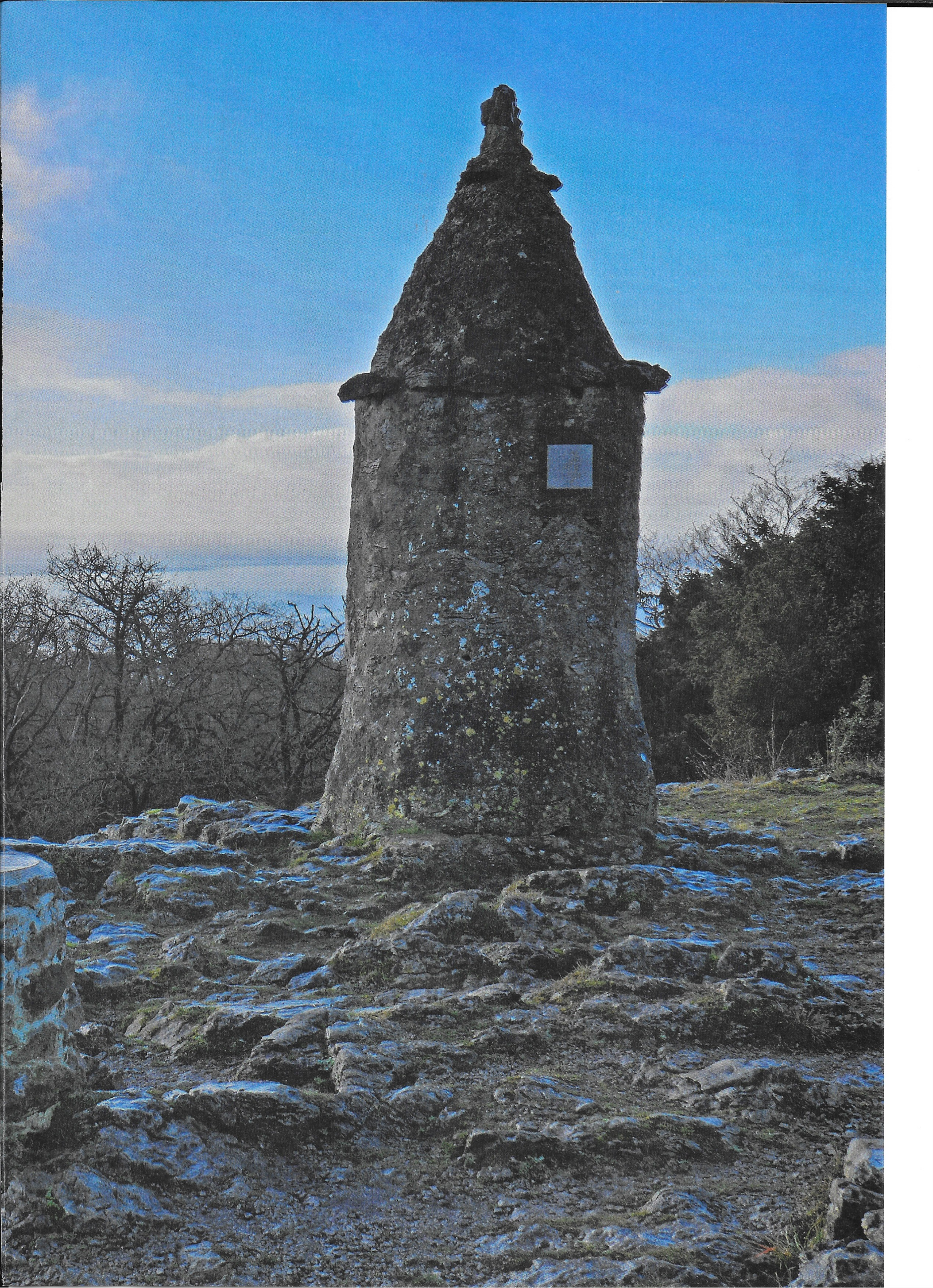




# A GATHERING TIDE

Circumnavigating the Cumbrian section of Morecambe Bay in a jigsaw of day hikes across every season

WORDS AND PHOTOS: Carol Kubicki



**I**t was Karen Lloyd's own journey around Morecambe Bay and her book, *The Gathering Tide*, that initially inspired me. Beginning casually with occasional days exploring new places around 'The Bay', I was soon gripped by a walking quest!

