rocky and steep and any idea of normal walking pace becomes irrelevant.

Another factor influencing your rate of travel will be the number of people in your group. Groups travel at the pace of their slowest member, or slightly less. Overall, expect to average 2 to 2½ mph (3-4 km/hr) unless you're very fit and keen to press on.



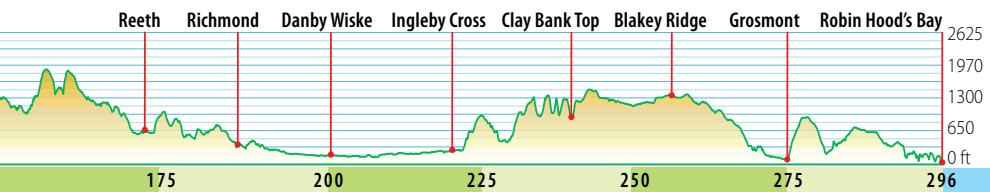


Cairns on Nine Standards Rigg

What is the best time of the year?

From late October to late March isn't the best time to do this walk – unless you live locally and can seize opportunities of good weather at short notice. In winter, snow and ice are likely, especially in the Lake District, and bitterly cold winds sweep across exposed ground. In addition, hours of daylight are short between November and January. Midwinter days may have as few as 8 hours of daylight, whereas in midsummer the light may last for 16 hours or more. The combination of winter factors can make the walk unduly difficult, or even dangerous. Bear in mind that October to January are the wettest months and April to July the driest. Also, many accommodations are closed in winter.

Between June and September, accommodation may also be difficult to find if you haven't booked well ahead, particularly for solo walkers seeking B&Bs or hotels. From mid-June to late September many paths, particularly along field edges, may be partly overgrown and less obvious. If you wear shorts, beware of nettles and brambles. All in all, the ideal months are May, June and September.



Fitness and preparation

Because of its steep gradients, long days and length overall, this route is more strenuous than most national trails in the UK, the main exceptions being England's Pennine Way and Scotland's Southern Upland Way. If you haven't done much walking before, we recommend you consider tackling a shorter route first, or at least split the C2C into 2-3 separate expeditions so you can learn what works for you. Whereas any aerobic exercise (cycling, sports, dancing) will improve your cardiovascular fitness, you also need to prepare your feet. Long before your departure date, do several consecutive all-day walks involving uphill work while carrying a medium-weight daypack, to test your footwear and to build up fitness. For advice on gear and likely pace, obtain our *Notes for novices*: see page 123.

In addition to the physical demands of the route, the navigation is challenging, especially in the western section which most people tackle first. We strongly advise that you walk with someone who is experienced in the use of a map and compass, at least in the Lake District where navigation can be demanding, especially in low cloud or mist. There you cannot avoid long, steep ascents and descents, and often they are combined with long days.

Many walkers who routinely walk 10-15 miles a day on other routes find the C2C much harder than they expect. In certain parts of Lakeland the extreme terrain makes for slow going: in at least five places you need to use hands as well as feet so it's more scrambling than walking. Combine that with likely wet weather and long distances, day on day, and some walkers who started with high hopes end up dropping out, usually from the Lake District sections. The single variable that most affects your chances of completion is a realistic itinerary. If in doubt, give yourself an extra day to enjoy the route, rather than to endure it.

Since our first edition, we have asked many readers what they would do differently next time. Not a single one said they would allow fewer days or get by with less support. The panel shows a summary of their advice:

The voice of experience

- 1 Work out how long you think you need, then add an extra day.
- 2 Take less stuff – especially if carrying for yourself, but even if your baggage is transferred.
- 3 Before setting off, mark the position of every night's accommodation on the map.
- 4 If splitting the route, do the eastern half first (but still go west to east): you'll learn what works for you.
- 5 Consider going with a small group of friends.
- 6 Consider using baggage transfer.
- 7 Research public transport before you set off, in case you have to change your plans.
- 8 Consider purifying drinking water to reduce weight – especially in hot weather.
- 9 Take a small tube of waterproofing wax to maintain boots.
- 10 Build in a non-walking rest day somewhere that appeals to you.

