



Route Information

Distance 10.3 kilometres (6.4 miles)

Ascent 300 metres (985 feet)

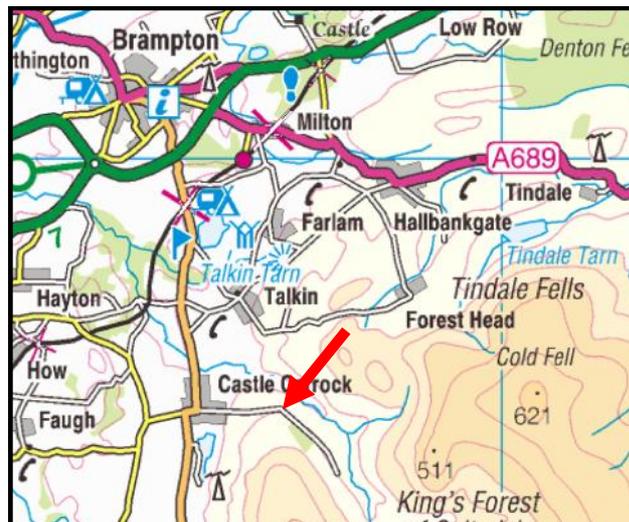
Time needed 3 hours (approx)

Start point

From Castle Carrock, follow the Geltsdale Road up the hill to reach the bend in the road at Jockey Shield (NY 558 556), where some verge parking is available.

Public Transport

Castle Carrock is served by bus routes 94 & 97 (limited service)



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Hynam Bridge and the River Gelt

The natural circuit of the valley head, this walk keeps to firm tracks, green-ways and minor roads.

Follow the track descending directly from the bend at Jockey Shield. Talkin Fell dominates the higher view with its distinctive line of cairns, akin to Nine Standards Rigg.

Many visitors who have never climbed the fell call these cairns a stone circle, but their history extends no further than post-enclosure days when the remnants of the wall-stone quarrying was picked up casually by visitors and the cairns progressively built, for fun! Near at hand is the birch dominated Hynam Wood, the minor hilltop beyond is surmounted by Ewan's Cairn – named after the youngest son of the owners of Jockey Shield.

The track descends to Hynam Bridge, originally constructed to carry horse-drawn wagons of coal from the upper valley. Later with the arrival of the age of steam and the Newcastle to Carlisle Railway, a branch line was constructed from Kirkhouse by the Earl of Carlisle, the ancestral landowner of this valley. After heavy rain the river can get into an agitated state, thundering through the bridge arch forcing its way down the constricting gorge to burst into a great pool at Low Hynam. The habit of sudden flow changes due to storms in the upper valley explains the river-name - Gelt is an Irish word, meaning 'magical'. Down the centuries children swimming in calm waters have been caught unawares and swept away to their death by such events!

Turn right and follow the track, as this forks keep up left, momentarily glancing over the newly built High Hynam.

At the time of writing the single-storey cottage of 1838 had been demolished and new walls were rapidly rising. The name Hynam is curious, there being few comparable names elsewhere. Yet if Hyton in Merseyside is some sort of clue, then the first element being 'landing place by a river', with the second element suggesting 'land that has been taken', both elements are Old English (Anglo-Saxon) in origin.

When Carlisle City undertook to extract water from this valley mercifully they did not choose to dam, else this walk would have been so different, and the author's home, Low Hynam, would not have existed. Incidentally coinciding with the preparation of this piece, the whole waterworks project was completed exactly one hundred years ago this very month, July 2009. A railway was laid up the valley from Hynam Bridge. One can still see evidence of its course, particularly upstream of the High Hynam meadow, where the valley constricts above a lovely 'open to the sun' waterfall and pool (popular with swimmers) a rock cutting has isolated a block of limestone. Known as Cat Rock, this is popular with local climbers for bouldering. But I should mention that this area of the valley is not Open Access.

Begin the steady ascent of the bridleway, a long incline with tangibly industrial origins. Indeed, much of the middle Geltsdale landscape has been touched by mining and quarrying, and astute eyes can pick up a multitude of clues. Whilst in the observation mode, I wonder how many will find the Ordnance Survey benchmark of 1861 on the bedrock to the right-hand side of the track? There is another mark of the same date on Hynam Bridge.