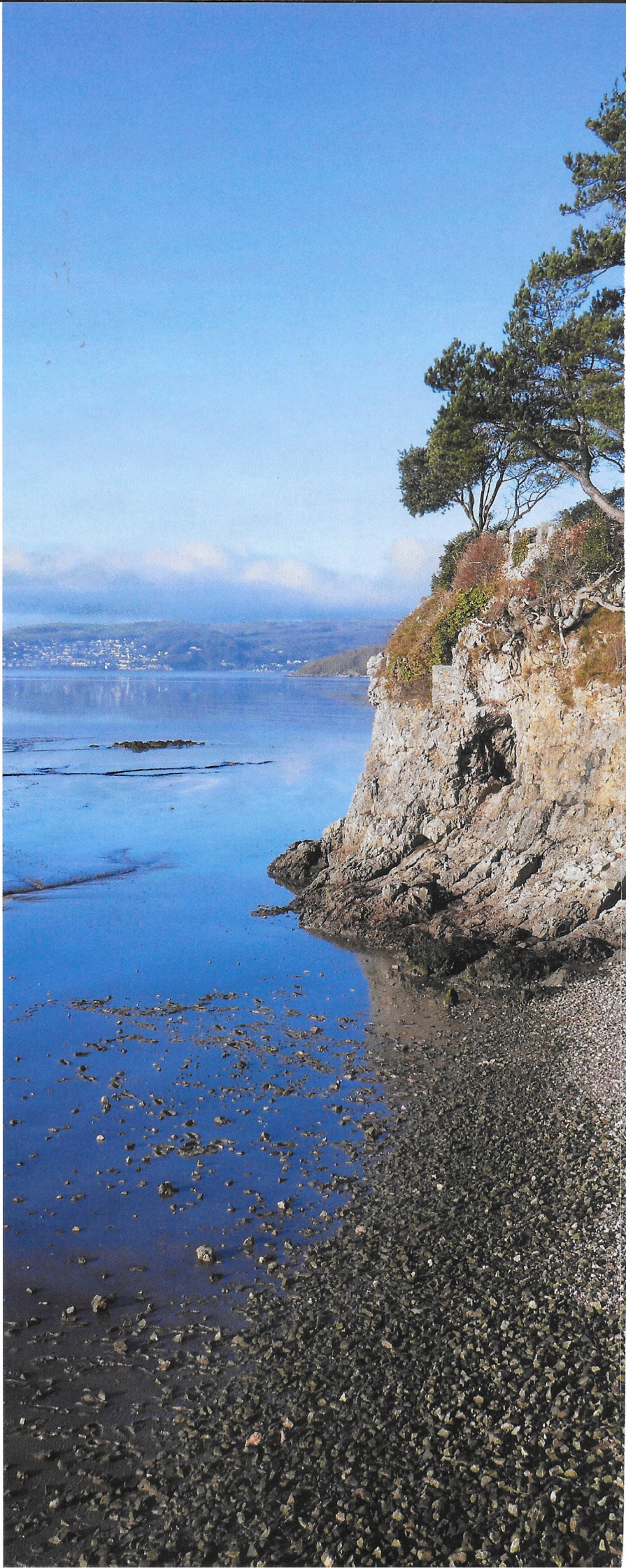
Having completed the Lancashire section from Sunderland Point to Silverdale, my partner and I circumnavigated the Cumbrian section in a jigsaw of day hikes across every season. Two walks were guided over the sands – all revealed something unexpected and most used The Furness Line, arguably England's most scenic railway. I would hop on board and grab a seat with a coastal view as we slowly plodded towards Walney Island.

### AROUND ARNSIDE KNOTT

Silverdale Station, just in Lancashire, is the start of many stunning rambles and my favourite is through Eaves Wood to the Peppercot viewpoint for the panorama of Morecambe Bay. This fluid landscape of sandbanks and shifting channels that shimmer in the sunshine at low tide, transforms as strong currents and high tides submerge these features and the sea stretches in blues and greys to the horizon.