For some people, completing the route in a single expedition is the holy grail. For others, this may be neither possible nor desirable. Wainwright himself said: *'It is a walk I recommend, not necessarily to undertake in a single journey, but in parts as place, time and weather become convenient.'*

Route options

It is not possible to walk Wainwright's original route without intruding on private land. In the years since 1973 when Wainwright first published his route, modern authors have solved this problem in different ways, and some of the options that have evolved are valuable alternatives to his high-level routes that in poor visibility and bad weather lose their attractions and may even become unsafe.

We indicate the main alternatives in the table below and on the mapping in alternative route style. In most cases, you can postpone your decision about which option to follow until you are on the trail: both the weather and your energy level may be important factors. However, if there are any high-level options that you are particularly keen to complete, read the route description carefully because it could affect how many days you allocate. In Section 3·8, your choice is determined by the month in which you walk. From May to July follow the red route, from August to November the blue, and from December to April, and in bad weather at any time of year, follow the low-level green.

The table below summarises the route options that this book covers. We first describe the low-level, easier option, shown in main route style on our map, and follow with the more challenging option, irrespective of which route Wainwright preferred. There are variants that are harder still, suitable only for well-equipped, experienced hill-walkers who have assessed the conditions carefully. They lie outside the scope of this book and are not shown on our mapping. Two examples are the high route via Red Pike, High Stile and Hay Stacks, of interest to Wainwright fans because his ashes were scattered beside the unnamed tarn near the summit of Hay Stacks: see page 27. The other is the ascent of Helvellyn (at 950 m it is the third-highest mountain in England) and descent via Striding Edge, an exposed ridge with some Grade 1 scrambling. It diverges at Grisedale Tarn: see page 57.

Section	Main route	Harder option	Comments	
3-3	Easedale Gill	Calf Crag/Gibson Knott/Helm Crag	AW's preferred route, recommended in good weather	<p>Rosthwaite/Grasmere p52</p> <p>610 m 537 m</p>
3-4	Grisedale	St Sunday Crag	Reaches summit of The Cape (841 m): unsuitable in poor visibility	<p>Grasmere/Patterdale p57</p> <p>841 m 540 m</p> <p>main route harder option</p>
3-8	seasonal routes apply	Over Nine Standards Rigg	No choice, except note that the green route is available in any month	<p>Kirkby Stephen/Keld p75</p> <p>662 m 480 m</p>
3-9	Swaledale	high-level route through Blakethwaite and Surrender	AW preferred the high-level option, but called it 'a grim trek amidst the debris of a dead industry'	<p>Keld/Reeth p83</p> <p>580 m 570 m</p>

Travel planning

The nearest airport is Manchester, for flights from North America, Europe and elsewhere in the UK. However, most people reach the north of England by train, see below. Or, if you have booked one of the services listed on page 123 there is the option of minibus transfer to/from each end of the route.

Reaching St Bees and returning from Robin Hood's Bay

Virgin West Coast runs trains from London Euston to Lancaster and Carlisle: change at either for Northern Rail trains to St Bees. Using a coach run by National Express may work out cheaper but also involves changes to Stagecoach Northwest local buses.

Robin Hood's Bay is not on a railway line. Take a bus to Scarborough for a train to York and onward connections to London and the north. Alternatively, go by bus to Whitby for coaches to London.

