

Windswept on Whitbarrow.

Description

A roughly three hour walk, around six miles that climbs over 1000ft. It's good to blow off cobwebs. On Whitbarrow there is almost always a wind and it's a good idea to carry a layer you don't expect to use.

Whitbarrow is the hill that keeps on giving. Three and sometimes four families would live from a tenancy or as yeoman in former years. Often the first son would raise stock on the fertile and gentle eastern slopes, second son would quarry the valuable limestone or even attempt to mine



other valuable ores and the third might Coppice the woodland and charcoal burn. Not rich livings but ones that kept families together, warm and fed.

Three loose stone cairns mark the highest part of Township Allotment (below).

A sheep fold through the dry stone wall on pastures bordering Row (right).





In late May these limestone hills encourage lovely purple flowers. The early purple orchid (lower left) and foxgloves (upper left) pepper the land along with other delightful flora. From the limekiln below Whitbarrow Scar you get great views of the Winster Valley and Cartmel Fell, here showing Broad Oak.

This walk explores some of those slopes around the north of Whitbarrow and gives you a taste for the hill that will make you come back. It takes in the pasture land, orchards and the rough limestone top, as well as the little lanes that link the tiny hamlets that are still lovely places to live today.

Route

The walk starts with a gentle walk up the village to The Punchbowl, through church car park to the delightful path old lane known as Church Lane. This is now no more than a path but you can imagine how busy this track was in former times when parishioners from outlying hamlets would make their way to St Mary's each Sunday. These days the path gets a little overgrown in mid Summer but the hedgerows on either side are rich with wild flowers.

When the path meets Mill Lane turn left and walk a short way to Esp Ford Farm. You need to make your way through the gates blocking the path towards the main Lyth Road. Esp Ford is a little sad at time of writing as the farm is redundant and a little ghostly. You won't want to linger here.

On reaching the main road take a short walk left and then cross the road and walk through the fields to Fell Side. The path goes through the farm and then zig zags until reaching Durham Bridge Wood. From here to Row Head, down to the hamlet of Row and beyond through the orchards and pastures to the crossroads at Township Plantation.

The path now gently meanders up the hill past currently unworked quarries and opens up through a gate onto the plateau of Whitbarrow. As you gain height now, look back sometimes as the views over towards Farleton Knott and beyond to Yorkshire's Ingleborough are marvellous. On this walk your time on top is limited and so take in the views as you cross the track on these northern slopes. You will see the three large cairns you might want to explore but otherwise keep them on your left. The track takes you directly across the Fell until you start a gentle descent when you need to keep your eyes open for a stone stile over the wall enclosing the allotment. When the Fell was new to me I struggled to find the stile on a dark afternoon and lost my sense of direction so even these modest heights can be a challenge sometimes. You might also find the short descent down the side challenging. It's sharp and you need to hang on to the helpful tree branches on occasion to steady you up.

As you reach the path at the bottom turn right and walk above Fell Edge towards the wider Whitbarrow Road that skirts the north of the Fell. Around the same time as the road flattens out you should look for a footpath sign left. This takes you over two stone stiles into a grassland pasture that then makes its way past the High Farm and back down to the A5074. From here, briefly left, then across to the tiny track taking you up to Mill Lane and past the water mill.

Take the little track left beyond Crosthwaite Mill and then back over the fields to Crosthwaite Green.

Things to See on the Walk.

Imagine these little lanes before they were just paths and mostly recreational. They would each have been busy parish thoroughfares with carts carrying peat from the mosses, logs or charcoal from woodland and stone from quarries to limekiln.

The scenery on top of Whitbarrow lacks the spectacular frozen and windswept trees you see further down the Fell but it is an outstanding open space with marvellous views over the Lyth Valley and towards Scout Scar. The pretty white village of Brigsteer looks inviting across the plain. On the Winster side the steeper cliffs of the Fell open up into the beautiful green valley with little copses dotting on hilly outcrops of rock. You get a good view of 17th century Cowmire (pronounced Coomer) Hall from here. Beyond you may make out The Masons Arms at Strawberry Bank on the way to Gummers How. Go on, you probably deserved a pint and some triple cooked chunky chips.

As you cross Whitbarrow in Spring or Summer listen to the birdsong. Watch small birds dart amongst the rock and Heather. Keep an eye higher up for the birds of prey as they hover and then swoop. Marvel at their strength and wingspan. You would be unlucky not to see them.

For a few months in Winter you see the higher fells of Lakeland in sharp focus. Snow covered tops always show the shape of fells well and those of us familiar with their shapes can impress friends by pointing out their names. That's OK too. It's not showing off, just what those of us lucky enough to live here are interested in. Nowt so queer as folk.