

Ellerside from Cartmel

Introduction



Bentham Footpath Group has visited the Cartmel Peninsula a number of times: It's a great place to start a walk and offers a good choice of routes. We could head east onto Hampsfell with cracking views over the Kent Estuary and into Morecambe Bay, or as we do on this walk, west onto the ridge at Ellerside with equally good views across the Levens Estuary and over to the Lakeland fells. Along the way we have the opportunity to explore Cartmel Village, potentially adding a visit to the Priory and Cartmel Park racecourse, before heading through Park Wood, and scaling Ellerside where from the top of a ridge running along the side of the estuary, we have great views over to Ulverston. Our return is south past How Barrow, then down to

Low Bank Side where we pick up a lane back to the racecourse tracking the river Eea.

- **Total distance 11.9 km (7.4 miles)**
- **Total Ascent 203 m**
- **Easy walk**

The walk

We start in Cartmel. Options for parking here are somewhat limited and basically boil down to readily available but expensive parking at the racecourse or limited but free roadside parking near the school. We chose the school option and were lucky, so our GPX shows that as the starting point. If you do start from the racecourse however, we pass that on the way so simply pick up the instructions from there.

To find the racecourse parking follow signs to the village centre, then racecourse parking signage. The address for your satnav is Cartmel, LA11 6QB. If your device accepts what-3-words tags, use **brimmed.dandelions.remotest** which corresponds to OS grid reference SD37687874

For the school, you need to be on the curiously named Headless Cross road. The address in that case is Headless Cross, Cartmel, LA11 7SA. If your device accepts what-3-words tags, use **daredevil.parts.says** which corresponds to OS grid reference SD38087851.



From the parking near the school, we set off back toward the village using the looming bulk of the Priory as a landmark. To get there we go back along



Headless Cross to the village green where the Millenium Monument sits. This simple uncut natural stone obelisk surrounded by a slate seat was installed in 2002 to celebrate the millennium.

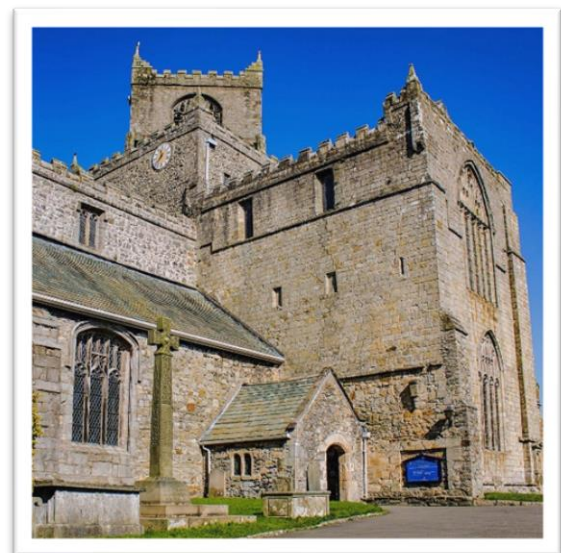
From here we head along Aynsome road, passing the Pig & Whistle, and then heading left onto the Causeway.

At the end of the Causeway, we go right, and 100m ahead see the Priory.

Standing at the heart of the village for more than 800 years, the medieval Priory was founded by William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke, also known as the architect

of the Magna Carta. The Great East Window dates back to 1420 and is thought to be the Priory's greatest architectural glory, influenced, and perhaps even designed, by the same people who built the Great East Window of York Minster. Also of note are the 15th century misericords. Misericords are small wooden sculptures formed on the underside of a folding seat in a church which, when the seat is folded up, act as a shelf to support a person in a partially standing position during long periods of prayer.

Externally, the belfry built at 45 degrees to the direction of the rest of the church is believed to be the only one of its kind in the UK. There are a number of priories in Cumbria and North Yorkshire, but Cartmel Priory stands out as being intact – which begs the question why all the others were destroyed during the reformation, whilst this one survived: Founder William Marshal stated in the priory's founding deeds that the church was to be used by locals as their parish church. So, when Henry VIII split from Rome, the village argued successfully that the building should be seen as a local church and not a priory. For that reason, it was spared, but all the other buildings associated with the monastic use were destroyed except for the gatehouse that remains at the centre of Cartmel today.



The gatehouse also functioned as the local manorial court, and so it too was spared. It was later put into use as the village school. It's well worth viewing from both sides of the large entrance way, but it is rarely open to the public at the moment.

Regular users of our website will no doubt take one look at the magnificent priory and ask themselves whether Lancaster Architect E G Paley was involved. He was . . . in 1867 a major restoration by Paley undid much of an earlier (1830) restoration that was described as "more enthusiastic than sympathetic".



From the Priory we head down to the square, passing the bridge over the Eea as we do, before taking a route past the fish slab. This is an old granite slab adjacent to the refurbished cross where, years ago, the daily catch would be laid out. Cartmel Village Society contributed toward the refurbishment of the fish slabs in 2021.

