

Grasmere & the Central Lake District

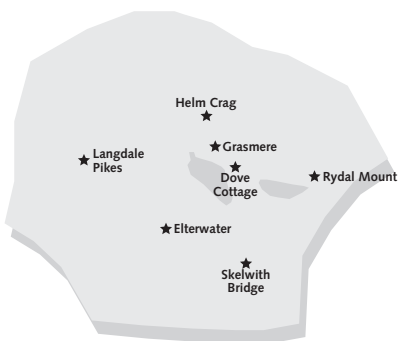


The broad green bowl of Grasmere acts as a kind of geographical junction for the Lake District, sandwiched between the rumpled peaks of the Langdale Pikes to the west and the gentle hummocks and open dales of the eastern fells. But Grasmere is more than just a geological centre – it's a literary one too thanks to the poetic efforts of William Wordsworth and chums, who collectively set up home in Grasmere during the late 18th century and transformed the valley into the spiritual hub of the Romantic movement.

It's not too hard to see what drew so many poets, painters and thinkers to this idyllic corner of England. Grasmere is one of the most naturally alluring of the Lakeland valleys, studded with oak woods and glittering lakes, carpeted with flower-filled meadows, and ringed by a stunning circlet of fells including Loughrigg, Silver Howe and the sculptured summit of Helm Crag. Wordsworth spent countless hours wandering the hills and trails around the valley, and the area is dotted with literary landmarks connected to the poet and his contemporaries, as well as boasting the nation's foremost museum devoted to the Romantic movement. But it's not solely a place for bookworms: Grasmere is also the gateway to the hallowed hiking valleys of Great and Little Langdale, home to some of the cut-and-dried classics of Lakeland walking as well as one of the country's most historic hiking inns.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get up close and personal with the Wordsworths at **Dove Cottage** (p87) and **Rydal Mount** (p91)
- Bone up on the Romantics' backstory at Grasmere's fascinating **Wordsworth Museum** (p89)
- Banish those camping blues by snuggling down in a luxurious **yurt** (p96) in the grounds of Rydal Hall
- Sink your teeth into a stonking Sunday lunch at Elterwater's **Britannia Inn** (p97) or **Chesters Cafe by the River** (p96) in Skelwith Bridge
- Tackle the stunning ascents of **Helm Crag** (p92) or the **Langdale Pikes** (p86)
- Stop off for a slab of Britain's best gingerbread at **Sarah Nelson's Gingerbread Shop** (p89) in Grasmere



■ Area of largest lake (Grasmere): 0.24 sq miles

■ Number of visitors to Dove Cottage in 2007: 61,870

■ Highest fell in Great Langdale (High Raise): 2500ft

ITINERARY 1

GRASMERE LOOP & OLD COFFIN TRAIL WALK

3.5 miles/2 hours/Grasmere centre

You don't always have to slog your guts out for scenic views. This popular lakeside trail tracks the shores of Grasmere Lake and Rydal Water, before making an easy loop back behind Rydal Mount along the old pallbearer's route to St Oswald's Church.

Start out in Grasmere, and follow Red Bank Rd past the tea garden. Look out for a left-hand turn over a stile and onto a bridlway about 10 minutes' walk from Grasmere, and follow the trail down to the lakeshore, from where there are fantastic views up to Helm Crag and Dunmail Raise. Keep heading east to the far shore of the lake, past a weir and a small footbridge. At the next junction you could backtrack west along the upper trail to the viewpoint from Loughrigg Terrace. Alternatively follow the trail east along the shores of **Rydal Water**, or plump for the higher trail that leads up to the disused slate quarries and the gaping maw of **Rydal Cave**.

Continue walking east towards Pelter Bridge, from where, if you wish, you can link up with the Underloughrigg trail (p57) into Ambleside; otherwise, stick to the path, cross over a small footbridge onto the main A591 and then take the left-hand turn up to **Rydal Mount** (p91).

Up behind the house is a path (signed 'Public Bridlway Grasmere') that leads into open fields. This is the beginning of the old coffin trail that leads all the way to **St Oswald's Church** (p89) back in Grasmere; look out for the stone slabs along the route that once allowed coffin carriers to rest their burdens without having to lay them on the ground. The path offers lovely views over Rydal Water and **Nab Cottage** (p93), passing beneath the face of Nab Scar on your right-hand side. Carry on past **White Moss Common** on your left; eventually you'll reach a paved road where you can turn right back towards Dove Cottage and Grasmere.