Intermediate services

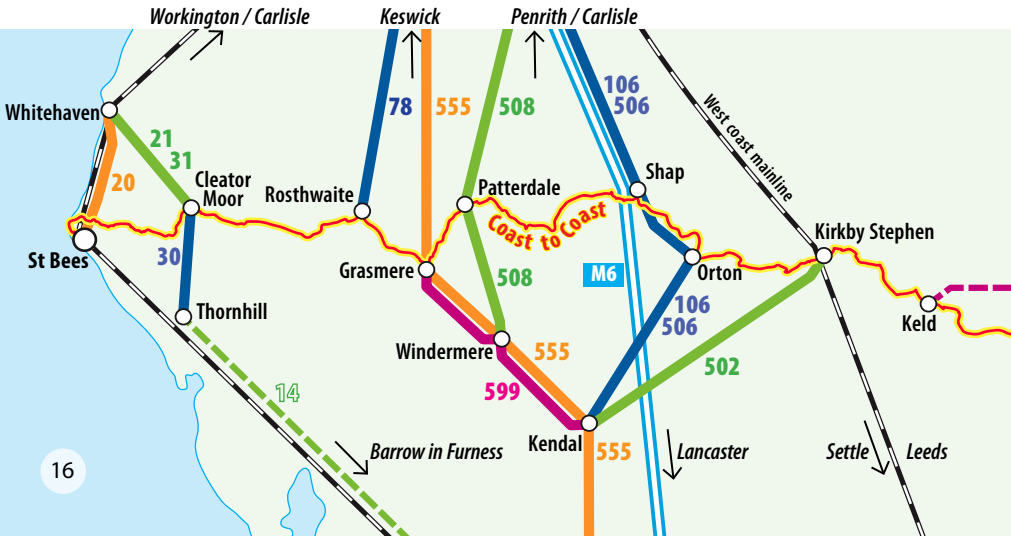
If breaking the walk into two or more separate trips, you will need transport to intermediate places. Kirkby Stephen is on the Leeds-Carlisle line run by Northern Rail: connect at Leeds for London, or at Carlisle for the north. Arriva North East buses run between Richmond and Darlington on the East Coast mainline.

Stagecoach Cumbria & North Lancashire runs buses in the Lake District, and we show selected routes in the map below. The lie of the land means that heading east by bus involves heading north or south to change at Keswick, Penrith or Kendal. Some buses are infrequent, others run on schooldays only: check carefully ahead of time.

The community-run Little White Bus company runs the Swaledale Shuttle (route 30) between Keld and Catterick via Muker, Reeth and Richmond. In 2018 between Easter and early November there were four buses daily but none on Sundays or Bank Holidays (though the Dalesbus 830 covers those days twice daily, also in summer only).

Arriva North East runs buses that serve the eastern part of the route, notably the frequent X93 Scarborough to Middlesbrough via Robin Hood's Bay and Whitby. Dales and District route 55 links Richmond with Northallerton via Brompton-on-Swale and Scorton. Abbotts of Leeming run various services from Northallerton to Ingleby Cross via Osmotherly.

Selected public transport serving the route



Responsible walking

Access

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 entitles people to walk freely across ‘access land’ – away from paths – in the mountains, moors, heath and downlands, and in large areas of Forestry Commission ground. Of greater relevance to this walk, which follows defined paths (and tracks and roads), are rights of way – paths which are open to walkers even if the surrounding land is not necessarily access land. Between Orton and Kirkby Stephen in particular (3-7), you will see signs showing areas of Open Access Land and recommended walking routes (including the Coast to Coast).

Access to paths which are not recognised rights of way is usually governed by hard-won agreements with landowners. It is vital that you keep to the route described. This is particularly important in the Vale of Mowbray between Richmond and Ingleby Cross (3-11 and 3-12), where the route follows a long chain of intricate twists and turns. Wherever you are, the Countryside Code is your guide to responsible walking.

Toilets

Use public toilets wherever possible; they are listed in the Facilities table on page 7, but some may have closed by the time you are reading this.

If you’re caught short in between, the best advice is:

- Choose a discreet spot at least 50 m from paths and buildings, preferably further, and as far as possible from any water course.
- Bury waste in a deep hole: use a plastic trowel, or improvise with boots or poles, and cover the hole with any earth and plant material available.

Contact details of transport providers and online booking services are given on page 123.

Countryside Code



Respect other people

- consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available

Protect the natural environment

- leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- keep dogs under effective control

Enjoy the outdoors

- plan ahead and be prepared
- follow advice and local signs.

For details on what this means in practice, read the full text online or as a PDF: visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code

