

Foreword

The Settle-Carlisle Railway is impressive not only for its engineering achievements but also for the scenic splendour of the land through which it passes for more than 70 miles. The nature of that land is reflected in the local stone used for railway stations, churches and drystone walls – from grey limestone in the Yorkshire Dales to the red sandstone that warms the appearance of railway stations in the Eden Valley.

The Settle to Carlisle Way enables walkers to enjoy the railway's scenic glory to the utmost, linking its stations in a 97-mile hike with ever-changing views. The first two days are dominated by the Three Peaks, the triumvirate of Yorkshire Dales mountains.

The stretch from Settle to Aisgill, with its ruling gradient of 1 in 100, became known to the men of the railway as 'The Long Drag'. You have to marvel at the skill and effort that created these imposing viaducts and ambitious tunnels. Walkers trudging over Blea Moor, just north of Ribbleshead, pass the red-brick tops of ventilation shafts and may even hear the eerie sound of a train passing 500 feet below their feet.

Further north, the deep valley of Mallerstang opens like a gigantic fan between austere, dramatic fells. Here, walkers join the River Eden – a convivial companion for the rest of the lowland journey. The Way passes along delightful woodland trails, riverside paths and gently rolling farmland, with overnight stops in welcoming villages beneath the moody North Pennines.

Whereas the train passenger gains only a teasing glimpse of this wonderful region, the walker earns a hard-won, more intimate knowledge. And when as walker you turn passenger, as surely you will, you will bless the railway and all who built it.

W R Mitchell



Planning and preparation

Passing through a wide and fascinating variety of scenery on its journey north, the Settle to Carlisle Way links together all the stations on the famous railway line. It never strays very far from the tracks, and, on any given day, walkers will hear – and may also see – regular passenger and freight services making their way up and down the line, over its many viaducts and through its 14 tunnels. During the summer, probably on a Wednesday, a glimpse of the ‘Fellsman’ steam special may add to the atmosphere and excitement.

Although not waymarked, the route sticks mostly to public footpaths, bridleways and country roads as it makes its way through the beautiful scenery of the Yorkshire Dales National Park and then into Cumbria’s glorious Eden Valley. We are not the first to devise and publish a walking route in sight of this famous railway, and we acknowledge its pioneers on page 62. However, our route has been revised and refined to take advantage of new developments including the Pennine Bridleway and Ribble Way and we have been careful to consult the relevant authorities.

Many long-distance walkers will want to do it as a single expedition, stopping in a different place each night. Others will put the regular train services along this line to good use and do the walk as a series of day trips or over four weekends. You could even choose one central base and complete the Way as a series of linear day walks. You can also walk the sections in any order: for example you may prefer to cover a shorter distance on your first day. Having a railway line nearby has many advantages, including flexibility to break things down differently.

Best time of year and weather

The best time to walk the Way is probably between March and October. May and June often offer excellent conditions, with wildflowers filling the woods and hay meadows with vibrant colour. July and August tend to be busier, so booking accommodation in advance becomes essential during these months. September and October are becoming increasingly popular with walkers in the north of England, who are rewarded with autumn colours.

There’s nothing to stop hardy souls from undertaking the Way during the winter. Bear in mind that, from November to the beginning of March, the weather is likely to be worse, the ground will be wetter, daylight hours will certainly be shorter and some accommodation options won’t be available. Having said that, winter holds its own delights, particularly on clear, frosty days when the visibility can be superb. It is more feasible for people who live locally to take advantage of occasional spells of good winter weather. See page 62 for a couple of good sources of weather forecasts.

November, December and January tend to be the wettest months, while April, May and June are usually the driest, but the weather is notoriously unpredictable. The possibility of a week of fine weather in December, or of heavy deluges in June, can't be ruled out. Overall, the wind and rain tend to come from the south-west, so this book describes the Way from south to north, keeping the weather at your back – unless, of course, you're unlucky enough to experience the helm wind: see panel.

Several parts of the walk use riverside paths that may flood during or after heavy rain. Other parts may become extremely muddy. This need not daunt a well-equipped walker, but if you have any doubts about your footwear or clothing, test its waterproof qualities before departure.

How long will it take?

The total distance is 97 miles (156 km), but you will inevitably walk more than this as you seek out accommodation and supplies along the route, or make sightseeing detours. Most walkers will want at least eight days to cover the entire route. Depending on your level of fitness and experience, you may also wish to add a rest day and/or to split the 15-mile first day by overnighting at Horton in Ribblesdale.

In Part 3, we describe the route in seven sections, one of which covers the 17½-mile stretch from Appleby to Langwathby. Most walkers will split this at Temple Sowerby, but energetic walkers in a hurry may prefer to omit this overnight for a seven-day itinerary. Table 1 shows both options, and the facilities table on page 8 allows you to plan your own itinerary around whatever facilities you require.

Helm wind

This area is home to the helm wind. Like the famous Föhn wind of the Alps, it is a dry down-slope wind that blows in the lee of the mountains. The helm occurs mainly in winter when a north-easterly air flow hits the Pennine escarpment near Cross Fell. The air climbs the eastern slopes and then comes hurtling down the western side to meet the warmer air from the west. The result is a ferocious easterly that lasts for days. A visible signal of the helm wind is the bank of cloud that forms just above the fell tops.



