

West Windermere Way and High Dam

Introduction



Windermere is the nearest of the major lakes in the lake District, so it's not surprising that we have started a number of walks in this area. However, a quick glance at our website shows that we have so far stayed to the east of the lake.

This excellent walk shows that that the Western side of Windermere is well worth visiting, and we offer an easy route starting from Finsthwaite, that runs in a figure of eight shape, offering the opportunity to divide it into two shorter trips – of about equal length.

The first half is a climb through ancient woodland at Bell Intake up to High Dam before returning to Finsthwaite via High Stott Park. The second half takes a path through fields and then woodland to Newby Bridge before strolling next to the railway up to Lakeside. From there we take a path through Great Knott Wood back to Finsthwaite.

- **Total distance 11.0 km (6.8 miles)**
- **Total ascent 237 m**
- **Easy walk**

The Walk

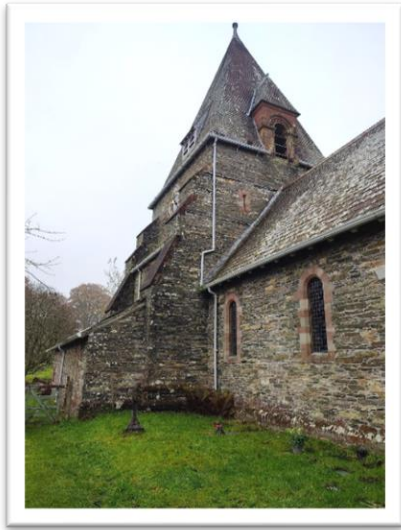
We start in Finsthwaite, a small and rather attractive village with a splendid church. To find the village, take the A590 to Newby Bridge and then cross over the river Leven as if visiting the Swan Hotel. Once over the bridge, go left, then follow the road round to the right and keep going following signage for the Stott Park Bobbin Mill. Drive past this and then when you get to a junction go left. This brings you to Finsthwaite where you will see St Peter's Church to the left. Head down the small lane to the church and park considerately before making a generous donation to ensure that this facility remains available to visitors.

If there is no space available, turn round and head back to the car park on the edge of the village – on the left just past the old vicarage. If you are using Satnav to get there, the address of the church is Lowside, Plum Green, Finsthwaite LA12 8BJ. If you are using What-3-Words, then the tag is **eggshell.bucket.companies** which corresponds to OS grid reference SD36858783.

Wherever you have parked, we recommend starting the walk by having a quick look at the church – it is open to visitors and is well worth a visit: Many of the churches we see on our walks were



designed by the renowned ecclesiastic architects Paley and Austin, but at first sight we might suspect that this is not the case for St Peters – the style is clearly very different to everything else of their design that we have seen. In fact, this is indeed a Paley and Austin design, but with an intriguing twist:



When the original church dating from 1724 was deemed to be too small, a competition to design a new structure “in an alpine Style” was instigated. Paley and Austin submitted the “mountain chapel” design we see today in 1874. It is not surprising that this was the winning entry - the exaggerated buttresses and massive tower, with a pyramidal roof rather than a traditional spire, ensure this building is rooted firmly in the landscape.

It is an idiosyncratic design with unusual attention to detail – particularly in the interior. The details are late Norman in style, and the beautiful coloured vaulted ceiling is clearly a reference to the medieval.

The original painting and decorations are largely complete and intact, with the exception of some of the works on the walls and window rebates which were removed in the early 1950s. The church features a number of outstanding stained glass windows, including the east window of Christ and the Apostles by Henry Holiday.

The parish clock, by Potts of Leeds, was installed in the tower in 1918 as a monument to those lost in the Great War and was completely renovated and electrified in 2005. A set of tubular bells is housed in the tower - these were refurbished and automated in 2012.



From the church we head up the lane between the houses opposite to arrive at the road through the village. We head right for just a short distance before we spot a sign on the left showing us a public footpath (High Dam ½) taking us up past the side of a cottage and onto open farmland. Here we bear right and head across the first field to enter an area used for camping during the holiday season. The path continues North to a footbridge over a beck just 100m later.

