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Scafell Pike, the Highest Mountain in England, from Wasdale Head

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Wasdale Head (NY 187086)
Ordnance Survey map	Explorer OL6 The English Lakes – South Western Area
Distance	6.5 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This is a hard walk but this is one of those hills you just have to climb it being the highest mountain in England at 978 metres (3209 feet). There are superb 360 ° views from the top with the whole of Lakeland laid out before you.

If I had to pick one word to describe this walk it would be “stone”. You ascend stony tracks (either “manicured” or natural), the top is one huge pile of stones ideal for ankle breaking! The descent is also stony. Possession of the equipment and the knowledge to navigate with map and compass are essential for safety in poor visibility on Scafell Pike due to difficulty defining the path across the rocks. There are sheer drops! Cliffs tower above you as you climb. On the descent, I have chosen to view and follow the dramatic Piers Gill which is a deep vertiginous cleft in the rock. A word of warning here, the path alongside Piers Gill approaches very close to its edge in places and there is one section of about 40 feet of very steep rock down which you have to climb. If you have vertigo issues, this part of the walk is probably not for you and after having a peek at the south eastern end of Piers Gill, you might prefer to take the more direct route back to Wasdale Head.

On a more positive note, the journey to Wasdale Head itself is worth the trip for spectacular views and if Wast Water is still, the reflections of the screes are amazing.

Start: The walk starts at Wasdale Head which is a dead end valley for vehicles (NY 187086). To get there, turn north east on to one of the various roads off the A595 between Ravenglass and Gosforth (or indeed from Gosforth). The roads are well signposted. Keep going until the road ends where there is plenty of parking at Wasdale Head although at peak times it does fill..

Start the walk by walking back down the road from Wasdale Head for no more than 300 yards and look out for a footpath sign on the left “Scafell Massif via Hollow Stones” (NY 186083). Take this path shortly going over a footbridge. The work starts here!

The footpath is well worn and easy to follow. As the path rounds the lower slope of Lingmell where there are good views of Wast Water, there is a faint path to the left (NY 190074). Ignore this and continue on the obvious main path which follows the

course of Lingmell Gill. At an altitude of 963 feet (courtesy of my GPS) (NY 195075), the path crosses the Gill. There is no bridge here so cross carefully. You will see the path at the other side where it has been “manicured” with boulders to prevent erosion.

The path climbs ever steeper becoming shale underfoot. Where the path forks, take the right fork. It passes beneath the steep cliffs of Mickledore and leads to a gully up which you scramble (NY 210069). It is a little loose underfoot but a fairly easy ascent. At the col, turn left (north east) towards Scafell Pike almost immediately passing a mountain rescue stretcher box. You will see Scafell Pike across towards the right.

The track itself is not easy to see across this very rocky hill but it is well marked with cairns. If you are faced with poor visibility, navigating across to the trig. point could be tricky as the cairns will not be clear and should not be attempted without a compass. The trig point lies at about 67° magnetic from near the stretcher box (unadjusted for mag. variation) although the route of the path does “wiggle” about a little.

As you get in clear sight of the summit itself, look out for another line of cairns indicating a route away to your left (north west) which will be the return route from the top. The summit is indicated by a stone built trig. point (NY 215072) and a large stone viewing platform. There are also several crudely built semi-circular shelters dotted about.

Enjoy the views from the summit before following the route mentioned above. The general direction of the route across the rocks is 302° (unadjusted) initially for about half a mile from the trig point before changing briefly to a north easterly direction but again it meanders to find the easiest path. After that half mile, the path becomes more obvious.

Descend Scafell Pike until you come to a crossroad of paths (NY 210077). A line of cairns indicates our route right (north easterly) to Piers Gill. The left turn (south west) is the direct route back to Wasdale Head should you either not wish to visit Piers Gill or having seen some of it, you decide not to walk its length for the reasons given earlier.

For Piers Gill, turn right at the aforementioned crossroads. The main track soon heads off into the distance towards Styhead Tarn but after less than a quarter of a mile take the fainter track to the left (NY 214077). Piers Gill should now be obvious and the path follows its right hand edge. The Gill performs a sharp right turn half way along.

At the end of Piers Gill, continue to descend following the path to the right of Lingmell Beck (as opposed to Lingmell **Gill**) by which you ascended.

Follow the Beck curving west back towards Wasdale Head. In places it is a little boggy and a little indistinct but the direction you want is obvious, just stick to the valley bottom. As the Beck swings south west to follow the curve of Lingmell, continue westwards towards the buildings of Wasdale Head which you should be able to see.

The Wasdale Head Hotel provides welcome refreshment.