Ordnance Survey benchmark on the side of the track

As a wall comes close on the left, one can see an old quarry path contouring right through the bracken. Keep up the slope to crest the brow and admire a fine view up the valley, the King's Forest of Geltsdale forming the left-hand side of the valley below Tarnmonath Fell, with Knotts Wood and Binney Banks on the lower flanks and Hespeck Raise forming the right skyline, in the far distance is the rise of Lord's Seat, a little frequented tract of active grouse moorland.

Indicative of the long settlement of this valley, has been the recent discovery of an Iron Age settlement above Binney Banks, and yet the Sites and Monuments record does not show the cluster of medieval house foundations, situated on a shelf over the brink directly below the kissing-gate.



The Gairs - a remote former workers dwelling

Keep right on the level way, as the well-built accompanying wall rises the green track forks. Pass a stately little cairn occupying a fine vantage into the lower How Gill valley. The green-way encourages a flowing stride heading towards the great dale-head wall of Tarnmonath. The track drifts naturally towards The Gairs - a derelict dwelling, frequently in shadow, which was built as homes for the principal game-keeper and shepherd. The track hairpins right rising to a track junction. Go right and fording a couple of gills either keep faith with the greenway or if you are curious, venture up through the rushes to inspect the remains of The Gairs Colliery.

Folklore tells that the final version of George Stephenson's locomotive 'The Rocket' ended its working life on this branch line, plying coal wagons down to Kirkhouse. Showing continuity, a coal merchant still uses the Kirkhouse Yard for his local bag-delivery trade. One can see the broad sidings and imagine the coal loading and collection activity. Clamber up to the

ruined shed and look at the collapsed level that must lead into a labyrinth of coal seam galleries. Perhaps one day this will be opened again and the rich beds further exploited. It is said that the colliery was closed in 1938 because the mine manager could not drive his car up here!

One may choose to descend over the spoil banks to the green-way or simply contour on a sheep track to the right of a line of limestone sink hollows, though the bracken and heather to re-connect with the green track as it levels.



The Gairs and Simmerson Fell from the disused colliery

One is now under Tarnmonath Fell, part of the main Pennine massif leading to Cold Fell. The name another of these clues to a long-lost cultural past. The area has an unusual concentration of Welsh place-names: Croglin, Cumrew, Cattle Carrock, Talkin and Tarnmonath. Many will recognise that the latter contains 'mynydd' the Welsh word for a mountain. The prefix tor probably a rare descriptive variant for 'an outcrop', hence we have the unique to Cumbria 'Tormynydd'.

As the only Royal Forest in Cumbria one might expect some strong lingering history associated with the King's Forest of Geltsdale, first recorded in the Lanercost Priory's Cartulary of 1210 as 'forresta mea de Geltesdale' meaning the moorland hunting ground. The name applies only to the slopes of Tarnmonath and strictly this is Geltsdale. It will have been a red deer hunting forest, but there is little record of who was the monarch. Owned since the Conquest by branches of the Howard family of Naworth Castle, perhaps their royal connections might harbour some link.

The bridleway continues on its contouring line and then as the great combe at the head of the Old Water valley comes firmly into view the track switches right. This moorland amphitheatre is