Beyond the bridge, we are in Bell Intake, and bear left to head uphill. The route we are following keeps to the right of the beck and follows it upstream to High Dam, but there are many paths in this area, so to be sure to follow the route we describe here, either download the GPX onto a suitable device, or make sure you follow the marker posts for the “Greenwood trails”.

The Greenwood trails are a set of eight walks centred on Rusland that the Lake District National Park team have developed to encourage enjoyment of the less visited area between Windermere and Coniston Water, south of Grizedale Forest.



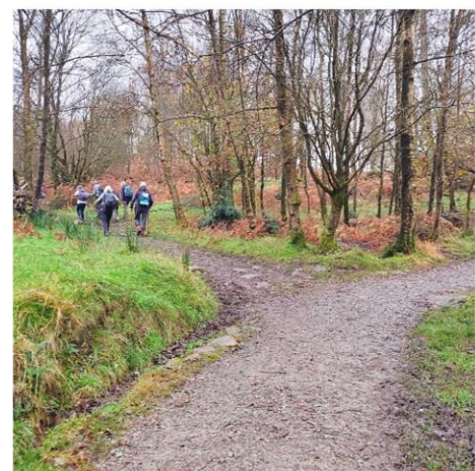
Just 300m after the footbridge at the base of Bell Intake our path arrives at a small lake – and we might assume that this is High Dam – it's not, it's just a widened section of the beck we have been following so far, so we either pause here at a very attractive bench with a great view, or press on for a further 100m to get to High Dam. Once there it is clear that this really is a dam – it has a characteristic earthen embankment to hold back the water, with a pavement across the top from which control gear to manage water flow can be accessed.

The question we need to ask ourselves at this point is why there is a dam here: And as is so often the case, to answer it we need to understand the industrial heritage of the area.

On the way to the start of the walk we passed the Bobbin Mill. This was built to produce bobbins for the Lancashire cotton mills, and in fact supplied mills all over the UK and even other parts of the globe. The wood was taken from local coppiced woodland. Coppicing involves harvesting poles from a tree approximately every 12-20 years and allowing it to regrow, and the current ethereal quality of the woodland is largely a result of that coppicing. You may have noted the prominent chimney at the Mill – this was the flue for the steam engine that powered the mill later in its working life. When the mill was opened in 1835 though, steam power seemed like an unnecessary complication when waterpower was so readily available, so an existing tarn at Roger Height was dammed to create a more controlled and consistent flow down the beck where a water wheel powered the mill machinery.



We cross the path over the top of the dam and then continue to follow around the tarn until we have done $\frac{3}{4}$ of a complete circuit – take care not to be tempted by any paths leaving on the left, we stay within sight of the tarn all the way through this section of the walk.



Once we have gone $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way round the tarn we do take a left – if you miss this and stray right it's not a problem, you arrive back at the dam, just 200m later and will need to re-trace. The slightly smaller path we are now on arrives at a gate and then continues through coppiced woodland with distant views of the fells on the far side of Windermere including Gummars How. After 300m or so the path forks again – we keep left and cross a beck before meeting a broader track at a bend. We follow this round to the right – we are heading east now – and soon encounter a clearing where there is a carved wooden pheasant – to the right of the track.

100m beyond this we see another artwork – this time an owl – and this is our cue to take the path opposite on the right which goes steeply downhill, requiring some care. We follow this path for a while, passing a rock face where climbing skills and abseiling are taught, before we arrive at a road.