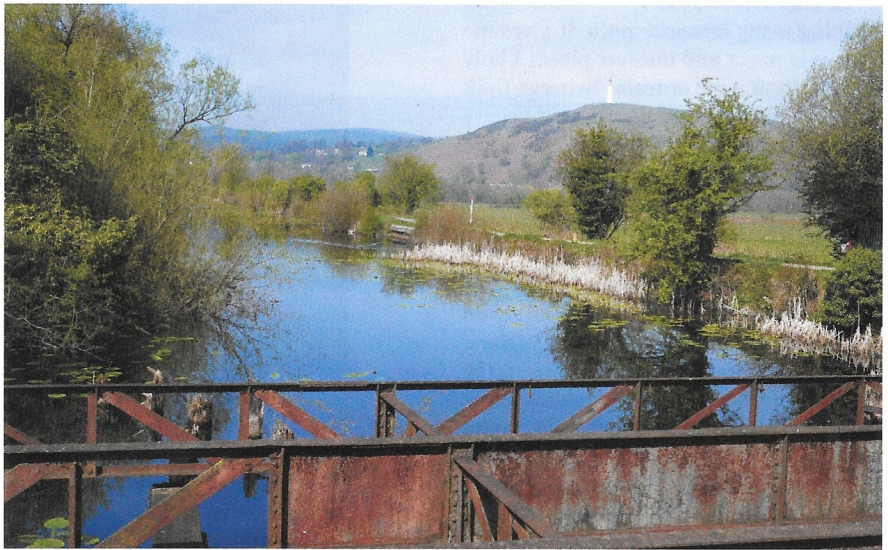
Beyond the Cumbrian border we left the caravan parks behind and picked up the narrow path to Park Point, threading between tangled woodland on the slopes of Arnside Knott and above low coastal crags.

At White Creek we scrambled down to the crunching pebbles and salt marsh. Turning into the shelter of the River Kent's channel, the sun warmed our backs as we negotiated the rocky beach to Arnside.





‘All revealed something unexpected and most used The Furness Line, arguably England’s most scenic railway’



### SPLASHING ACROSS THE BAY

A Morecambe Bay highlight is crossing from Arnside to Grange-over-Sands with the *King’s Guide*. I have completed crossings when the Kent is narrow and high (reaching my thighs) but on this latest crossing it was a longer ankle-splashing saunter. Kicking off your shoes at Blackstone Point, everyone is in high spirits as the group spreads out across the sands. I always stop in the expanse of The Bay and slowly turn 360° to take in its vastness. The potential for quicksand and the unknowable channels are both unsettling and breathtaking, the only concrete certainty are Heysham’s two boxy power stations in the distance.

A dusk stroll around Foulshaw Moss with Cumbria Wildlife Trust was a chance to see the nesting ospreys and multitudes of bats

darting over the lowland raised mire and pools. Earlier, we had wandered along narrow lanes winding between low-lying fields around Meathop to Grange-over-Sands.

### HUMPHREY HEAD

Train timetables made it easier to walk from Cark back to Grange-over-Sands. We reached the big skies of Morecambe Bay at Cowpren Point and followed the edge of the salt marsh to the holiday park. It was a warm spring day and a sign for Wraysholme Creamery was a welcome excuse for a diversion for rich ice cream.

Beached on the salt marsh, the limestone promontory of Humphrey Head is cut off from the villages by the railway line. It isn’t high but even this short elevation gives a panorama across The Bay and near the



summit hunched hawthorns hold the stories of storms. Descending through woodland we negotiated the cliffside to the marsh and followed the railway on a shoe-drenching footslog to Kents Bank. The sunshine dried us as we squelched by the floral displays on Grange-over-Sands' promenade.

### THE RIVER LEVEN

Walking is my favourite pace. It gives me time to connect and uncover places I only glimpse from a car or train. Between Cark and Greenodd I found unexpected beauty in lush woodlands, bogs and knobbly hills.

Climbing above Holker Hall, the ups and downs of Ellerside Ridge felt like hill walking, with the Leven Estuary below and the Coniston Fells in the distance.

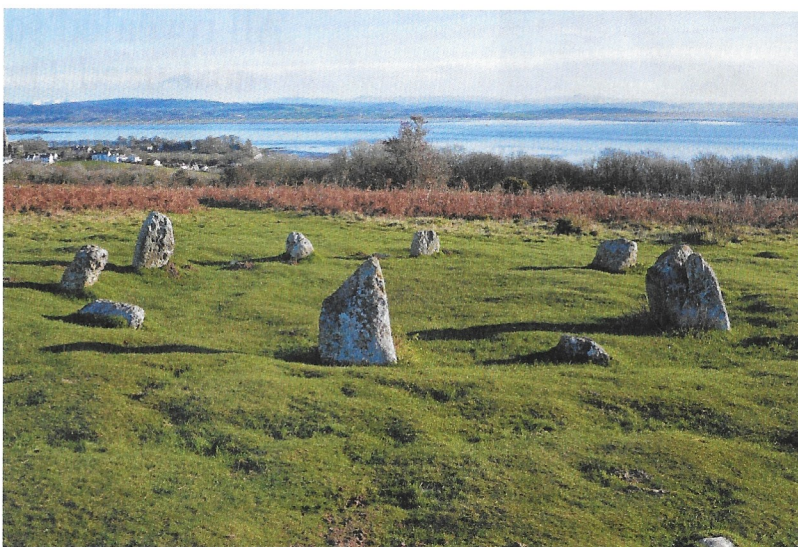
Despite the summer sunshine, we had this corner of Cumbria to ourselves, apart from the four jets that screamed by! At Bigland Tarn, we munched our picnic overlooking the reeds and lily pads before descending to the River Leven and skirting the edge of Roudsea Wood Reserve. Crossing the Leven I thought about how the A590 separates Greenodd from the river today, but in the past, the town was a port and industrial hub and they were reputedly building ships at Greenodd long before the Barrow yards existed.

