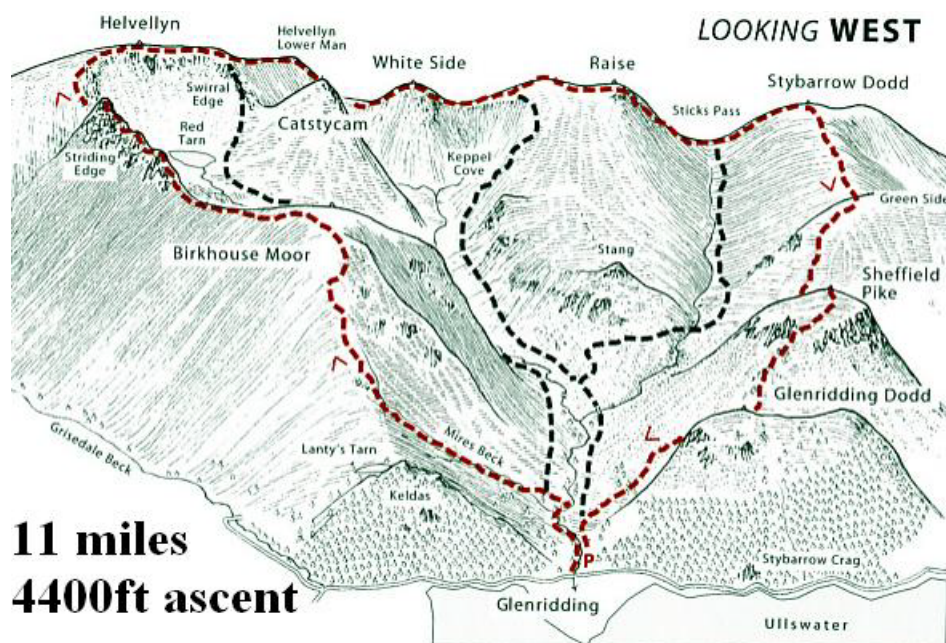


Glenridding [8th November] Birkhouse Moor, Helvellyn, White Side, Raise, Stybarrow Dodd and Sheffield Pike.



In amazing contrast to the abrupt western aspect of the range, the long ridge and valley system stretching east from the high summits of the Helvellyn range ensures that walks from Patterdale and Glenridding are full-day undertakings. Here is the lion's share of the good walking, the longer days. Here you'll find elegant peaks and chiselled ridges, wild corries and verdant straths all held in comparatively small compass - the romance of mountain Lakeland wonderfully disclosed. Fundamentally this route is the Glenridding skyline walk. The first objective is Birkhouse Moor - its grassy pasture in stark contrast to the narrow serrated crest of Striding Edge, a ridge that attracts admiration, awe and respect from all who tread its devil's spine. Completing the ascent onto the headwall escarpment of Helvellyn, the walk sets to work gathering up a string of summits - Helvellyn Lower Man, White Side, Raise and Stybarrow Dodd - before striking east by Green Side and Sheffield Pike. In its mid-section the walk has three well-engineered tracks back down to Glenridding, providing honourable bail-out points to suit prevailing conditions and/or your inclination. Discretion is always the better part of valour when venturing on these challenging ridges, especially as the weather can turn nasty very quickly.

The large National Park Authority car park at the centre of Glenridding, GR385169, is the natural springboard for this expedition. Either follow the path out of the top end of the car park by the health centre to follow the village road up past the Travellers Rest pub, then at the road-fork bear left to cross Rattlebeck Bridge (what a lovely name, redolent of clattering beck stones). Or, more in tune with the walking day, follow the lane from Glenridding Bridge, passing through Eagle Farm and along the beck-side bridle path by Gillside camping site.

Both routes come together beyond the farm signed 'Helvellyn via Mires Beck', passing via a stile up to a fork below 'Miresbeck' cottage, and rising right to the ladder stile crossing the intake wall. Paths splay to left and right. Join the well-engineered pitched path built to cope with rampant boots bent on Striding Edge. This fords Mires Beck and winds up Little Cove to the ridge wall keeping right. It then pulls away from the wall to gain the broad top of Birkhouse Moor, handy for the summit cairn over to the right at 2356ft. Ahead is a superb view of the Red Tarn amphitheatre, with Striding Edge forming the left-hand side-wall and the peak of Catstycam, projecting proudly from Helvellyn's breast, to the right. Bear left to regain the wall, passing the Hole-in-the-Wall wall corner and now setting sights on the rocky headland connecting to Helvellyn.

Approach the next stage of the journey with a steady head and bated anticipation for exciting situations. The walkers' highway runs on the north side of Low Spying How, passing striated rocks to reach the top of the High Spying How, a good first vantage to survey the depths of Nethermost Cove and the changing fortunes of the westward-trending razor-topped ridge. Many walkers attempt to avoid the bare crest to varying degrees of success, and the net effect is unsightly erosion that could be healed only by giving the edge a 10-year sabbatical from boots. How likely, if desirable, is that? The ridge-name implies scope for confident strides, whereas it actually means 'the sharp ridge one can stand astride'. The edge ends with a rock tower, and equally difficult options to descend chimney clefts to right or left.

Step through the little col and scramble up the broken fellside, via a scree gully. Equilibrium and composure are restored at the plateau rim, and there is elation too, as the cross-wall is passed and the summit of Helvellyn reached at 3116ft.

Follow the scarp edge north. One may break right at the first cairn and go down the crumpled Spine of Swirral Edge, though this can be a slow descent. To take this route, from the col with Catstycam bear down to outflow of Red Tarn and join the Glenridding-bound made trail.

