

TRAVEL  
FEATURE

# Lake District *ramblings*

**KEVIN FERRIE GOES WANDERING AND BLEATHERING AROUND CUMBRIA – AND REDISCOVERS THE CHARMS OF AN AREA THAT HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON HIS CHILDHOOD**

A COUPLE of years at school in Carlisle having been responsible for many days that fell a long way short of counting among life's happiest, it took a long time to succumb to the charms of the Lake District.

The whole of Cumbria effectively suffered from guilt by association with its county town until, the best part of a quarter of a century later, the Scotland rugby union squad headed there on a pre-tour team-building exercise and the drive to that camp was an image changer. In some ways England's most mountainous region bears similarities to our own Scottish hills, but there is a different, smoother roll to them, accentuated by a version of dry-stone dyking that is more manicured than our own, so lends an extra prettiness.

When, then, three cousins and I finally got around to organising, this autumn, a long mooted get-together, since Andy lives in the south east, while Dave and Steve have both ironically settled in the city from which they knew I had eagerly fled in the seventies (maybe there's a hint in those decisions that should have been picked up on previously), the Lakes seemed the ideal option for a couple of days' hillwalking.

Ex-military man Andy, who once nannied me through a Duke of Edinburgh gold award expedition, sorted out the logistics and we convened in Patterdale for what turned out to be two marvellous days on the hoof, starting with the fun negotiation of Striding Edge on the way to the top of Helvellyn, England's third-highest mountain.

His next day's schedule involved another walk in the local area, but as we discussed it over the sort of reminiscence-filled dinner in the local pub that was the real purpose of all that thirst-inducing

exercise, Munro completist Steve suggested a shortish drive west would let us take on England's greatest peak, Scafell Pike, leading to another glorious day's wandering and blethering, all lubricated by a wee liquid tribute to childhood days spent holidaying in Speyside.

As so often happens, appetite duly stimulated, an opportunity to return arose within just a few weeks, but this time to a rather more cosseted version of the experience.

Rugby was once again the catalyst, albeit its other code, as the Scotland rugby league team prepared for its Four Nations campaign-ending trip to Workington, offering scope to stop off at Windermere's Beech Hill Hotel and Spa, something of an accommodation upgrade on the Patterdale Youth Hostel's excellent but rudimentary facilities.

At the very least there was the definite prospect of a less intimidating route to bed than the ladder to the top bunk that had to be negotiated after Andy had pulled rank, insisting that his dodgy knees, that had just yomped so efficiently up Helvellyn, could not cope with such a challenge.

Nocturnal comfort was far from the only attraction, though and, magnificent as the views of the surrounding area had been from atop its highest peaks, there is an awful lot to be said for looking across England's biggest lake from the comfort of an outdoor Jacuzzi, after a brief doggy paddle in the pool, or just as a way of gently chilling after a stint in the adjacent sauna or steam room. Not a bad way to prepare, either, for some pretty spectacular dinner offerings that are a cut above Patterdale's pub fare, welcome as that had been, or to recover from as hefty a breakfast as you could hope to encounter.

The real joy of this hotel, though, is its



location.

By dint of being just a couple of miles south of Bowness-on-Windermere it offers calming retreat from the bustle of little towns and villages that are so packed with tourists in November that it is hard to imagine finding room to move in the height of summer.

Lovely as many of those are, the real attraction of the area is in the countryside that surrounds them and, on a Steve recommendation, there had even been another chance to sample the outdoors on the way down, dropping into Grasmere for a late, long-shadowed afternoon hike up to Helm Crag.

That route bypassed a shrine to a member of the Wordsworth family, Dorothy rather than William admittedly, but apt none the less because the first fall

of winter had dusted the terrain in a way that was as attractive as the gilding of any daffodils. There is something particularly uplifting about snow-covered hills on a bright, calm day.

Closer still to the Beech Hill was another short, but rewarding walk, up out of the centre of Bowness, to the place that is perhaps more responsible than any other for the scale of modern-day tourism in these parts.

Few travel books are as well-known as Alfred Wainwright's Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells, a project that effectively began in 1930 when the then 23-year-old took a day out from his home in the industrial north, alighted a train in Bowness and climbed the path from the station to Orrest Head, little more than a bump on the landscape, but strategically

perfect in terms of unveiling the glory of the Lakes.

In the autobiographical Ex-Fellwalker, Wainwright would recall: "... quite suddenly we emerged from the trees and were on a bare headland and, as though a curtain had been dramatically torn aside, beheld a magnificent view ..."

On reflection my own autumnal ramblings were somewhat out of sequence, concluding with what had been Wainwright's introduction, having begun by taking on the highest, if not necessarily toughest, challenges available.

The shared aspect of the experience, however, is an awakening to a place that is not that far from home but is sufficiently otherworldly, with its meres and its fells, its tarns and its becks, its hows and its thwaites, to be such

## 5 THINGS TO DO IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

Those with children and/or a sentimental streak will love a visit to either or both of Beatrix Potter's house, Hill Top in Near Sawrey and The World of Beatrix Potter Attraction at Bowness-on-Windermere. **Higher brow literary tastes are also accommodated in a part of the world that is synonymous with romantic poetry, the Wordsworth Museum sitting alongside his first family home at Dove Cottage in Grasmere.**

For a dramatic change of gear, Lakeland Motor Museum in Backbarrow is surely nothing short of a petrol-head Mecca, containing a tribute to the racing careers

of father and son Malcolm and Donald Campbell, including full-size replicas of the 1935 Blue Bird car, 1939 Blue Bird Boat and, perhaps a little morbidly, the 1967 jet hydroplane Bluebird K7 which lay undiscovered for more than 30 years after the crash which killed the younger of them.

**For the stimulation of being on the water, but at a more sensible pace, there is an array of options to choose from with Windermere Cruises.**

A less sedate passage awaits those looking for a real spot of time travel, to the days of Emperor Hadrian's regime via what is claimed to be England's joint-steepest road to Hardknott Fort from which, in conducive conditions, the Isle of Man can be seen. They knew a thing or two about vantage points those Romans.

an obvious inspiration for Tolkien's hobbit-infested Middle Earth. Further adventures beckon, with Wainwright's 192-mile Northern England coast-to-coast walk a tempting proposition. If taken on, though, it will be from east to west, hostel-hopping along the way perhaps, but with the prospect of rounding things off by contemplating the achievement over a celebratory glass of Beech Hill bubbles while also sitting among them. Satisfying as it may be to push yourself, a little bit of pampering rarely goes amiss.

*Kevin Ferrie was a guest of Beech Hill Hotel and Spa on Windermere, who have an array of special offers available, including for Christmas at: <http://beechhillhotel.co.uk/gifts/fabulous-lakes-escapes/>*