

# Askham

We start at the small village of Askham – not far from Pooley Bridge, an area we have visited a few times. The best route to Askham, assuming you are travelling from the south, is via the M6 northbound leaving at junction 39 signed for Shap. Take the A6 north through Shap following signs for Penrith. The A6 goes under the M6, then back over and approaches Hackthorpe. Go left onto a minor road and continue through Lowther – Askham is then just 500m further along this road. We cross the River Lowther, pass St Peter’s church, and then after 100m turn right into West View to find the car park. If you are using Satnav to get to the start point, then try West View, Askham, Penrith CA10 2PD as an address. If you prefer paper maps, then the OS Grid reference is NY51512395 whilst the what-3-words tag is **vase.reference.stumps**

From the car park we head back down the access road we arrived on, and once back at the main road, head right toward the village centre – just 100m away. At this point we meet a crossroads and continue opposite, still heading west. We ignore a road branching off on the left and continue through the village. The houses soon end – the population of Askham being just 356 in the 2011 census – and we find ourselves walking along the front of a large farm. The road is initially metalled, but degrades the further we walk, and eventually becomes a track. Beyond the farm we keep the wall on our right as we head out onto Askham Fell – we are climbing quite steeply through this section of the walk, and use the left hand end of small woodland ahead as our next landmark. There are a good number of side paths and tracks marked on the OS map on the climb from Askham village to the peak at Heughscar Hill, and many more are apparent on the ground, so if you want to be sure to follow the walk we describe here, keep to the wall or better still download and follow the GPX trail.

As we get past the end of the woodland, we have a short climb to the peak where we are rewarded for the hard work we have invested: A great view over Ullswater opens up with Pooley Bridge at the right hand side, and the fells that we enjoyed on our Ullswater Way linear walk under somewhat better weather in July 2022 ahead. This is a great vantage point to take a break.

Fully refreshed, we turn round and start to descend. We initially head back to the southern end of the stand of tree below us – retracing our outbound route - then strike out south toward Moor Divock. As on the initial climb, there are many paths here, some marked on the OS map, but many not, so there is some potential to take the “wrong” route, but in practice the route we are following is the clearest. Across Moor Divock (which is just the name given to a flat area of Askham Fell) there are further ancient sites and interesting geological features such as sink holes, and again we get a clear sense of ancient habitation. It is thought that the name derives from Mor meaning moor) and Dyfog, (meaning a Celtic person).

We soon arrive at a metalled road and our path continues opposite – we need to be careful though as there are two routes down from the fell, and each has a continuation on the far side of the road. We need the more northern of the two – the one to our left as we arrive at the road. They are just 60m apart so you should be able to see both. The path now heads across pastureland toward the edge of Helton – the route is clear and obvious as long as we keep left as we approach the village and ignore the tempting track to the right. We arrive at the road into Helton, and go left before crossing, and then almost immediately taking a path between houses to arrive at a crossroads where we take the metalled road opposite – look for the dead end and children playing signs to be sure.

We follow this down to a footbridge over the River Lowther, where we encountered a sign that we found a little ambiguous. One interpretation would be that the bridge is closed, the other that it may

not be used as a bridleway. We investigated and could see no reason not to use the bridge and so progressed – make your own decisions here.

Beyond the bridge we climb up to a minor road, and then continue opposite on a path to Whale – a tiny hamlet. As the farm buildings at Whale come into view, we look for a path on the left of the road which takes us north past Whale Farm, and then onto a track at the edge of a dense but rather atmospheric woodland which manages to generate a night-time feeling even in the mid-afternoon.

We now head north for the next mile or so, on fairly flat meadowland at the base of the valley. We are never very far from the river, although it's not in view for all of the route. As we arrive at a wooded area just to the south of Askham, we start to see the cranes that are currently in position to help with the restoration of Lowther Castle, and once we are about 200m into the woodland, we need to bear right to approach the rear of the castle.

Although we did not enter the castle on this walk, it's visitor attraction well worth getting to know. Despite looking like it has been a ruin for centuries, this grand house was essentially intact until fairly recently: In 1939 the castle was requisitioned for the war effort, and used by the tank regiment, and survived the war essentially undamaged, to be returned to the family in 1954. The family however could not afford to use or maintain it, and offered to give it away to the National Trust or other institutions. Sadly, in those depressed post-war years that transfer proved non-viable. To avoid taxes the owners stripped the castle and removed the roof, resulting in the derelict site we now see. The resolve of the current generation of the family and a less aggressive taxation regime mean that restoration work can now progress – if the castle looks familiar by the way, it's probably because it's been on TV so often. It has featured in Gardner's World, Antiques Roadshow, and Digging For Britain, amongst others.

From the gate at the back of Lowther Castle, we take the driveway to the north. It branches after about 100m, and we stay to the left meeting the road we drove in on soon after. The path continues opposite, and heads toward an area of woodland. As we reach the trees, the path forks, and again we need to keep left so that the woodland remains on our right.

The path then arrives at a stone bridge over the Lowther, with a wooden bridge to our right – we cross using the stone bridge, then turn sharp left to pick up the riverbank path on the opposite side. This runs at the base of a wooded area and if you look right as we walk down here you will spot a mound that is indicated as "Castlestead" on the OS map.

One school of thought says that this medieval fortified structure was probably a timber "ringwork" - a timber version of a Motte and Bailey Castle without the Motte.

The path continues through woodland following the course of the Lowther – but moving further from the riverside as we progress. Eventually, we emerge into an open field which we cross picking up a lane which we follow to the left, arriving back at the car park just 150m later.

- **Total distance 13.9 km (8.6 miles)**
- **Total ascent 317 m**
- **Moderate walk**