

# In the Footsteps of the Ancients

This walk, first produced by Neil Coates and published by Sigma Leisure in 1992 has been re-walked and slightly modified; it comes highly recommended. The route is full of interest, beautiful land and seascapes and provides a gentle introduction to a magical land shaping and being shaped by man's habitation for at least 3,000 years.



Low Furness,  
South  
Cumbria

## Footsteps of the Ancients

Route: Great Urswick~ Birkrigg Common-  
Sunbrick~ Little Urswick

Distance: About 5 miles

Map: OS Explorer OL6 Scale 1:25000

Conditions: Generally good walking, some craggy  
hill walking.

Strong boots or shoes required.

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Start: The General Burgoyne, Great Urswick.

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Access: Great Urswick is about 4 miles south of  
Ulverston.

From Ulverston take the A590 towards Barrow;  
after 2 miles, having passed through Swarthmoor  
and Cross-a-Moor with its traffic lights, a minor  
road is sign-posted to the left to Great Urswick  
as you descend the hill. Follow the road into the  
village passing the 'Coot on the Tarn' on your  
left. The General Burgoyne is on the right just  
before the Post Office and Shop.

Parking: In the village and by the church of St.  
Mary and St. Michael, Urswick.

There is a regular bus service between Ulverston  
and Barrow which passes through Urswick Mon-  
day~ Saturday (No.10)



The Tarn, a stretch of water held to be bottomless is also said to have drowned the original village of Urswick. The local priest, on an undeterminable date, allegedly cursed the village women for their ungodly ways, the result being that the village sank into a suddenly-opened hole in the ground which subsequently filled with a great depth of water. This, so the story goes, is why the church of St. Mary and St. Michael (well worth visiting for its historical architecture, wooden carvings, its ancient cross fragments and its sense of peace) is so far from the old part of the village!

### The Walk:

Turn left from the General Burgoyne and walk along the road passing the 'Coot on the Tarn' on your right to reach the junction in front of the 'Derby Arms'; here turn right, walk along the lane, essentially the village's other street, which is lined with old cottages and houses dating back to the 1600's. The village history is a lot older, the name being Old Norse for 'Village of Wild Cattle.

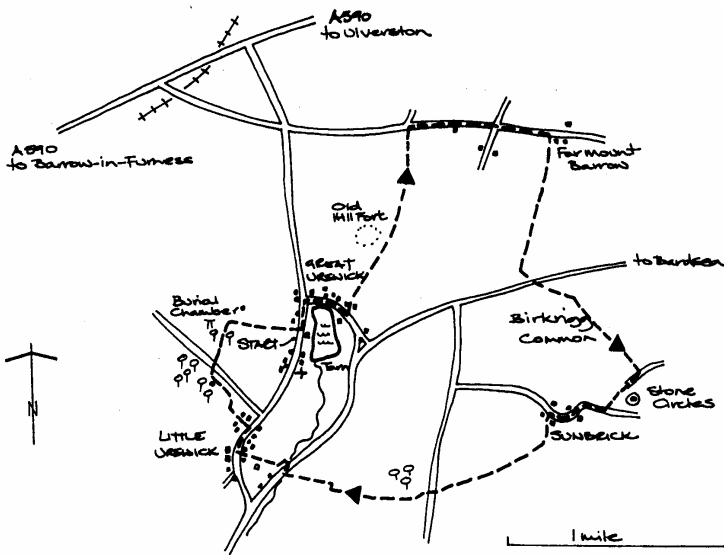
Towards the end of the 'street' look for a pebble-dashed house on your left: immediately beyond a rough lane climbs up the hillside passing between the house and a smaller building.

Follow this lane as it winds up between limestone walls capped with thorn hedges. After a while the hedges disappear. Look to your left at this point for distant views of the isolated mass of Black Combe, one of the Lake District's least known or climbed mountains. Looking back down the lane you get a good view down the shallow valleys of Low Furness to the sea beyond the long, curving spit that is Walney Island.

At the top of the track go through the left of the two gates and walk ahead along a line of broken down walling. To your left the hill-top is capped by a large area of exposed limestone blocks known as *Skelmore Heads*. It's the site of a British Hill Fort and there are remains of an ancient barrow nearby, although not much can be seen by the untrained eye

*You can feel it's wild history!*

From this modest hilltop an extensive view to the peaks of the South Lakes, the great Forest of Grizedale and across Morecambe Bay to the Penines and Ingleborough. Join the line of the wall which runs along and below and to the east of the fort, keeping this wall to your right. Go through the gate at the far end near which is a waymark arrow and walk on through the pasture, a barbed wire fence on your right. Go through the snicket stile at the end on your right and, within a few yards, a further one on your left. Walk along the left edge of two further fields and then down a short walled track to reach a junction of minor roads. Turn right following the sign to **Bardsea**. A keen observer just might spot a number of Roman 'tooled' blocks of sandstone along the wall.



Walk along this quiet back road for just over half a mile, going straight across the crossroads and continuing towards Bardsea. The hedgerows hereabouts groan under the weight of honeysuckle, the verges are rich in Red Campion, yellow Birdsfoot Trefoil and climbing blue Tufted Vetch.

