

Ullswater



Second only in stature and stateliness to Windermere, the elegant lake of Ullswater cuts a regal 8-mile sweep through the eastern fells, stretching between the small villages of Pooley Bridge in the north and Glenridding and Patterdale in the south. Gouged out by a long-extinct glacier, it's arguably one of the most dramatic of all the Lakeland valleys, with each shore flanked by lofty mountains and serrated summits, topped off at its southern end by the unmistakable razor ridges leading up to Helvellyn, England's third-highest mountain.

Storybook steamers have been puttering their way across the waters since 1859, and the lake's shorelines are lined with ancient stands of birch, oak and hazel. Overlooking the lake are the woodland parks of Gowbarrow and Glencoyne, whose annual daffodil displays were canonised by Wordsworth in one of his best-loved poems. But Ullswater is a long way from a well-kept secret these days, and it can feel frustratingly logjammed in summer; you can usually find more solitude in the little-visited valleys on the lake's eastern side, or by venturing away from the lakeshore altogether to explore the rolling parkland of the Lowther estate and the wild valley of Haweswater out to the southeast. And if it's wide-angle panoramas you're seeking, there aren't many to match the view from the sky-top summit of Kirkstone Pass, the highest road pass in the national park.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tame your nerves on the tightrope walk along Striding Edge to **Helvellyn** (opposite)
- Hop aboard the historic **steamers** (p167) on Ullswater
- Wander among Wordsworthian daffodils around **Gowbarrow Park** (p170)
- Visit Cumbria's most beautiful mountain chapel, **St Martin's** (p174) in Martindale
- Take a wildlife safari around the estate of **Lowther Park** (p175)
- Scan the skies around **Haweswater** (p176) for England's last golden eagle



■ Area of largest lake (Ullswater): 3.41 sq miles

■ Ullswater 'Steamers' passengers in 2007: 187,469

■ Number of daffodil varieties in Britain: 27,000 to 35,000

ITINERARY 1 HELVELLYN HIKE

8 miles/6 to 7 hours/Patterdale to Glenridding

The classic Helvellyn route is the ridge scramble along **Striding Edge**, a strenuous challenge even for experienced walkers, with dizzying drops and some all-fours scrambling – don't try it if you're even slightly wary of heights, steer clear in wintry conditions and come suitably prepared.

There are several possible routes, but one of the most rewarding starts along the gorgeous Gisedale Valley. Head west from Patterdale and, after about half a mile, cross **Gisedale Beck** via a humpback bridge before ascending the flank of **Birkhouse Moor**. After a long, steep climb you'll reach the **Hole-in-the-Wall** landmark, a good place to take a breather, with grand views up to the Helvellyn summit, the glacial Red Tarn and the dramatic spine of Striding Edge.

Head southwest beneath **Bleaberry Crag** and over the rocky mound of **High Spying How** before venturing onto the ridge itself. Several trails wind their way along the edge, offering various degrees of difficulty; whichever you choose, take it carefully. At the end of the ridge it's a scramble over the rock tower known as the **Chimney** (or along the easier right-hand trail) and up another sharp, rocky section to the summit (3116ft), where you'll be rewarded with fabulous views southeast to **St Sunday Crag**, northeast to the pointy peak of **Catstycam** (2917ft), west to Thirlmere and east to Ullswater.

Three memorials can be found around the summit: the first to Robert Dixon, who slipped off the peak while following a foxhounds' trail, and a second to the headstrong climber Charles Gough who, in 1805, became the first recorded person to fall off the mountain. A third memorial marks the point where two daring pilots, John Leeming and Bert Hinkler, landed their plane on 22 December 1926. Some people will do anything to avoid a walk!

After the dizzying challenge of Striding Edge, the descent via **Swirral Edge** is a doddle, with a clear trail winding down between Catstycam and **Red Tarn**. You can now either retrace your steps back to Patterdale or take the alternative route along **Red Tarn Beck**, passing Greenside Mine before descending to Glenridding.

