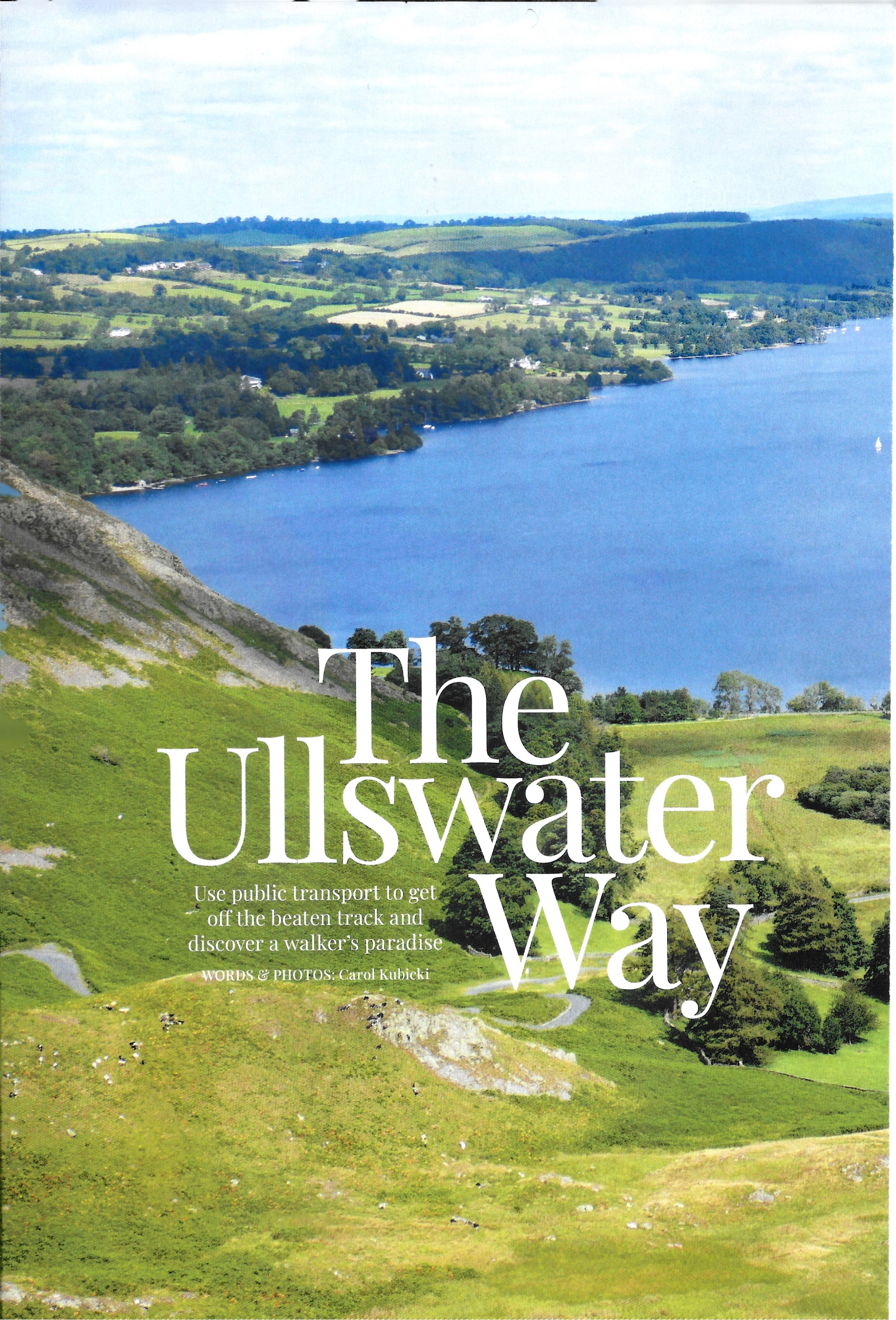
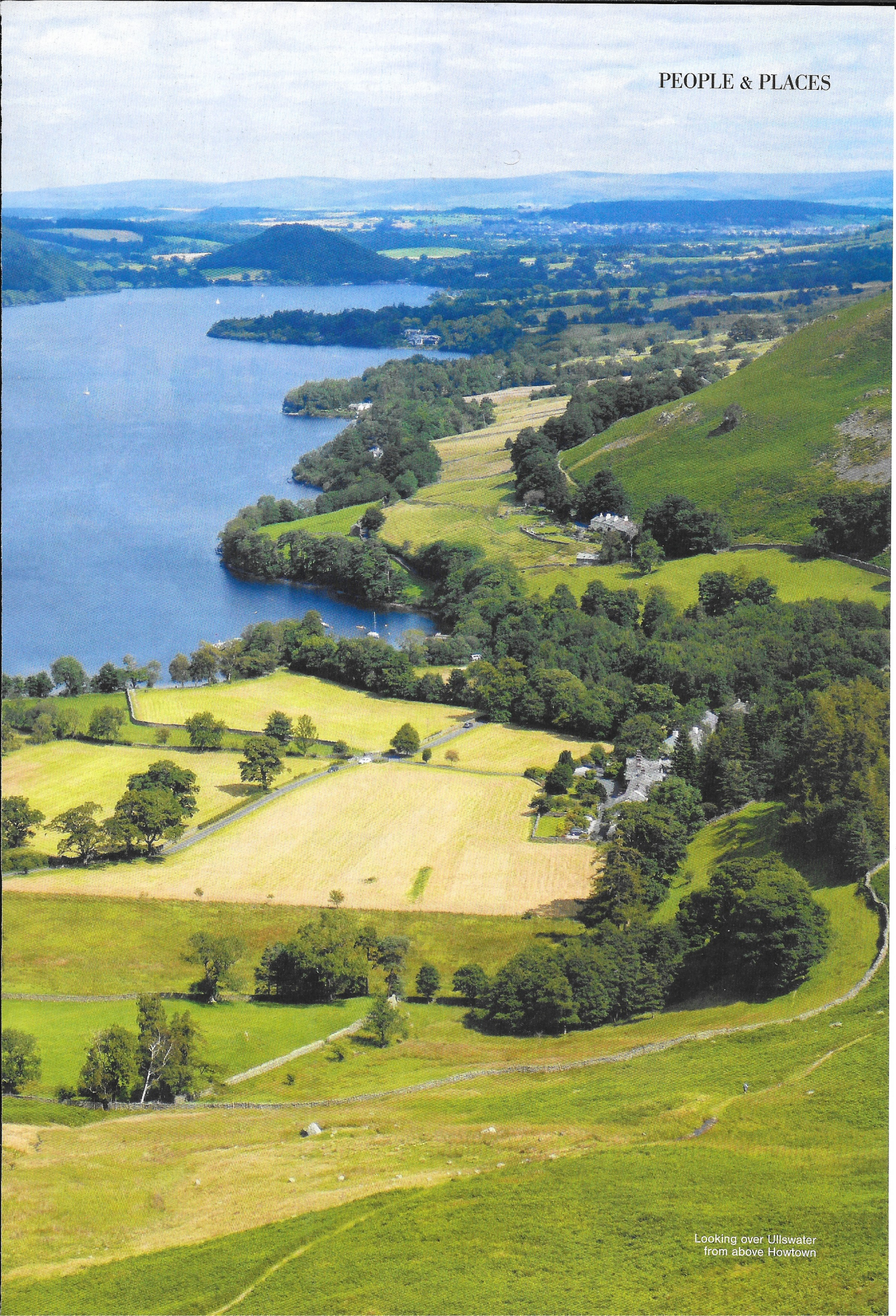


