

*Why?* The sparkling coastal light  
and spectacular sunsets brighten up the  
gloomier months



A sunset spectacle on the beach at St Bees

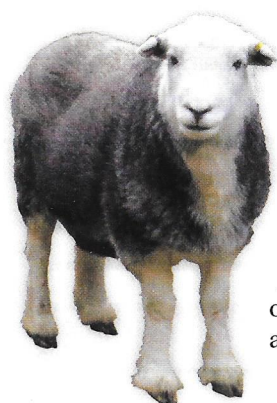
GET AWAY...

## *For the Weekend!*

EXPLORATION, ADVENTURE AND STUNNING SUNSETS  
ON THE WILD CUMBRIAN COAST

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki

**I**t is often the places on the edge that draw and fascinate us. So, would a few days exploring the coastal periphery of Cumbria, enjoying expansive skies reflected in the Irish Sea, luminous coastal light and spectacular sunsets, outwit the diminishing daylight of a British autumn?



The southern coastline of Cumbria juts out into Morecambe Bay in a raggedy collection of peninsulas. On the coast road around the Furness peninsula, we stumbled upon Conishead Priory. A sprawling Victorian gothic mansion occupies the priory site and is now the home of a Buddhist community, with an ambitiously named World Peace Café. We explored the modern

Buddhist temple in the grounds, enjoying the incongruity of oriental golden statues and engravings in a Victorian walled garden.

Further around the coast, we were happy to be delayed by a flock of pretty Herdwick ewes on a narrow stretch by the Duddon estuary. We left the main road for Millom, a small town dominated until the 1960s by haematite mining and smelting, the iron exported all over the country from the sheltered harbour. Nature has now reclaimed Millom's industrial sites and, at Hodbarrow RSPB reserve, only the iron-rich red ground and a few picturesque ruins indicate the previous use.

It is an easy three-mile walk around the flooded lagoon and, on the sea wall high above the sands, I didn't know which way to look. On the seashore we spotted multitudes of redshank and oystercatcher as well as ►

**MAIN** Replica tall ships in  
Whitehaven harbour

**BELOW LEFT** An engine at the  
Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway

**BELOW RIGHT** The Colin Telfer  
sculpture, *End of an Era*, in  
Whitehaven



**BELOW** Josefina de Vasconcellos' sculpture, *Escape to Light*, in the dunes at Haverigg

individual curlew; on the lagoon were tufted ducks, wigeon and swans, with a backdrop of the Lake District fells dusted with snow.

The sea wall passes the disused Hodbarrow Point lighthouse and ends at the coastal village of Hag, with colourful houses and an expansive beach.

It is worth exploring Haverigg's dunes to find an impressive stone sculpture, *Escape to Light*, a vivid illustration of animals fleeing an evil dragon.

This is the work of Josefina de Vasconcellos, a sculptor who lived in the Lake District.

She chiselled this sculpture at 90 years of age and, getting up close to see the chisel marks, I marvelled at her strength as well as her skill.

By the thirteenth century, Ravenglass had a market charter and, for 500 years, was a commercial centre. The houses on Main Street still face what was the market rather than the blustery Irish Sea. However, the village declined as towns further north industrialised and, by 1814, William Daniell, an early travel writer and landscape painter, pronounced it "the most miserable place in the kingdom". Certainly no travel writer would say such a thing of this charming village today.

The Norse Viking settlers and farmers came to Cumbria in around 900AD leaving many place names and some artefacts. Our northbound journey took us to Gosforth parish church seeking examples of where this Scandinavian civilisation mingled with that of the resident Christian Celts.

In the churchyard, a 13ft (4m) high sandstone cross is carved with both typical figures from Norse tradition and the crucifixion of Christ. Inside the church are further Pagan-Christian stone carvings.

The other 'secret' in this churchyard is a cork oak tree, more commonly seen in the Mediterranean. This one, planted in 1833 by the local vicar, is thought to be the most northerly example.