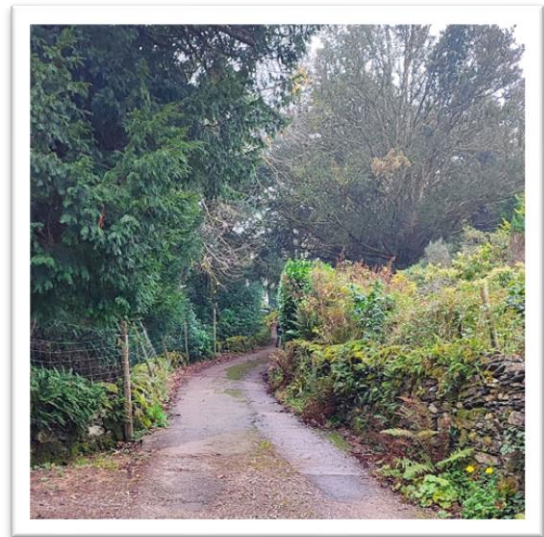


We go right at the road and look for the access to the West Windermere Way path on the left. The “official” access is some way down the road, so we improvised and crossed the beck next to the bridge on the adjacent bridleway to get away from the road as soon as possible: It seems a shame that safer access to the WWW path at the exit from the woods was not included in this otherwise excellent path.

Once at the path, we head right following the road, but safely distanced from it for the next 250m, at that point we do rejoin the road, but this time

on a section with much better visibility, to head left passing High Stott Park which is to the left of the road.

Our next landmark, just past High Stott Park is the way marker on the right taking us up to a lovely cottage at the side of Smith Haw Woods. When we approach the cottage, we head left to find a gate into pasture, where we cross two fields to arrive at a lane, and then a car park – this is the alternate parking we noted at the start of the walk. In the season, ice creams and snacks are available here, so this might be a good point for lunch.



The first loop of the figure of eight is completed by walking along the road back into Finsthwaite and back to St Peter’s. For those completing the second loop – which is quite different in character to the first - we look for the way marker showing the path into fields on the right of the road between the church and the village hall. This is signposted as Newby Bridge $\frac{3}{4}$. From here the path heads consistently south through three large fields – this section of the walk involves little change in elevation as we are essentially following the contours as we head south. That all changes after the end of the third field though, and as we enter woodland at Wintering Park we descend quite steeply – care is needed on this section when it is wet.



The narrow woodland path that we are following soon arrives at a broader track which accesses a small number of houses, and from here we simply stroll down that track to the road at the bottom where we see the Swan Hotel and the bridge over the railway that we crossed on our car journey to the start of the walk. We cross the line and follow the road round to the front of the Hotel where we see

Newby Bridge – the village is named after the ancient bridge over the river Leven.

We now follow the bank of the Leven upstream passing the front of the hotel, until we find ourselves walking next to a railway line: This is the Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway (L&HR), a 5.1 km heritage line running steam services between Haverthwaite and Lakeside. The railway is a former branch line of the Furness Railway (FR) which opened in 1869. The line was then served by passenger trains which started their journey at Ulverston on the main line from Carnforth to Barrow-in-Furness.



The FR trains travelled east to the triangular junction at Plumpton, then turned north via Greenodd and on to stations at Haverthwaite, Newby Bridge halt and Lakeside. The FR's weekday passenger service was successful and popular: In July 1922 eight trains ran in each direction every day. There were also advertised train-to-boat connections that were established as early as 1869. During the summer season, excursion trains

from Lancashire and elsewhere used the east-to-north side of Plumpton Junction to reach Lakeside, where their passengers joined the boat sailings on the lake. An excellent example of joined up thinking, not apparently to the liking of British Railways who closed the line to passengers on 6 September 1965, and to all traffic two years later.

(note: the picture above was taken during an earlier trip, not on the day of the group walk)

We follow the railway line for a while now and soon need to cross over a footbridge such that the line is on our right. The path remains clear at all times, and after while we arrive at the terminus at Lakeside where there is also an aquarium, and ticket office for ferries and trip boats.

Our route back to Finsthwaite is simple – we head up to the road adjacent to the Lakeside Hotel and Spa, and almost opposite see a way marker for a path heading west – this is signed for Finsthwaite $\frac{3}{4}$. After 50m this path heads right and then over the next 100m comes to run alongside a road. We then need to look for the path heading left away from the road and uphill through Great Knott Wood directly back to Finsthwaite. Our final approach is via fields to the rear of the Church and Village Hall, so use the Church as your landmark.



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