

## West Windermere Way and High Dam

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.

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".

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. We cross the path over the top of the dam and then continue to follow around the tarn until we have done ¾ 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 ¾ 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 Gummers 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. 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.

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.

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