


Striding Edge and Helvellyn

Starting point and OS Grid reference	Pay and Display cp at Glenridding NY 386170
Ordnance Survey map	OL5 The English Lakes – North-Eastern area
Distance	7.4 miles
Traffic light rating	

Introduction: This is probably the most famous walk in the Lake District and the “must do” if you are visiting the area. It is a horseshoe walk providing dramatic views and a real feeling of drama and exposure. It has the potential to be dangerous but only if care is not taken or if it is attempted in the wrong conditions. I have done it many times, including in snow and ice but I was properly equipped with crampons and ice axe. Do not undertake this walk if it is very windy or in snowy and icy conditions unless you know what you are doing and have the equipment. Above all, if it is snowy, beware of cornices of snow which may have blown out from ridges. From above, they look solid. Do not go close to snowy edges. There has been more than one death caused by people falling through these cornices.

The walk is much easier and safer if done in the order described as a rocky scramble is climbed rather than descended.

In good conditions it is a fabulous walk with great views of Red Tarn below and a real feeling of achievement at the end.

Start: The walk starts from the pay and display car park in Glenridding (NY 386170). Turn right out of the car park, on to the main road and turn right. Go over the beck then turn right along the road in front of the shops where the bridleway sign indicates to Mires Beck and Helvellyn.

The road becomes a footpath. It is possible to take a more direct route avoiding Lanty’s Tarn but it is such a pretty spot it is a shame to miss it. Follow the footpath until you see a sign pointing left to Lanty’s Tarn. Follow the signs and after climbing some stone steps, you will arrive there (NY 383163).

From the northern end of Lanty’s Tarn, take the path in a south-westerly direction. After passing through Brownend Plantation, turn right at a crossroad of footpaths (NY 380159). The obvious path now starts to climb ever steeper and all you really need to do is keep climbing.

After about 1.3 miles, you arrive at the Hole-in-the-Wall (NY 360155), which is literally that where a wooden stile takes you on to Bleaberry Crag and Striding Edge. From the Hole-in-the-Wall, the line of the ridge stretches out before you and you can see the entire horseshoe circling Red Tarn, across the top of Helvellyn and down Swirral Edge at the other side.

Walk along the ridge taking whichever route you are comfortable with. There are sections where you can scramble along the rocky top of the ridge or take a more conventional footpath.

Keep a look out for the Dixon Memorial on the left which is easy to miss and commemorates Robert Dixon who fell to his death following the Patterdale hounds.

Eventually, you will see a very steep rocky ascent ahead of you to the summit but just before this is possibly the most difficult part known colloquially as “The Bad Step”. This is basically a descent down a 15/20 feet rocky “chimney” which involves an actual climb down the rocks. There are plenty of hand and foot holds and it is not difficult, just take care and do not rush. All the routes converge at this spot and at busy times you will probably find yourself having to queue.

Once down The Bad Step, you then have a daunting but straightforward scramble up to the summit passing the Gough Memorial.

On reaching the top of the scramble, the route heads north-west to the cross shaped (to give protection from winds from any direction) shelter. There are stone seats which provide a good lunch stop. The trig. point is a little distance further on (NY 342152).

Follow the ridge round in a clockwise direction and not too far beyond the trig. point the path descends Swiral Edge. Once again take care on this descent.

The path descends to the north-east corner of Red Tarn (NY 350154) although if you are in peak bagging mode, you can make a short diversion by branching off left about half way down and climbing to the top of Catstye Cam (NY 348159) (properly Catstye Cam) and back.

From Red Tarn, the route heads in a north-easterly direction until it reaches Red Tarn Beck. It then follows this beck until, after crossing the beck via a footbridge (NY 364173), it reaches the old mine buildings and Glenridding Youth Hostel. Follow the track/road (Greenside Road) to Glenridding turning right at the “T” junction then next left to pass in front of the Travellers Rest pub (still Greenside Road). Continue back to the car park.