The day we walked up Hoad Hill to the monument commemorating Sir John Barrow, statesman and geographer, snow blanketed the Furness Peninsula. Everyone was making the most of the magical wintry landscape.

It was sunny when we next jumped off the train in Ulverston and from the path along the canal I looked up to Hoad Hill and remembered that special day. From the bustle of Canal Foot we followed the shore to the Leven Viaduct and then backtracked, picking up lanes and a disused railway line to the woodland around Conishead Priory.

The café, run by Manjushri Kadampa Meditation Centre, is not to be missed.

We sat outside eating delicious fresh food before meandering back to the coast and Bardsea.



### BRONZE AGE STONES

Picking up our circumnavigation on a cloudless frosty morning in Bardsea, a walled lane led us to Birkrigg Common.

At the stone circle I paced around the Bronze Age stones, looking across the sands to the Cartmel Peninsula. Climbing higher to patches of limestone pavement, snow-plastered fells and Bardsea Monument created an impressive scene.

A fellow walker remarked, 'They say you can see Scotland from here.' I wasn't convinced, but squinting against the low winter sun to the east, I spotted the distinctive shape of Ingleborough in Yorkshire. Grassy tracks and quiet lanes through farming country took us to Gleaston Castle and watermill. The mill was closed but the café was welcoming and homemade cakes fortified us for the miles to Barrow-in-Furness.

### ISLAND FINISH

Hopping off the bus on Roa Island, passengers waited on the slipway for the ferry to Piel Island. Our guided walk to

Piel Island was booked for a few weeks' time so, today, we were concentrating on striding around Roosecote Sands back to Barrow-in-Furness.

Leaving the boats of Roa Island, we followed the beach to a cycle path lined with blackthorn bushes heavy with ripening berries. The tide was out and little egrets were finding food on the salt marsh as we skirted the gas terminal. By the docks the fresh breeze ruffled the feathers of the sleek cormorants. In town, a lump formed in my throat at the Dave Myers' tribute mural, as I saluted the Hairy Biker and son of Barrow.

We needed the car to get to Walney Island, fitting in an amble to the beach on South Walney before meeting for the guide's Piel Island safety briefing, the finale of my walk around Morecambe Bay. Shorter than the Cross Bay Walk, the trickiest part was slithering in the sticky mud down to the shingle and sand. Bare feet were a hazard rather than helpful on this terrain so, with shoes on, I fortunately stayed upright. The mud



‘The watery landscape was soon covered in hundreds of footprints as we passed Sheep Island, heading to the stone remains of Piel Castle’



wormed its way into every crevice in my shoes and, months later, I am still finding traces of Morecambe Bay.

The watery landscape was soon covered in hundreds of footprints as we passed Sheep Island, heading to the stone remains of Piel Castle. After the shifting sands, arriving on the terra firma of Piel Island felt surreal; there were tents, a few houses and the famous Ship Inn, where the staff were working non-stop to provide hospitality to the visitor influx.

The grey sky brightened as we sat on a picnic bench eating freshly-cooked chips and sampling a swift half. Wandering around the 14th century fortress ruins, they seemed perilously close to the shore, just waiting to become part of The Bay. Feeling happy, I stood on the shore looking across the sweep of Morecambe Bay. After my coastline tour I knew it better but, as I hugged my sandy memories close, I understood there were more secrets to uncover.

# Lifestyle & Leisure

GETTING OUT AND ABOUT TO ENJOY  
WHAT'S ON THE DOORSTEP



PHOTO: CAROL KUBICKI

**DISCOVER  
MORECAMBE BAY**  
Exploring the  
coast on a series  
of day hikes  
P80

**ON THE RUN  
FOR FUN**  
Meet Sarah Perry,  
the maths teacher  
from Cockermouth  
P88

**LAKE DISTRICT  
THRILLS**  
Hike Seat Sandal  
and Fairfield  
from Grasmere  
P96