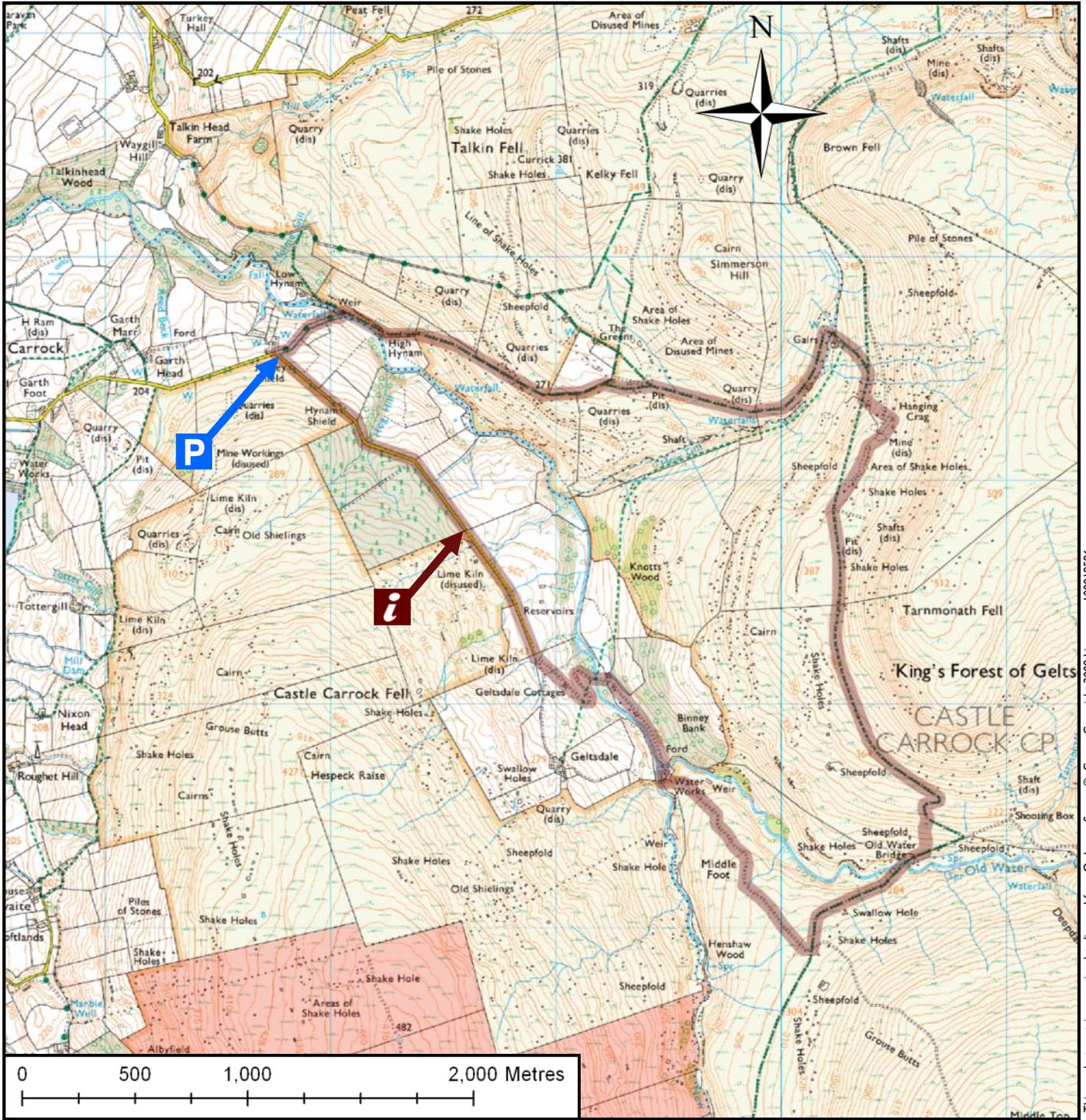
within the care of the RSPB Reserve, who protect the habitat of several of our most endangered moorland birds, including Hen Harrier. The green path switches again with a view down upon a redundant circular sheepfold and meets a wide green track. Turn right and cross Old Water Bridge in the vicinity of the water extraction pipework, the material effects of this installation largely hidden. Continue on the green track which now rises gradually to contour the slopes of Middle Top, and shortly arrives at a junction. The bridleway ahead continues to a lost bridge over New Water before heading on to Newbiggin, this old way from Hallbankgate will have been akin the M6 of its day, a major highway from before the industrial revolution.

The branch track leads down to the Waterworks compound, go through the wide galvanised gate and pass below the Waterworks Cottage to a ford and footbridge where Old and New Water meet. Follow on with the ensuing open road along the valley floor, with the old woodland of Binney Banks to the right. Recent excavations have revealed clear evidence of the Iron Age settlement of this area and the native woodland is a valuable continuity from this ancient human activity. Cross the bridge by the barns and wind up the hill passing the cottages to join the access road from Geltsdale House (farm) heading over the cattle gird (site of Open Access signboard).



View across the valley to Talkin and Simmerson Fells

The switchback road is lined by trees and woodland to the left, and gives lovely views across the valley to the King's Forest and the shapely hill hills of Talkin Fell and Simmerson Hill. Passing Hynam Shield, the road declines to the start point.



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Parking Place
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Line of Route
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Restricted Access
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Access Information