We now follow signage for the Village Hall and Parking (although we note that the car park at the village hall itself is not for public use) and then follow the road down to the racecourse car park. So,

if you parked there initially, pick up the directions from this point.

Standing in front of the public toilets at the car park we look opposite toward the woodland to see what looks a little bit like a bridge – it's not it's a walkway across the racecourse which protects the surface of the course, and which is removed when racing is underway. We cross the racecourse at that point and then enter the woodland opposite: this is Park Wood.



The path rises steeply through the woodland and after just 50m splits. We take the right hand option which 100m later brings us to a minor road. Don't worry too much if you miss the split in the path or accidentally take the left hand branch – this too arrives at the same minor road barely 30m further south.

At the road we go right and then after just 30m as the road bends right, we take a track continuing onward to Well Knowe. From here we pass a large white house on our left then soon after another on the right and continue slightly uphill along a lane. We note a finger post for a path on our right and ignore this to continue north for the next 200m, passing a disused quarry on our left as we go.



We now approach a group of houses and need to look for the roundels showing the route up onto the fells – this is via a gate between the buildings.

Beyond the gate we are in open fields for a while, and for the next 400m head north toward a farm at Wall Nook. The path is clear on the ground, but there are a number of other paths which cross ours, so we recommend having our GPX trace available either on a navigation device or as a paper copy.

When we arrive at Wall Nook, we find that it is a collection of attractive holiday cottages – each named after a bird – Kestrel and Pheasant making unlikely neighbours. The track in front of the cottages curves round to the right and we follow it for a short while before taking a stile into a field.

There are a number of protruding rocks here which we found made a good perch for a mid-morning break – from here onward we have reasonable views across to the Lakeland fells, and at the bottom of this field there is an interesting pond worth exploring.

Our route now continues to a stile over a drystone wall and onto a minor road where we head left. We walk on the road for the 500m or so, but as we saw no traffic at all during this part of the walk, don't let this be a concern. The road eventually fades away once we reach Speel Bank, and at this point we need to keep left on the track – there is an option to the right, and this might be worth exploring another day as it takes us toward Bigland Tarn, but for today, keep left through the farm buildings.



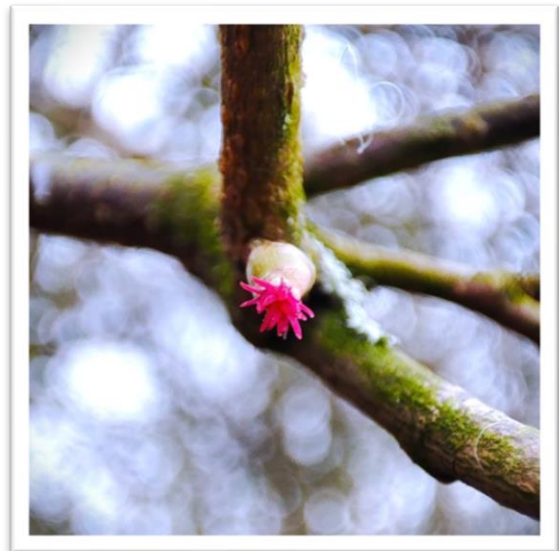
Just 50m later we arrive at a junction of paths: we need to keep right – we are on the obvious and clearer path so navigation should not be a problem, but if you don't have woodland over to your right, with farmed deer often visible, you may have erroneously taken the left hand route.

We are now walking on what looks like a green lane, but given the uneven surface probably did not function as such, and as well as the deer, highlights here are the Hazel trees, where the lack of leaves in February gives us

the best view of the catkins.

The catkins are the male flowers, and they produce copious amounts of powdery yellow pollen. This is dispersed by the wind, which is why they can flower in February when insect activity is nearly non-existent. Each catkin actually consists of 240 individual flowers arranged on a dangling stem, and when fully ripe it only takes the slightest touch to release a cloud of microscopic pollen grains. These can be carried over a great distance on a favourable breeze in the hope of reaching their intended target, a female hazel flower. Of course, wind dispersal can be a bit haphazard, and a lot of the pollen will be wasted, landing on damp branches, sticking to spider webs or dusting unsuspecting birds – but the sheer volume of pollen produced helps improve the odds.

The female flowers are red and tiny, and vastly outnumbered by the males, so you'll have to look a lot closer to spot them. Every hazel produces both male catkins and female flowers – though they do not self-pollinate. The female flowers are equally unusual and resemble a scaly green bud with a bundle of delicate red tendrils emerging from the top – looking almost like a sea anemone. The "fingers" are the female flower's styles, or pollen tubes, and any wind-blown pollen grains that land on them will fertilise the flower and trigger the development of a hazelnut. So, a visit in September or October to harvest them might be worth planning.





