

Windermere West Side

This elevated walk alongside Windermere's undeveloped western side features a dramatic viewing point at Low Blind How, where a gap in the wall leads to a crag that affords sweeping views of the lake, islands and the Troutbeck fells.

Difficulty: Challenging

Distance: 7.5 miles

Time: 4hr 30min

Starting Point

Ash Landing Car Park

Stage 1

From the Ash Landing car park take the track with a low wooden barrier, leading uphill to the right at the back of the car park. Walk up the track and some stone steps. This leads to a junction with a tall beech tree in front of you and a ruined building (Claife Station) beyond. Turn left along the broad path, which veers right towards the building. Just before the building, turn left and continue uphill until you meet a junction. Turn right (signed to Hawkshead).

Stage 2

When you reach a wicket gate at a junction with a walled bridleway, turn left (signed to Sawrey) through woodland and pasture. At the crossroads, take the right turn. Follow this, veering right at the top of the ridge.

Stage 3

Skirting a marsh or pond (depending on the time of year) go through a gate, continuing with a wall on your right and a conifer plantation on your left until you reach a knoll. At the fork, ignore the left turn and carry on to a gate with a step stile. Cross the stile and continue. To your left is High Blind How.

Stage 4

Follow the path through the woodland and eventually bear left uphill, to the top of the ridge. Here you veer right, running parallel to the lake (looking out for a path off to the right, which leads to a classic view over Windermere). Continue on the broad path until you reach a junction signed Hawkshead to the left and Belle Grange straight ahead.

Stage 5

Take the path straight ahead (following the signs for Belle Grange), following yellow arrows through woodland and bracken beds. Ignore the sharp turn to the right and keep straight on, keeping parallel with the lake. Eventually, you'll drop down and cross a stream. Just beyond this, the path meets a junction signed as a public bridleway.

Stage 6

Turn left here (signed to Hawkshead). The track winds uphill at first, through larch woodland with Grange Beck on the right. After it passes a National Trust sign (to Claife Estate), it levels out. Ignore any side paths until the path crosses a much broader forest track, signed as a bridleway to High Wray.

Stage 7

At the crossroad, turn right. After about 300yd (275m) there's a path to the right, marked with a blue arrow. Follow this through woodland until the path meets a wall and a tall gate. Go through and walk through the conifer plantation, ignoring any side paths leading to the road. Eventually you'll go downhill to another gate. Go through and continue right through birch woodland. Go through another gate and past buildings on the right (National Trust Basecamp). Go straight ahead to join a bigger forest track, turn right and continue over the cattle grid and to the road junction at the bottom of the hill.

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Stage 8

At the junction, turn right, walking along the road signed to Wray Castle and Ambleside, through the village of High Wray. Pass the village hall and after about 100yd (90m), where the road veers left, turn right and follow the footpath to the lake. After about 10yd (9m), go through the squeeze stile and little gate in the wall, walk down some steps and down the field, keeping the wall to your left. Go through another wicket gate and follow the field edge down to a step stile in front of a boathouse, on the lake shore.

Stage 9

Cross the stile onto the main lakeside path and turn right to start your return, (or left for the optional Wray Castle section, see Step 10 below). Follow the well-surfaced lakeshore trail, for approximately 3.5 miles (5.6km), passing through Red Nab car park on the way, past the Strawberry Gardens caravan site and back to the start point at Ash Landing car park.

Stage 10

Optional extra stage: If you have more time you can turn left on the main lakeshore track and visit Wray Castle, a mock Gothic fortress built in the 1840s. The castle has a café and toilets for that well-deserved pit stop, and is open on selected days between Easter and October. The grounds and café are open all year round.

The grounds are open all year. Turn left on the main track and after a short distance look out for a gate on the right with a well-surfaced path that will take you beside the lake and up to the castle in around 5-10 minutes. Retrace your steps back to the main lakeshore track mentioned in Step 9.

Finish Point



Points of Interest

Thomas West wrote one of the first guidebooks to the Lakes in 1778. The guide included several viewpoints or 'stations' where people could enjoy the best views of Windermere. Claife Station (1799) was built on the site of Thomas West's first viewing station.

One of the best places in Lakeland to see wild deer, Claife Woods is home to both red and roe deer.

The Crier of Claife, a particularly noisy ghost, is reputed to be the spirit of a monk whose mission was to rescue fallen women. Alas, he fell in love, was rejected, went mad and died, and has wailed about it ever since. Eventually the crier was exorcised and banished to a small quarry

Claife Woods is a great place to see red squirrels. Squirrel populations are monitored and supplementary feeding stations are provided to help the red squirrels and control the number of grey squirrels.