To continue on the main route, curve with the ridge the half a mile to the subsidiary top of Helvellyn Lower Man, with its dishevelled shalt' cairn. Head on down the north ridge into the broad saddle rising to the summit of White Side at 863m/2851ft, the entire route super-served with cairns. The ridge path continues in similar vein. At the apparent fork, be aware that the right turn draws one down the renewed engineered pony route around the head of Keppel Cove and down into the Glenridding Beck valley – another useful return route. Keep to the skyline ridge by a string of cairns and continue to the coarse-rock top of Raise at 884m/2900ft. Continue north again down through a marsh to the cairn at the top of Sticks Pass. A right turn can curtail the walk and take you back to Glenridding via Stang End. But having come this far, why miss the final summits? They need only a little extra effort.

Strike due north up the grassy bank to the south top of Stybarrow Dodd, and curve with the edge to find the modest summit cairn at 846m/2776ft. Turn south-east and quickly east down the slope in harmony with walkers engaged on the round of the Dodds (Walk 36) to the cairns on Green Side, and here bear off south-east. In mist this apparently simple action has dangers, for the unprotected broken rim of the top mineral quarry catches the edge of the descending path. Striding through the cotton grass and peat of Nick Head, keep east to claim the splendid peak of Sheffield Pike. The name has nothing to do with the old Yorkshire home of steel and cutlers, being a mischievous corruption of 'sheep fold'.

The important path angles south-east over rough heather ridge to the brink of Heron Pike and continues down the ridge to trend down The Rake path from the saddle with Glenridding Dodd. With the last saps of energy one might visit this little vantage summit, giving the perfect view of the village below and, from the eastern edge, a brilliant view of Ullswater too. The Rake path comes down behind Rake Cottages, a terrace of converted miners' dwellings, to join the Greenside Road track.



THE SIMONSIDE RIDGE [29th November]

The Simonside Hills are a heather-clad, 5 mile ridge of fell sandstone running across the eastern border of the Northumberland National Park between Elsdon and Rothbury. The characteristically dark heather moorlands have given the name of the 'Black Lands' to these and the Harbottle Hills, in contrast to the 'White Lands' of the grass-covered Cheviots. The finest one-day excursion in the Simon-side Hills is the 4 mile traverse of the main ridge, from Garleigh Moor to the reigning summit of Tosson Hill (1,443ft). Taken during, late August when the heather is at its best, this is an outstanding outing, with fine views in every direction, especially across the fertile Coquet Valley to the distant Cheviot Hills in the north. Park in the Forestry Commision's car park and picnic area below Simonside summit south of Rothbury. Turn right to walk back up the road and out of the trees towards the col between Garleigh Moor and The Beacon. Before starting west across the ridge, it is worth spending a few minutes locating the numerous mysterious 'cup and ring' marked boulders which litter the slopes of Garleigh Moor below its reigning Iron Age hillfort. A particularly fine example overlooks the road and is marked by a Ministry of Public Buildings and Works sign. Dating from the Bronze Age, these concentric rings and hollows still baffle archaeologists. Back on the road, an easy track leads up through the heather to the first summit on the ridge, The Beacon, which is reached by turning right at the top of the col, leaving the main track which descends over Caudhole Moss. There is a fine view east from this 1,181ft summit across the rich archaeological sites of Garleigh Moor, with an aerial view of the concentric rings of its crowning hillfort. Looking north, the roofs of Rothbury sheltering beneath the tree-clad crag of Addyheugh are prominent in the middle distance, with the mock-Tudor facade of Cragside peeping out of the trees to the east. From the large cairn on top of The Beacon, follow the broad track westwards down and then up again to the prominent outcrop of Dove (or Dough) Crag. Facing north across the thick forestry plantations of Rothbury Forest directly below, the sandstone rocks of Dove Crag are reminiscent of a Peakland 'edge', with rolling miles of sweet-scented heather moorland stretching down to the south. Another mile through the heather brings you to the first of the eponymous summits of Simonside, known as Old Stell. Crag. Indeed, if you look down from your lofty vantage point you may be able to make out several stells, or ancient circular sheep pens. The name of Simonside itself is thought to have been derived from Sigemund's Seat, and is recorded as Simundesette in 1279, 'sett' denoting a settlement or dwelling in Old English. The views from the westernmost 1,407ft summit of Simonside are superb - one of the best viewpoints in the whole of Northumberland. It is a steep descent through the shattered sandstone crags at the western end of Simon-side, where there is some rock-climbing on the coarse fell sandstone. At the foot of the crags, you meet up with the forestry track which leads down to the right through the trees of Rothbury Forest and eventually back to the car park. To complete the ridge, however, head up again towards the narrow neck of land between the trees and over the stile to the impressive crags of Raven's Heugh (1,384ft). Here, there is a fine raven's-eye view between the curiously detached crags across the meandering Coquet to the lakes of Castron far below. A perfect circular stell lies in the bracken-covered slopes directly beneath the crags of Raven's Heugh ('Heugh' is the local name for a hill which ends abruptly). Another mile through the heather finds Tosson Hill, at 1,443ft, the highest point on the Simonside Hills. There is no official access, but the circular drystone-wall shelter on the summit offers nothing like the views you have already enjoyed on the eastern summits. Retrace your steps to the gap between Raven's Heugh and Simonside and turn left to follow the waymarked forestry tracks which eventually lead back to the car park in Rothbury Forest.