Just over the crest of a hill and immediately before the bungalow on your right take a somewhat overgrown bridleway which runs alongside the garden wall of the bungalow. Remain with this for nearly a mile (*again looking out for Roman 'dressed stones' in the right hand wall*) soon passing by a hangar of beech and sycamore, after which the bridleway becomes a wide green swathe between limestone walls. Off to the left is a monument atop a hillside above Bardsea whilst ahead the bracken covered, rounded hilltop of Birkrigg Common. Go through the ramshackle kissing gate at the end and take the path which angles half-right up through the bracken (ie not the one which parallels the wall). Cross diagonally over the road and continue up the rutted track beyond for a short distance, then bearing right along the distinct path

which cuts up through the bracken. You're gradually gaining height on Birkrigg Common but all the time remaining a good distance below and to the left (east) of the summit. Join a wider path which comes in from the right and walk along to the small area of close-cropped grass. Cross this and take the widest path opposite. In a short while the delightful village of Bardsea comes into view nestling by a small headland jutting out into the Bay (*Conishead Bank where the ancient 'cross-sands route' exited*).

You'll soon reach the corner of a wall; carry on with the wall off to your left, slowly losing some height and heading, in line of sight, for Heysham Power Station, some 15 miles away across the sands of Morecambe Bay. In a few hundred yards turn right along the rutted old cart track which comes out onto the common through a gate off to your left. After just a few yards angle off to the left along one of the paths through the bracken and you'll shortly reach a fine survival of a stone circle known as the 'Druids' Circle'. There are in fact two circles, the stones of the outermost one are lying flat and hidden in the bracken.

The inner circle has 10 stones and when excavated in the early 1900s produced evidence of several cremations and an urn.



The views from here are extensive all round. Much closer to hand, the tiny island just off Bardsea is Chapel Island, site of the ruins of a medieval chapel or cell where travellers 'over sands' were refreshed and sheltered. Take a sight south west to the few buildings of Sunbrick hamlet and walk towards them, soon joining a minor road which leads to this tiny farming community. Most of the few cottages and farms date

back several centuries, the first farm you pass, for example, has a date stone displaying 1655 to the world.

*This was a significant Quaker settlement and the graveyard contains a number of former 'Friends' including Margaret Fell, wife of George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends.*

Where the road bends sharply right go ahead along the lane with the 'no through road' sign. Go through the farmyard at the end (the farmer has way marked a diversion which avoids entering the very muddy stock yard) And along the rough track beyond. Stick with this path as it winds along between walls and hedges, passing through any gates which happen to be across it. Off to the left is a small limestone quarry with a considerable lime kiln alongside it. The track gradually narrows to become a narrow path lined by a high thorn hedge with, in Summer at least, head-high nettles and thistles. Views ahead and to the left stretch across the southern end of Walney Island to the gas platforms out in the Bay.

At the end of the path go straight across the road and through the gap stile to the left of the field gate, then walk through the boulder-strewn field to the two darker stones which catch the eye ahead.

These 'dark stones' turn out to be two old stone cattle troughs. Off to the right is an area of extraordinarily twisted and gnarled old hawthorns growing on an area of exposed limestone which has been recognised as the site of a Neolithic settlement.

Your route lies along the left edge of the field; pass by the old kissing gate beside the short stretch of wall and walk with the hedge/wall on your left. At the far end of this field find the kissing gate through the threadbare hedge (about 20 yards into the field) and then walk down across the subsequent field towards the brown coloured cottage in the middle distance. The village ahead of you is Little Urswick. Off to the right Great Urswick nestles along the north and east banks of the Tarn and on the far northern horizon, the sharp peak of Coniston Old Man.

At the foot of the field go through the gap stile, turn right to the kissing gate, go through this and turn left, then walking alongside the wall to the lane at the bottom. Turn right along this lane and walk to the public footpath sign for Little Urswick on your left about 50 yards along.

Cross the stream and look to the left for a rusty kissing gate. Once through this keep to the wall/hedge on your right and walk up along the long, narrow pasture passing by a ruined barn some yards to your left. At the top of the pasture continue ahead through the kissing gate and walk up through the farmyard to emerge onto Little Urswick's village street, turning right along it.

In about 150 yards look on your left for a public footpath sign for Dimple Holes Lane and go along this between the new houses and the old cottages. Go through the gate and carry on up past the garden, following the field road up the rough pasture. Towards the top of this field is a way mark arrow on a post; follow the direction this indicates to the far corner of the wall and then round this corner and walk to the ladder stile at the far end of the field. Beyond this is a small pasture.

A field road curves right down the pasture; walk down this to the small stone building at the bottom end, to the left of which is a stile to climb giving access beneath a few trees and over another stile to a minor road. Go straight over the road and into the field opposite, walking towards the knoll of limestone ahead..

The stile out of this field is about 35 yards in from the right hand hedge, at the end of a short stretch of stone walling. Once over this climb onto the small knoll. *To your left are the remains of an old chambered tomb, a limestone block perched on two others.*

Walk up alongside the wall on the right of the knoll and go through the field gate at the top, turning right to follow the hedge along the bottom end of the pasture at the top of which is a bungalow. Climb the ladder stile and continue ahead to the gap stile, beyond which a track winds across a field littered with limestone blocks, birch and ash trees. At the far side join the old lane which soon runs past a few cottages and issues onto Great Urswick's main street.

Turn right to return to the start.

This Walk is one of a number produced by the  
HIDDEN LIGHT-LOW FURNESS  
ASSOCIATION, a local community project  
linked to Hidden Britain Centres intending to share  
something of the unique nature and heritage of Low  
Furness' with you. For more information see our  
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