

Foreword

If there's one walk that captures the sheer variety of the Lakeland landscape, this is it. The peace and quiet of the Blawith Fells, bustling Coniston, picturesque Tarn Hows, the challenge of Stake Pass from Langdale over to Langstrath, Borrowdale, Derwent Water, Back o' Skiddaw and the river valley approaches to Carlisle. Who could ask for more?

Me. I have to confess that I'm by nature a diverter and if you're not pushed for time, the Cumbria Way provides the perfect backbone to an exploration of a wider Lakeland – the views from the pretend lighthouse on Hoad Hill above Ulverston; The Cathedral, a spectacular slate cavern out by Tilberthwaite; the prehistoric equivalent of the iPhone at Castlerigg stone circle above Keswick – calculator, calendar, clock and messaging service all rolled into one; the atmospheric, abandoned bobbin mill in The Howk at Caldbeck; and dozens more such side-trips.

But if your time is limited, come back to see all those things another day, and in the meantime relish five or six days of relatively gentle walking. In fact, if you're new to long distance walking, this is the perfect introduction. The only real challenges are on the long haul from Mickleden up to Stake Pass, and the high-level route over the summit of High Pike. The rest of the seventy-plus miles you can devote to inspirational thoughts – such as wanting to strangle the man who wrote the Foreword when you get caught in a downpour in Langstrath (as I did) or go up to your hocks in the bogs o' Skiddaw (as I did).

But look on the bright side. I promise you will dry out – eventually.

Eric Robson

Chairman of Cumbria Tourism and the Wainwright Society

Through Mickleden towards Stake Pass

1 Planning

Best time of year

The earliest that most walkers attempt the Cumbria Way is Easter – anywhere from late March to late April, when wintry conditions are still possible. Springtime, April to mid May, can feature cool, clear weather, with the first flowers appearing, trees just coming into leaf and newborn lambs in the lower pastures. It might still snow, but snow will seldom lie on the ground.

Early summer, mid May to June, looks much greener, with the trees covered in leaves, bracken growing on rugged fellsides, and plenty of flowers in bloom. Sheep are moved onto rough grazing on the high fells. Midsummer, July and August, tends to be warmer, but is also the busiest time in the Lake District, when accommodation fills up. The weather can be good, but it is essential still to be prepared for rain and wind, especially in exposed parts of the route.

September and October generally see fairly settled weather, often with wonderful autumn red, brown and gold colours as the foliage begins to turn. As the weather gets colder, it may snow on higher ground. The winter months, November to March, are suitable only if you can take advantage of clear weather at short notice. Even hardy Herdwick sheep are no longer on the fells. Stake Pass and the Northern Fells can be difficult to cross if covered in snow and ice, and daylight hours are very limited. If you live locally, you may seize the odd clear, crisp day, but winter is not a good time to plan an expedition from afar.

Regardless of season, what really matters is the weather for each day you spend on the route. Check specific Lake District forecasts on Weatherline: www.lakedistrictweatherline.co.uk. Be warned that the wettest inhabited place in England is at Seathwaite in Borrowdale, barely 4 km from the Cumbria Way at Rosthwaite. And remember that in misty conditions or low cloud, your navigation skills may be tested. See page 71 for recommended maps.

Which direction?



Footbridge over Stake Beck

Most walkers walk south to north, from Ulverston to Carlisle, in the hope that any wet or windy weather will come from behind them. This guidebook is arranged in this direction, and anyone walking the reverse way will have to take great care to follow the route description 'backwards'. Finishing in a city such as Carlisle means having more facilities and better onward transport links than in a smaller town such as Ulverston. However, the minority who choose to walk from north to south will find adequate facilities there, and those who have already walked the Way may enjoy the different views.

