

Coniston, Hawkshead & Around



She might not have the stature of Windermere or the comeliness of Derwent Water, but compared to her sister lakes Coniston Water somehow manages to retain an air of unruffled serenity even on the busiest of days. Stretching for five glassy miles and overlooked by the sombre granite stack known as the Old Man, the lake is still famous for the world-record speed attempts made here by Malcolm and Donald Campbell between the 1930s and 1960s. These days it's an altogether more tranquil place, and the only boats you'll see skimming across its surface are the solar-powered Coniston Launches and the puffing steam yacht *Gondola*, which glide out across the lake to John Ruskin's former home at Brantwood.

Out to the east, mountain bikers, walkers and art lovers congregate along the shady trails of Grizedale Forest, while a little to the north is the pretty whitewashed village of Hawkshead, where a young Willie Wordsworth received his elementary education. But if you can face the crowds, there's no doubting the top draw in this corner of the Lakes – the idyllic farmhouse of Hill Top in the village of Near Sawrey, where Beatrix Potter famously put pen to paper and dreamt up her anthropomorphic tales of mischievous kittens, house-proud hedgehogs and light-pawed bunny rabbits.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Trace Beatrix Potter's biography at **Hill Top** (p123)
- Explore the outlandish outdoor artworks of **Grizedale Forest** (p122)
- Cruise a stretch of **Coniston Water** (p114) in a steam yacht or solar-powered launch
- Indulge in microbrewed beer and modern gastro-cooking at the **Drunken Duck** (p121)
- Keep your eyes peeled for Squirrel Nutkin around the shores of **Tarn Hows** (p121)
- Sit at William Wordsworth's very own desk at the **Hawkshead Grammar School** (p118)
- Browse around John Ruskin's elegant lake-side retreat at **Brantwood** (p112)



■ Area of largest lake (Coniston Water): 1.84 sq miles

■ Visitors to Grizedale Forest in 2007: 231,500

■ Official number of tales penned by Beatrix Potter: 23

ITINERARY 1

CONQUERING THE OLD MAN WALK

6.5 miles/3 to 4 hours/Coniston

Hunkering above Coniston like a benevolent giant, the Old Man (2276ft) presents an irresistible challenge for hikers. There are endless ways to attack the summit – we've chosen a moderate route (although you'll still be tackling some steep ascents).

The trail starts beside Coniston's **Black Bull Inn** and heads uphill past the disused railway station to a drystone wall at the end of the paved road. Where the tarmac ends, the **Walna Scar Rd** continues across the open fell-side. Continue west along the trail past the small reed-covered pond of **Boo Tarn**, where a zigzagging path leads north to the summit via Bursting Stone Quarry. Carry on west instead, across the fell for another mile or so, until you reach a right-hand fork that leads north past the scree slopes of **Dow Crag** to **Goat's Water**.

Take a break at the tarn and fuel up – the climb up to **Goat's Hawse** is steep and can be slippery, so take things slow. Ascend via the east side of the lake and when you reach the saddle you'll need to turn sharp right; the hump of the Old Man is clearly visible to the southeast.

After the slog up Goat's Hawse, the final hike up Old Man feels like a breeze; at the top you'll be rewarded with a 360-degree panorama east over Coniston Water, north to the Langdale Pikes, northwest to the Scafell Range and west to Dow Crag.

From the summit you should be able to see a zigzag trail tracking down the peak's northern side. Follow the path down to the shores of **Low Water**, and then east past the old copper mines and stone works beneath **Colt Crag**. Continue along the old quarry road, and at the next junction take the left-hand fork, which skirts the banks of **Levers Water Beck** and **Church Beck** down to Coniston. If you have time, just before the junction turn-off a side trail leads north into the rock-strewn area known as Boulder Valley, with its famous 25ft-high 'Pudding Stone'; climbing this huge lump of rock is probably best left for experienced rock-bunnies.

