

Staveley Woodlands

Our walk starts at the nearby village of Bowston, where there is ample roadside parking, but as always, please park in a manner that is considerate to residents. To get to Bowston, take the A591 to the Plumgarths roundabout just beyond Kendal, then continue as if heading to Ambleside / Windermere. Just 400m after the roundabout take the Burneside turning on the right and follow that past the level crossing and to the T Junction. Head left passing the Jolly Anglers pub, then continue for just over 1 km to arrive at Bowston. If you are using Satnav to get there, then try Bowston Bridge, Kendal LA8 9HD as an address. The OS grid reference is SD49749666, which corresponds to the What-3-Words tag **agreed.carry.insulated**

From the parking spot, we need to locate the bridge over the river Kent – look for the Victorian post-box set in the wall, or signage to the Handsome Brewery. Walk down to the bridge, then cross the river Kent using the Grade II listed bridge which dates from the 17th century. At the far side of the bridge there are signposted paths on both sides – we go left and follow the river upstream for a while, not straying far from the water. As we progress upstream, we cross a number of surprisingly large stiles, which despite the giant proportions have the steps rather too close together, so take care. At this point in the walk, the best views are over to our right toward Potter Fell.

We soon catch sight of a large white building to the left of the path – this is Cowan Head Mill, an active industrial site until 1977, but since then converted into luxury apartments. We continue with our path upstream, and about 300m after the apartments, arrive at a flat concrete bridge over the river. The riverside path does continue upstream, but we leave it here and head right to climb the track up to a minor road – on the way we pass a number of beehives, and some impressive fungi growing on the trees adjacent to them.

Once at the road we go left and walk on the road for a short while – it is generally traffic free, but please be careful. The on-road section is short, and after just 100m we see a set of steps on the right leading up to a step stile giving us access to a path heading north toward woodland. We climb a little at first but then follow contours as we head up a valley toward Side House – which is 800m or so from the point where we left the road. Side House is easy to identify – not only is it the only building in the area, but it may look familiar to you if you are a Wainwright reader: Side House appears as one of his illustrations and has been a popular navigational landmark since.

Four paths meet here so in addition to the path we arrive on, there are paths continuing up both sides of the beck – these are worth following for a few metres to see the impressive waterfalls, but don't go too far, as our onward route is back south along a very minor road. After no more than 250m, look for a junction on the right where we take an even smaller road back uphill – we are now heading into the woodland that the walk title promised. The OS map shows the wood as being called Spring Hag, but locals refer to it as Dorothy Farrer's Wood. It is privately owned, but has a number of public footpaths through it, and is made up of a number of smaller named woods; High Wood, Dorothy Farrer's Spring Wood and Beddard's Wood.

About 100m after entering the woods, there is a fork in the path – we need to keep right here and contour round to the top end of the woods where we find a green lane that runs up the east side of the woods – outside woodland boundary. Our next landmark is a large gate on the left back into the woodland – the high gates and fences here are a deer-proofing measure. The woodland we are now entering is Mike's Wood, this section is owned by the Friends of the Lake District, and it incorporates Beddard's Old Wood.

If you don't have a GPX enabled device, simply follow the path from the tall gate for 50m then head right to find a path leading to an exit back out of the woods with great views north toward Brunt Knott. We go left here and follow the track down for 400m until we see a wrought iron gate on the right into our next woodland: Craggy Plantation.

From the gate, there is a path that rises steeply up a zig-zag route until just 200m further north we have gained 50m in height to arrive at the highest point of our walk. We are now at the northern edge of Craggy Plantation and the path heads left to follow the margin of the trees for a while. All along this section we have really impressive views to the north.

After about 250m, the path takes a sharp right turn, and we head north for the next 300m until we emerge into a more open landscape: here we meet a path coming up from Staveley, we take this to the left and head downhill into the town. The bottom end of this path brings us to Barley Bridge in Staveley – just upstream from the bridge, and worth taking a moment to see, is a large weir that was once an important part of managing water supplies to the three mills adjacent to the bridge.

Our path however goes left along the minor road at the side of the Kent until after just 300m we find a signposted path on the right which takes a traffic free route along the riverside. Along here we see another weir – reminding us how important waterpower was to the old industries in this area. Not far beyond this we see a footbridge over the Kent, and cross to the cluster of businesses and shops that is Staveley Mill Yard.

We now follow the path down the side of the Mill Yard using St Margaret's tower as a landmark. Once we get to the main road we head left and then see the tower in all its glory.

The tower was once part of a church, but the rest of the building no longer exists – it was demolished in order to build a new and grander church - St James. The bells were however retained and are still used.

From the tower we walk southeast along the road for 500m or so until we find a well signed path on the left – this is part of the Dales Way. This takes us down to the banks of the Kent again, and we follow it downstream for a good while now, passing the concrete bridge we saw early in the day, then the apartments at Cowan Head, this time from the front.

Just beyond the apartments, we find ourselves on the well surfaces access road, and as it turns sharp right after about 300m, we need to carry straight on keeping along the side of the river.

After no more than 200m the path arrives back at Bowston where the walk ends.

- **Total distance 11.8 km (7.3 miles)**
- **Total ascent 254 m**
- **Easy walk**