

My 214 Story

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Membership number: 3812

First fell climbed: Coniston Old Man, 6 April 2003

Last fell climbed: Great End, 14 October 2019

I was a bit of a late-comer to the Lakes.

My first visit was with my family when I was 15. We rented a cottage in Grange for a week at Easter. Despite my parents' ambitious attempts to cajole my sister Cath and me up Scafell Pike and Helvellyn, the weather turned us back each time. I remember reaching Sty Head and the wind being so strong my Mum was blown over. My sister, 18 at the time, eventually just sat down in the middle of marshy ground somewhere below the Langdale Pikes and refused to walk any further.

I didn't return then until I was 28. It was my Dad's 60th and we took a cottage in Coniston in April 2003. The Old Man of Coniston became my first summit, and I also managed to get up Helvellyn via Striding Edge with Cath and my brother-in-law Dave. Clambering along the edge and up on to the still snow-capped summit was thrilling. A love of the Lakes, and in particular reaching and walking on high ground, was finally born.

Visits to the Lakes became more regular after that, but often only for a week a year as work and other commitments limited opportunities. A number of favourites established themselves: the Langdale Pikes; Lingmoor Fell; Catbells and Wansfell among them. I gradually became more ambitious in the peaks I was willing to take on. My first ridge walk was the Newlands horseshoe in November 2010. It was a cold, crystal-clear day with plenty of snow on the summits. Standing on top of Dale Head with my parents, then in their late 60s, is a vivid memory we all still treasure.

It wasn't until 2015 that I idly totted up how many fells I had summited and realised it totalled 74. The challenge of completing all 214 then took hold.

At the same time, I had just become self-employed. I now had much more flexibility to manage my time. I started planning walks to complete the Wainwright books one-by-one.

On a family break to Braithwaite in October 2016 I hit the fells with gusto. On one day I completed a fantastic extended round of the Coledale fells, taking in Sail, Eel Crag, Wandope, Whiteless Pike, Grasmoor, Hopegill Head, Whiteside and Grisedale Pike. On my way up Sand Hill, I met a lady who said she felt like she was in the middle of a giant adult playground. That pretty much summed up my view too. I completed the North Western Fells on Broom Fell that week, motivating me to keep going.

Based in York, I could reach Ullswater in 2 hours so day trips were a possibility. Over the next couple of years I therefore concentrated on the Central, Eastern and Far Eastern Fells. On several occasions I got up in York at 5am and would be walking by 7:30am. Walking with my friend Steve, 14 years my junior and in the Army, pushed me to tackle more challenging routes. Some big walks helped the peak-bagging statistics. This included a 17.5-mile, 13-fell marathon around the Martindale summits; and a linear 13-mile traverse of the Helvellyn ridge summits from Clough Head to Seat Sandal. Feeling very proud of myself as I approached the third of 10 summits at Watson's Dodd, I was put in my place by a fell runner who breezed past me, casually reaching down to touch the cairn without stopping. It was a hot day and I completed the walk with several quickly-consumed pints in the Traveller's Rest on Dunmail Raise.

By June 2018 I had completed 4 Wainwright books. Next came the Northern Fells. This was relatively easy as there are only 24 and I had already chipped away at the obvious south-facing peaks over the years, including Skiddaw and Blencathra. I enjoyed the quiet fells 'Back o' Skiddaw', presenting a different perspective on the Lake District I thought I knew so well. A highlight was another linear walk, this time from Bassenthwaite through Skiddaw Forest all the way back to our rented cottage in Portinscale. The walk took in Bakestall, Great Calva and Lonscale Fell. From Great Calva I looked down the 'Lake District fault line' towards Thirlmere and beyond. The climb up on to Lonscale Fell from Burnt Horse is surely one of the steepest in the district! A circuit of the Skiddaw massif with my sister Cath, ending on Dodd, completed the Northern Fells on 10 July 2018.

That left many of the Western Fells, and the core high Southern Fells including the Scafells. Given their relative remoteness, this would involve greater planning and determination.