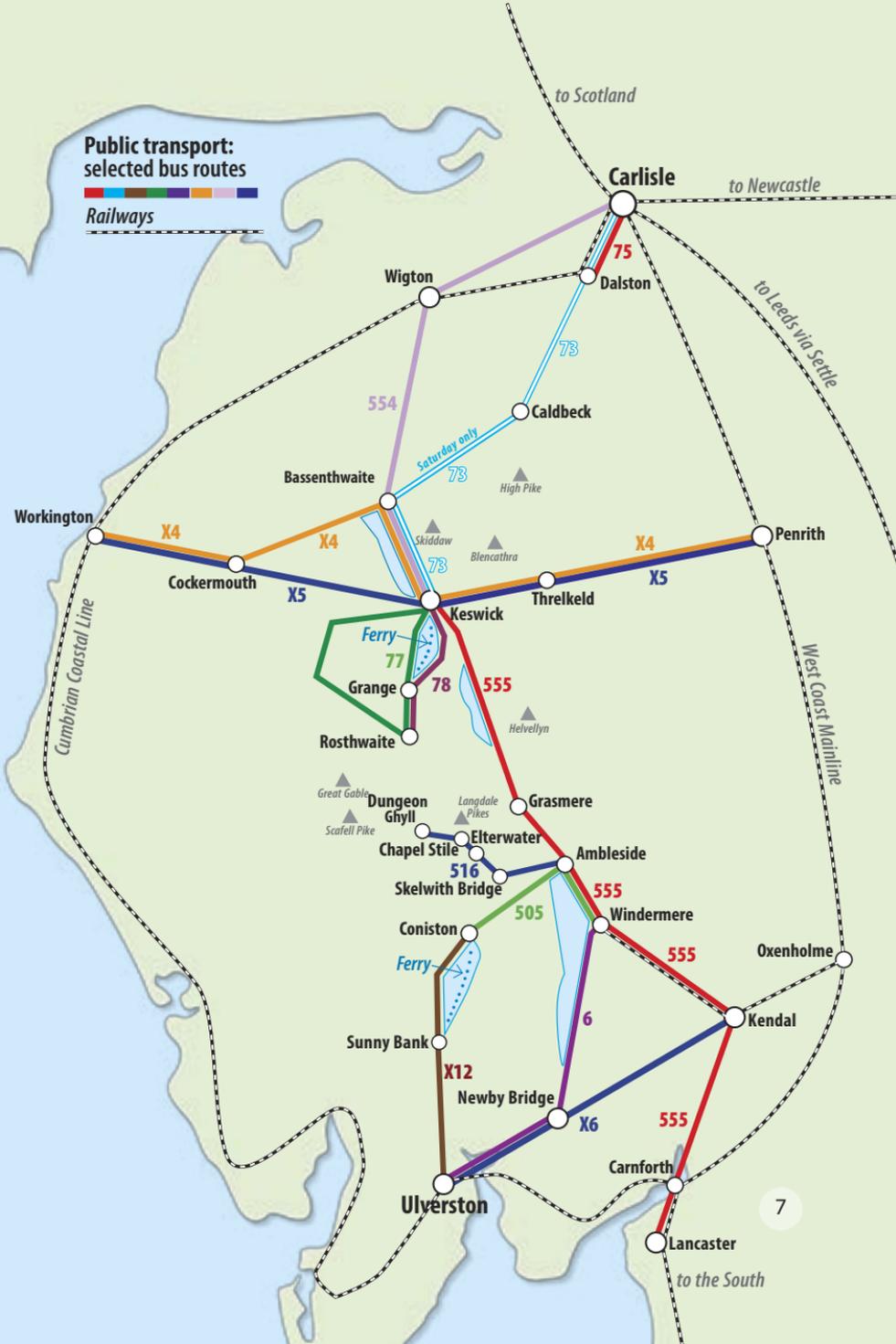
Getting there and away

Almost 90% of visitors reach the Lake District by car, but this is not the best way to reach a long-distance walk. Arriving at one end of the route, you would need to find secure parking for a week, then after walking you would have to return for the car.

Ulverston and Carlisle are both served by rail, with excellent links to the rest of Britain. There are direct daily rail services to Ulverston from Manchester Airport, and regular daily links between Lancaster, on the West Coast Mainline, and Ulverston. Carlisle has excellent daily rail links with London, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle upon Tyne, Glasgow and Edinburgh. For National Rail Enquiries, see page 70.

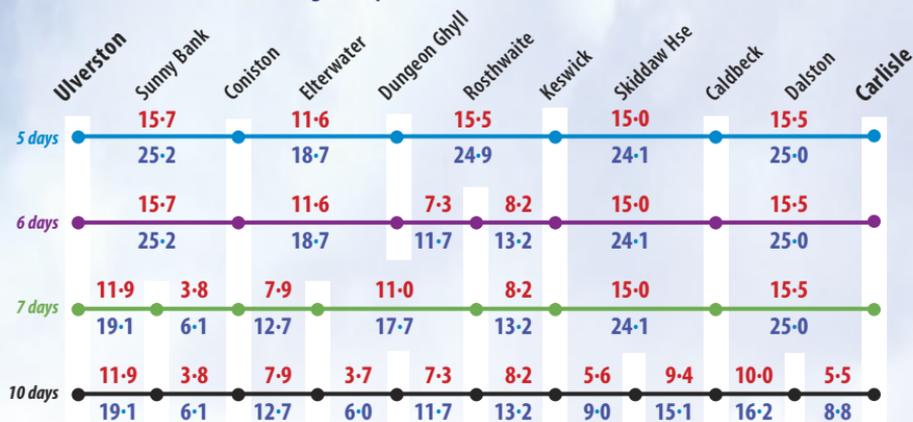
National Express coaches are very cheap when booked in advance. Many services call at Carlisle, along with Scottish Citylink services. Ulverston isn't on a coach route, but Kendal is, and the X6 Stagecoach bus runs daily from Kendal to Ulverston. Links for National Express and Citylink are provided on page 70.

