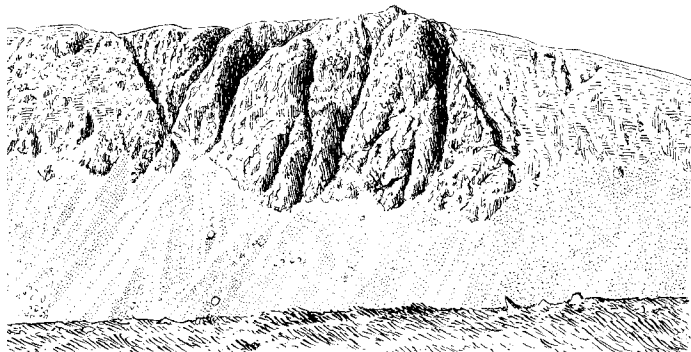


PARK&STRIDE

with Mark Richards
on BBC Radio Cumbria

2 Dow Crag from Coniston



Dow Crag from Coniston Old Man

*including Goat's Water and Walna Scar
ascent 1,820ft/555 m round trip 5.5 miles/ 8.8km
ascent time 2.75 hours round trip 5 hours*

PARK either at the Old Station car park in Coniston village or best of all at this time of year, drive up past the Sun Hotel following the Walna Scar Road to the fell gate.

START 740ft/225m at grid ref. 289 971 and no later than 10.30 a.m. in winter months.

Walk summary: founded upon the Walna Scar Road visiting The Cove, Goat's Water and Goat's Hause. Climb to the impressive rock bastion of Dow Crag before striding south over the subsidiary tops of Buck and Brown Pikes then descend to track down the Walna Scar Road. With time in hand, some walkers may be tempted to gather up the three tops of the continuing Walna Scar ridge, the actual summit plus White Maiden and White Pike, all three excellent viewpoints in their own right.

MAPS Ordnance Survey Explorer OL6
Harvey's Superwalker Lakeland South
and Lake District Outdoor Atlas

WINTER WALKING ADVICE essentials to wear and/or carry in your daypack: first and foremost wear comfortable boots. Then ensure you have a reliable torch and spare batteries, a map and compass, a hot drink in a sturdy flask, energy snacks (with marzipan or Kendal Mint Cake in reserve), thermal hat, gloves, cagoule and gaiters. A pair of walking poles have everything to commend themselves, especially during descent when slick ground is a probable hazard. On the clothing front layers are better than reliance on just one heavy item (jumper/fleece), being able to add and subtract to suit body comfort and conditions is an immensely sensible habit to cultivate. Unless you are practiced crampons and an ice axe are not to be used on the high ground of Dow Crag. If conditions warrant their use you should curtail your walk well before the perils of snow and ice begin.

Na tyem na place fa laekin about

Ronald Turnbull refers to Dow Crag as 'the friendly crag'. However, his audience are climbers, not your average fellwalker, the likes of you and me! In any fair season the crag offers superb rock routes, bold, impressive and hugely fulfilling, invariably culminating on the summit - which to my mind is the true purpose of a climb be it pedestrian or by a gymnastic feat of the limbs. So it may be a cliff to scale, but hardly doe-ray-me!

Early climbers were attracted to Dow Crag's gullies, horrid places by comparison with the projecting buttresses. The first climb attributed to 1886, though the first properly established route came in 1904. It was here that the Lakeland Fell and Rock Climbing Club was born, the Sun Hotel the setting of its first meet in 1907. In my mind the name most synonymous with Dow Crag is Harry Griffin. A journalist with a passion for climbing and the great outdoors, supplying The Guardian with a Country Dairy column for a staggering fifty-three years. Harry coined the terms Coniston Tigers and Cragrats for the fraternity of local climbers, many from his native Barrow-in-Furness, who pioneered routes here. Tigers derives from Nepalese sherpa's attribution of the adventurous European mountaineers for whom they portered. While cragrats referred to climbers instinct of forcing their way up thin cracks and grooves. AW called it 'second only to Scafell Crag in the magnificence of its rock architecture'. But at this time of year the 600 foot crag should be considered out-of-bounds, to be admired from a safe distance, en route to the summit by its fellside approaches.

John Ruskin, the great Victorian philanthropist and one of the first conservationists, gazed daily upon the Coniston Fells from his home of Brantwood on the eastern shores of Coniston Water. With assured wisdom he pronounced that 'mountains were the beginning and end of all natural scenery' and certainly the Coniston Fells always gladden my eyes.

I have brought this classic fell walk into focus now because at this time of year Lakeland can take on an Alpine appearance with all the wild portend that can imply. Thus walkers, with some experience of the fells, might be tempted to venture onto this or similarly exposed heights and they need to be aware of the potential high stakes. Coniston may be the home of the oldest mountain rescue team in Britain, founded in 1947, but your careless pioneering wanderings should not be a cause to wantonly bring them out!

The overwhelming majority of fellwalkers will be setting their sights on Coniston Old Man. So to venture further west means you are less likely to encounter fellow walkers. The significance of this is not conviviality, it is safety, if you get into difficulties you may be more than just lonely in time of need. Winter can bring ice and snow (cornicing on the eastern lip of the ridges) but it also can offer mist, rain and the treachery of wind. The name Goat's Water obviously refers to the wild goats that could pick perilous grazing from the cliff. Shepherds of yore were only too pleased as they may have not thought it worth putting their own lives at risk catching cragfast ewes - allowing them to starve and fall as bundles of wool onto the screes below.

But the name 'goat' like 'cove' might be thought to have its roots in pre-Anglian terminology for rather like Pen-y-ghent (Yorkshire Three Peaks) and Castell-y-gwynt (Snowdonia) it just might be adapted from these words for wind. >>