I plotted various routes using the excellent OS Maps app and also used Stuart Marshall's *Walking The Wainwrights* to help plan all the walks required to complete the 214. Needless to say, I also read Wainwright's books over and over again to establish the most scenic and rewarding walks. My objective was not just to visit the summits as quickly as possible; I wanted to experience as many different aspects of the Lakes as I could. I got it down to 10 big but manageable walks.

A benefit of this planning was to introduce me to some excellent Lakeland pubs. I enjoyed staying several times at the Kirkstile Inn, from where I tackled the Buttermere and Loweswater fells in September 2018. Steve and I also stayed at the Langstrath Inn in November 2018, climbing Base Brown, Green Gable, Great Gable and Seathwaite Fell. Cloud enveloped us at Green Gable but cleared completely as we arrived on the summit of Great Gable. The view down Wast Water from the Westmorland Cairn was magical.

I used the Kirkstile Inn again as a base for access into Ennerdale in July 2019. A high point was walking from Bowness Knot up to Caw Fell, then on to Haycock, Scoat Fell, Steeple, Red Pike and Pillar. I seemed to slide most of the way down from Wind Gap back into Ennerdale. It was an exhilarating walk.

From there I drove to Wasdale. In all my visits to the Lakes I had never reached it before. Arriving early on a fine, still morning, I stopped for the perfect view down the lake to Great Gable. Staying that night at the Wasdale Head Inn, I climbed Kirk Fell and Yewbarrow separately on the same day. For a relatively low fell, Yewbarrow was a tough climb. On my way up via Great Door I met a Scottish guy who told me I was mad to be contemplating coming down via Stirrup Crag. I took Wainwright's advice and found the path from the ridge which skirted round the side of the rocks. I then enjoyed literally surfing down Dorehead Scree, which must be the fastest way off any fell possible. A circuit of Buckbarrow, Seatallan and Middle Fell allowed me to finish the Western Fells on 17 July 2019.

Another pub I greatly enjoyed was the Woolpack Inn at the bottom of the Hardknott Pass: really friendly with excellent beer and food. The landlady darted around in a one-seat electric buggy - perfect for the surrounding narrow lanes. A beautiful, well-graded and varied walk nearby (recommended by Wainwright) was to climb Whin Rigg and Illgill Head from Miterdale.

I hadn't made any definite plans for what should be my final fell. My only aim was for it to be a fairly significant summit.

I had tried several times to climb Scafell Pike over the years but been turned back by the weather. By part-accident, part-design, the final summits I had to tackle were the core high peaks of the Southern Fells.

On a spectacular cloudless early morning in September 2019 I drove from Coniston over Wrynose and Hardknott to Eskdale, without seeing a single car. My only hold-up was coming face-to-face with a herd of cattle standing in the road half-way up the Hardknott Pass. From Eskdale I climbed Scafell via Cam Spout and Foxes Tarn. It was a tough but exciting climb, especially up the narrow gully to the tarn. I didn't see a soul until I reached the summit, where I met a farmer from Wha House collecting in stray sheep. What a job! I returned over Slight Side and drove back to Coniston, stopping on Wrynose to dash up Cold Pike for good measure.

And so my final walk was to take in Lingmell, Scafell Pike and Great End. On 14 October 2019 I rose early in Braithwaite and drove down to Seathwaite. I was up at Sty Head by 8:45am. Spurred on by the prospect of achieving the 214, I bounded up the Corridor Route and was on Lingmell an hour later. Arriving at Scafell Pike summit at 10:15am, I had it to myself. I lingered there for half an hour, savouring the moment. Cloud came and went. In time a lady arrived from Wasdale. She told me she climbed up regularly to collect litter: a story both to depress and inspire. I told her I was moments away from completing the Wainwrights and she excitedly shook my hand.

After another half-hour of boulder-hopping I arrived at Great End. Perhaps subconsciously I had intended to finish here all along.

I ran most of the way down to Esk Hause and on down Grains Gill, arriving at the Lodore Hotel at 1:30pm just as my family were emerging from lunch.

Chris Taylor
24 October 2019