Table 1 Distances and overnight stops

	Itinerary: 8 day		7 day	
	miles	km	miles	km
Settle	15·0	24·2	15·0	24·2
Ribblehead	10·9	17·6	10·9	17·6
Garsdale	13·2	21·2	13·2	21·2
Kirkby Stephen	13·4	21·6	13·4	21·6
Appleby	9·5	15·3		
Temple Sowerby	7·8	12·6	17·3	27·9
Langwathby	12·7	20·5	12·7	20·5
Armthwaite	14·1	22·7	14·1	22·2
Carlisle				
Average daily distance	12·1	19·5	14·8	22·7

Accommodation and supplies

There is plenty of choice of accommodation in Settle, Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Carlisle, but the villages and smaller towns *en route* may have only a handful of small B&Bs. Ribblesdale, Garsdale and Langwathby present long-distance walkers with the greatest challenge. Ribblesdale has only the Station Inn, although it offers several options including B&B, a camping barn and free camping. On arrival at Garsdale, you'll find no village as such, just cottages and farmhouses strung out down the valley along a busy A-road. The Old Joinery is a couple of miles away but expects to collect walkers from (and deliver back to) Garsdale Station. Another option is to continue along the Way for a further 1.5 km to the Moorcock Inn or The Garsdale (both at the junction of the A684 and the B6259). As of late 2012, there was no B&B accommodation in Langwathby. Unless and until this changes, walkers will have to use the railway to reach accommodation elsewhere or to find a B&B provider who is willing to pick them up at the end of the day's walk.

Booking accommodation in advance is strongly recommended for the entire route at any time of year. It would be wise to solve the challenges of Ribblesdale, Garsdale and Langwathby first, and email or phone to book the easier places afterwards. Where accommodation options are limited, remember that each day (except Temple Sowerby) ends at a railway station so that, timetable permitting, you are never more than a train-journey away from access to a bed for the night.

Although the Settle to Carlisle Way is a new long-distance route, it passes through areas that are frequented by walkers, so accommodation providers are used to dealing with wet gear, muddy boots and tired feet. They may be willing, by prior arrangement, to pick you up at the end of the day and even drop you off the next morning. It never hurts to ask, but be sure to do so before booking. Remember also that mobile phone reception is patchy along the route.

The cost of accommodation on the Way varies, but much of it falls into the less expensive country inn or farmhouse B&B price categories. The options for budget accommodation are more limited: there are very few hostels, camping barns or bunkhouses along the Way. Those planning on carrying a tent will find long sections where there are no official campsites, or where they will have to deviate significantly from the route.

Settle, Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Carlisle have a range of shops, including chemists and walking gear stockists. Some villages have a shop, but these tend to be small and stock only the basics. Bear in mind that, after passing through Horton in Ribblesdale on the first day, there is no shop until you reach Kirkby Stephen at the end of day three. (And, as of 2012, Horton in Ribblesdale's general store had closed and was up for sale.)

Facilities along the route

Table correct at time of publication: some facilities are available only in season. All details should be checked before making plans that depend on them.

	miles from last place	km from last place	café	pub	shop	campsite	hostel, barn, bunkhouse	B&B, hotel
Settle			✓	✓	✓			✓
Stainforth	3.8	6.2		✓		✓ ¹		✓
Helwith Bridge	2.3	3.7		✓		✓	✓	
Horton in Ribblesdale	2.3	3.6	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Ribblehead	6.6	10.6		✓		✓ ²	✓	✓
<i>Cowgill (700 m)³</i>				✓				
<i>Garsdale (B&B about 3.5 km)³</i>								✓
Garsdale Head	11.8	19.6		✓				
<i>Outhgill (500 m)³</i>								✓
Kirkby Stephen	12.3	19.7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Winton	1.9	3.0		✓				✓
Soulby	2.3	3.8						✓
<i>Warcop (750 m)³</i>				✓				✓
Great Ormside	6.1	9.8				✓		
Appleby	3.1	5.0	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Long Marton	3.8	6.1		✓				✓
Kirkby Thore	2.3	3.7			✓	✓		✓
Temple Sowerby/Skygarth⁴	3.4	5.5		✓				✓
Culgaith	3.1	5.0		✓				✓
Langwathby	4.7	7.5	✓	✓	✓			
Little Salkeld	2.9	4.6	✓			✓		✓
<i>Lazonby (1 km)³</i>				✓	✓			✓
Kirkoswald	4.0	6.5		✓		✓	✓	
Armathwaite	6.0	9.7		✓	✓			✓
Drybeck	1.6	2.5				✓ ⁵		
Wetheral	6.2	10.1	✓	✓	✓			✓
Scotby	2.3	3.7		✓	✓			✓
Carlisle	5.0	8.0	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

¹ Knight Stainforth Hall Caravan and Camping Park is in Little Stainforth

² Camping at the Station Inn is free for pub customers

³ Places that are offroute are shown in italics with distance after placename

⁴ Skygarth Farm is about 600 m south of Temple Sowerby, and offers B&B

⁵ Drybeck Farm has yurts and a gypsy caravan available on a self-catering basis.