Just a little further on we approach a drystone wall with a steep stile to climb over, and as soon as we scale this we are greeted with a wonderful view: We can now see the entirety of the Levens Estuary, with the Roudsea Wood and Mosses national nature reserve below us, Ulverston across the Leven with the Leven Viaduct carrying the railway line into town with the Hoad Monument clearly visible on the far hillside. Meanwhile, if we look to our right we see the peaks of the Lakeland fells –

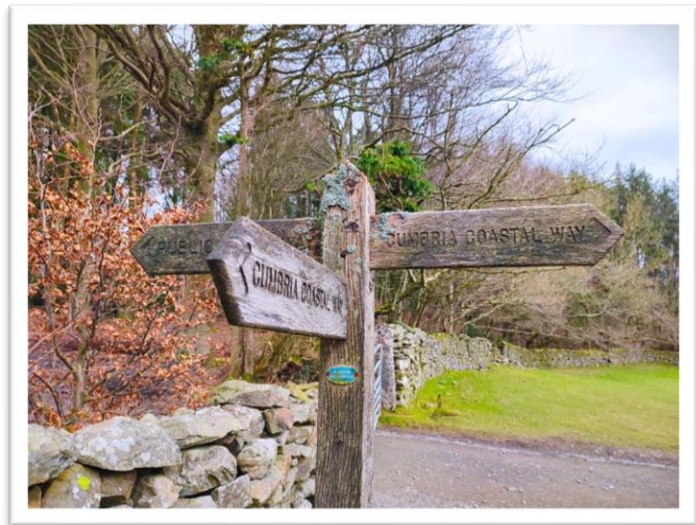
and given that we undertook this walk in February, the tops were still dusted with snow.

We are in fact now at the Ellerside the walk title refers to; Ellerside is in practice simply a ridge that runs down the eastern side of the Leven estuary. We took a moment to enjoy the views from here and to take lunch before setting off down the ridge toward the coast. For the avoidance of doubt, this means that as we come over the stile at the top we are turning left.

From here navigation is simple: we walk south along the top of the ridge for the next 1.7 km. At times the views are to the right, but more often they are to the left where we look over Cartmel toward Hampsfell. The air was not quite clear enough to pick out the Hospice, which we have visited a number of times, but on a clear day and with binoculars it should be visible.

A little while later we see a (small) wind turbine at a farm and our path approaches the access road for that farm. We go right and slightly downhill here. We see a gate ahead but head off left before that to continue south through woodland on a broad and occasionally muddy forest track. Active forestry works are ongoing here so be prepared for churned up ground and potentially for minor diversions.

600m or so later we arrive at a gate and a junction in the tracks. We notice a fingerpost and take the route to the



right which is signed as the Cumbria Coastal Way. Despite being well signed and apparently popular, Cumbria County Council informed the Ordnance Survey in 2010 that it no longer endorsed the route and so it has been removed from OS maps, along with the Allerdale Ramble. The reason they give for this is that it used a number of permissive path sections, and permissions on these have expired. Happily, the part we are now using is still available, and is a definitive public footpath, so we head to the right and along the path until (about 600m later) we

get to a gate on the right accessing woodland at Low Scar. This is memorable, because it bears a sign warning us of the presence of adders. In fact, we have little to fear – adders may be the only venomous snake indigenous to the UK, but they are very shy and unlikely to be seen. Known to zoologists as *Vipera berus*, and the rest of us as the common European adder or common European viper, this species is surprisingly widespread and can be found throughout much of Europe, and as far as East Asia. It is not aggressive and usually bites only when really provoked, stepped on, or picked up. Bites can be very painful but are seldom fatal.

The species is cold-adapted and hibernates in the winter. In Great Britain, males and females hibernate for about 150 and 180 days, respectively, whilst in colder climes such as northern Sweden hibernation lasts 8–9 months. On mild winter days, they may emerge to bask where the snow has melted and will often travel across snow. About 15% of adults and 30–40% of juveniles die each year during hibernation.

Their diet consists mainly of small mammals, such as mice, rats, voles, and shrews, as well as lizards. Sometimes, slow worms are taken, and even weasels and moles. Adders also feed on amphibians, such as frogs, newts, and salamanders. Birds are occasionally taken, as are nestlings and eggs, for which they will climb into shrubbery and bushes.

As an interesting aside, the name derives from the old English *nædre*, that had the generic meaning of serpent. In the 14th century, 'a nadder' in Middle English was re-bracketed to become 'an adder', just as 'a napron' became 'an apron' and 'a nompere' changed into 'an umpire'.

Once at the gate with the warning of Adders, look to the left and find the path along the edge of the drystone wall and into the woodland. We follow this for about 200m through somewhat spiky gorse until we arrive at a deer gate from the woodland onto a minor road.



We go left here and follow the road back through woodland (somewhat reduced post Storm Desmond) and eventually arrive back at the racecourse, where depending on where you parked the walk either ends or continues through Cartmel back to the school.

On this final section back toward the racecourse we are just 20-30m to the west of the river Eea (you will recall the bridge over it in the centre of Cartmel). The curious name - the only river with no consonants in it – is thought to derive either from the Viking *eea* meaning eel, or the old Cumbrian *ia* meaning ice.

At just under 12km this walk is classed as easy – there are no challenging sections, and the route is easy throughout.

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