It isn't just the light that is better by the sea; often in Cumbria the low cloud shrouds the fells while it remains fine along the coast. We were able to enjoy a post-lunch beach walk at Seascale. However, the waterproofs were out by the time we reached Egremont.

I had seen an iron-red sculpture by Colin Telfer in Millom, finding two more of his works on Egremont's main street. Colin was a Cumbrian miner who studied art after redundancy and developed a unique style that recalls the industries and workers of



**BELOW LEFT** Colourful artwork on a bird hide at Hodbarrow RSPB reserve, Millom

**BELOW RIGHT** The disused Hodbarrow Point lighthouse

## TOP TIPS

For **Hodbarrow RSPB reserve**, follow the signs in to Millom and park your 'van in the first parking area as the road quickly deteriorates

**Senhouse Roman Museum** has a small car park that larger 'vans might find challenging. There is nearby street parking or the museum is a 15-minute walk from the harbour car parks



*Must do* Take a waterside walk around Cumbria's largest coastal lagoon at Hodbarrow RSPB reserve



these coastal communities. The chances are that, if you travel around the Cumbrian coast, you will encounter sculptures with the distinctive lustre of iron ore and coal dust prevalent in Telfer's work.

Egremont also has the remains of a medieval castle on a mound above the river. Set in lovely parkland, there's enough left to get a sense of the defensive structure. The castle has unusual herringbone masonry work, a brickwork style that links to the Romans and was valued for its strength.

From the village of St Bees we caught a glimpse of the Isle of Man on the horizon. The Priory Church here has a superb Norman red sandstone arched doorway and sculptures by Josefina de Vasconcellos.

As well as the moving works in the Sleeping Child Garden, inside the church is the *Vision of St Bega*. This sculpture of a

youthful Bega kneeling and facing Mary is both delicate and expressive.

Emerging from the stillness of the church, it was clear my hoped-for sunset was imminent and we were soon on the shore. The beach was as busy as any summer day, with everyone drawn to watch the spectacle of the vibrant orange sun steadily lowering itself into the Irish Sea.

The wind brought the rain next morning, so we needed an indoor attraction. Fortunately, there are plenty. Whitehaven once had over 70 pits and was a vibrant international port; now it has recreated itself as a tourist destination.

In the Beacon Museum, overlooking Whitehaven's attractive harbour, I learnt about local industries. I also learned how Whitehaven was designed with a grid-pattern of streets that may have been the blueprint for New York!

Admiring the boats around the harbour complex, we laughed at the sailing idioms decorating the street art on Sugar Tongue Quay. I found 'three sheets to the wind', 'money for old rope' and 'turning turtle'.

We climbed the hillside to enjoy a spectacular view over the town. Also, wandering along West Strand to the old ➤

## Essentials

**HOW LONG**  
Three nights

**WHEN** Off-season, when it feels wilder; we visited in November

**HOW MUCH**

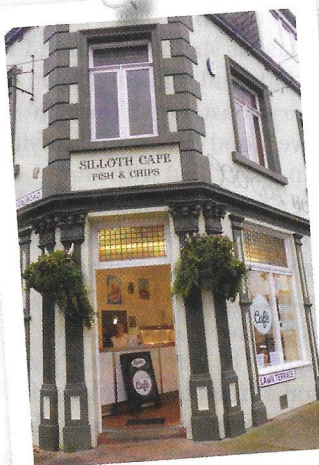
Fuel average 34mpg  
(360 miles) .....£53  
Site fees.....£48  
Entrance fees.....£19  
Two adults; The Beacon and  
Senhouse Roman Museum  
**TOTAL** ..... £120










**ABOVE LEFT** Colin Telfer's *The Scutcher*; the scutcher stopped wagons of iron ore by putting a bar through the wheels