Every stage of the Cumbria Way is served by buses, mainly operated by Stagecoach. Most of these run daily, but a few don't run on Sundays, and some services are infrequent. The main bus transport hubs are Ulverston, Ambleside (for Coniston and Langdale), Keswick and Carlisle: for information refer to Traveline. Contact details for boat trips on the lakes, as well as for Traveline, are on page 70.



How long will it take?

Table 1 Distances and overnight stops. Total (all itineraries) : 73·3mi 117·9km



Most walkers need at least five full days for the Cumbria Way. This guidebook describes the route in six sections, but the two shortest stages can be combined. For a distance of 73½ miles (118 km), a six-day itinerary averages out at about 12 miles (19.3 km) per day. In practice, you will walk a bit further because you'll have to go off-route to find food, drink, and accommodation. The low-level alternative from Keswick to Caldbeck would add an extra 3 miles (5 km). Most people will do at least 80 miles/130 km in all.

Bear in mind that the first and last days are mainly in farmland, with lots of stiles and gates that take time to negotiate. Avoid the temptation to arrive in Ulverston mid-morning in the hope of being able to walk all the way to Coniston: this could result in a very late finish. Better to spend a night in town and make an early start the next morning. On the final day, avoid trying to rush from Caldbeck to Carlisle in the hope of catching a train home. Much better to overnight and explore the city the next day, and travel home at leisure. Allow at least a week to enjoy walking the Way.

Most walkers start on Saturday, but bear in mind that Ulverston is a 'Festival Town', with events on most weekends through the summer. Also, the Lake District is a very popular destination, and in high summer it can be difficult to secure lodgings. Arriving mid-week in Coniston, Langdale and Keswick is less likely to lead to booking problems. Accommodation in the little village of Caldbeck is very limited, and it may be worth securing a bed there first.

The Way visits interesting towns and villages such as Ulverston, Coniston and Keswick. To explore them properly you need a few free hours in each. To reach museums within opening hours, re-organise your schedule to include half-day walks, leaving mornings or afternoons free for visits. Table 1 suggests five, six, seven and ten-day schedules.

Accommodation

There is a wide range of accommodation – from simple campsites to expensive hotels – but it is unevenly spread along the Way. There is no on-route accommodation between Ulverston and Coniston to break the first long day. Between Coniston and Great Langdale, there are several intermediate lodgings. After a long gap, options are dotted throughout Borrowdale. The town of Keswick has many places to stay, whilst to its north there is only Skiddaw House Youth Hostel in the middle of the Northern Fells. Caldbeck has very limited accommodation, whereas at the finish, the city of Carlisle offers plenty of choice.

Many walkers are happy to book all their overnights themselves from a list. You are strongly advised to book well in advance. Some are happy to use a Tourist Information Centre to make their bookings, whilst others prefer to let a tour company take care of everything including baggage transfers. All

Facilities along the Way

This list was finalised at a time when England was still emerging from its latest lockdown due to the global pandemic. Check which facilities are open before relying on any.

	miles from last place	km from last place	café, pub, restaurant	shop	campsite	hostel, barn, bunkhouse	B&B/hotel
Ulverston			✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Lowick Bridge 2 km</i>			✓				✓
<i>Torver 2-5 km</i>			✓		✓		✓
Coniston Hall	14.7	23.6		✓	✓		
Coniston	1.0	1.6	✓	✓		✓	✓
High Park	4.9	7.9	✓				
Elterwater Park	0.9	1.5	✓				
<i>Skelwith Bridge 400 m</i>			✓		✓		✓
Elterwater	2.1	3.3	✓			✓	✓
Chapel Stile	0.5	0.8	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Robinson Place 900 m</i>							✓
New Dungeon Ghyll	2.3	3.7	✓				✓
Old Dungeon Ghyll	0.9	1.5	✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Stonethwaite 200 m</i>			✓		✓		✓
Rosthwaite	7.3	11.7	✓			✓	✓
Hollows Farm Campsite	1.7	2.7			✓		
<i>Grange 600 m</i>			✓				✓
<i>Nichol End 200 m</i>			✓				
Portinscale	5.4	8.7	✓				✓
Keswick	1.1	1.8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skiddaw House*	5.6	9.0				✓	
<i>Mosedale 3 km</i>							✓
<i>Hudscapes 1-5 km</i>						✓	
Caldbeck*	9.4	15.1	✓	✓	✓		✓
Bridge End	9.1	14.6	✓				
Dalston	1.0	1.6	✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Cummersdale 600 m</i>			✓				
Carlisle	5.4	8.8	✓	✓		✓	✓

* Between Skiddaw House and Caldbeck, those following the low-level alternative route can divert for facilities (pub, B&B) at Bassenthwaite (1.6 km off-route) or Uldale (2 km off-route).

Places that are off-route are shown in italics with distance off-route after placename.