**BELOW LEFT** A café in Silloth

**BELOW RIGHT** Egremont Castle ruins are set in a lovely park



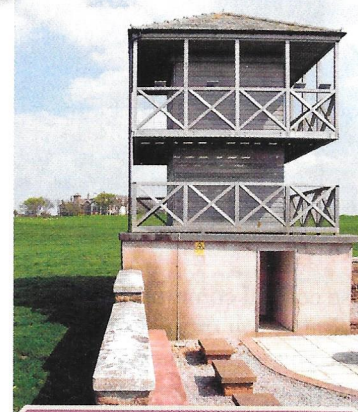
### INFORMATION

-  [visitcumbria.com](http://visitcumbria.com)
-  [conisheadpriory.org](http://conisheadpriory.org)
-  [rspb.org.uk](http://rspb.org.uk)
-  [ravenglass-railway.co.uk](http://ravenglass-railway.co.uk)
-  [stbees.org.uk](http://stbees.org.uk)
-  [thebeacon-whitehaven.co.uk](http://thebeacon-whitehaven.co.uk)
-  [senhousemuseum.co.uk](http://senhousemuseum.co.uk)





© Stan Pritchard / Alamy Stock Photo



© Robert Douglas / Alamy Stock Photo

*Must see*  
Climb the observation tower in the grounds of the Senhouse Roman Museum to see the full extent of the site

harbour, I found my favourite Colin Telfer sculpture. This shows a group of four coal-black mine workers, including a 'screen lass' who worked at the pit top picking the coal clean of stones.

After a lunch spent watching boats bobbing in the fishing harbour of Maryport near another Colin Telfer sculpture, we headed for the Senhouse Roman Museum.

Maryport was known as Alauna by the Romans. Finds from the large fort were collected by the prominent local Senhouse family from the sixteenth century, including 17 sandstone Roman military altars found in one dig. Today, the collection has grown to 24 altars. These and other funerary items are housed in the old Naval Artillery Drill Hall above the town. It is suggested that so many altars survived because they were reused in a later building.

The road from Maryport to Silloth is one of my favourites. It hugs the shoreline and, on a breezy day, the sea is often just a few inches from the road. This is a remote and wild coastline that is certainly on the edge.

Allonby, in particular, is a frontier village with a weatherworn charm. The village barely peeps over the low dunes. Charles Dickens visited here in 1857 and declared it 'rough wild country.'

It's perhaps living on the margin that has given businesses of Allonby a sense of humour. I spotted The Codfather chippy, Pig

**ABOVE LEFT** Haverigg, Millom

**ABOVE RIGHT** Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport

## *The campsites*

**Rosegarth Farm Camping and Caravanning Club CS**  
Egremont CA22 2UH

☎ 01946 822501

📞 campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk

📅 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £15 (Members only)

**Rowanbank Caravan Park**  
Silloth-on-Solway CA7 4LA

☎ 07766 303377

📞 rowanbankcaravanpark.co.uk

📅 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £15.50

ALTERNATIVE SITE

**PREMIER** **Shepherds Views Holidays**

Holmrook CA19 1XU

☎ 01946 729907

📞 shepherdsviews.co.uk

📅 1 March – 31 October

£ From £21

in a Bath antique reclamation yard and the curiously named Twentyman's Ice Cream, an Allonby institution since the 1920s.

Having pitched at a site north of Allonby, we crossed the dunes at dusk to watch the waves rolling in. A cloudburst of windswept horizontal rain saw us sheltering behind a stunted bush that is all that can grow along this blustery coast. Later, the rain moved on and we stood outside identifying constellations in a sky filled with stars.

Silloth is only a few miles and another world away from Allonby. It was planned as a northern Brighton and the grid pattern of cobbled streets are wide and the Victorian villas colourful. The town is separated from the sea breezes by The Green, a park with a pagoda on a tree-covered mound. On the seafront we chatted to a local who reminisced about the days when Silloth had two railway lines and even an airport. As we looked across to southern Scotland over the Solway Firth, I told him we had seen porpoises last time we visited.

We'd taken our time on this 80-mile trip, enabling us to linger over some of the area's little-known attractions. This northwestern edge of England has looked outward for thousands of years as people and goods have come and gone. All these different cultures and industries have left layers of history that are still being added to – and which are waiting to be explored. **MM**