The Ullswater Way

Use public transport to get off the beaten track and discover a walker's paradise

WORDS & PHOTOS: Carol Kubicki



Looking over Ullswater
from above Howtown



Enjoying the view from Hallin Fell

The Ullswater Way is a 20-mile long walk that circumnavigates the lake. I have super-human friends who would walk this in one day, but I prefer to amble, taking my time to stop, smell the flowers, gaze at the views and visit a café.

Studying the Ullswater Way map I realised that, although I had walked up and down most of it, the leg from Howtown around Silver Point to Patterdale was a significant gap. This omission seemed particularly baffling as it is a pretty stretch of the walk that is quiet, as it is mostly away from the rumbling traffic on the A592. Once I realised my own Ullswater Way was incomplete it became a niggle, something I had to finish.

An ideal day arrived when everything came together. It was summertime and the Ullswater Hopper bus was running every day, the sun was shining and my partner and I had no other commitments. We were first in the queue to hop on the minibus in Pooley Bridge and were soon admiring the reversing skills of the driver as she manoeuvred the bus into overgrown passing places, putting car drivers who couldn't seem to find reverse gear to shame.

In Howtown, we were just in time to watch the handsome green Ullswater steamer with its postbox-red funnels dock and passengers spill onto the jetty. This is another fabulous way to reach Howtown and available year

'The lake is in my dream, The tree is in my blood, The past is in my bones, the flowers of the wood, I love with long past loves'



The Pooley Bridge Inn has a generous beer garden


The Howtown Hotel

round. Before picking up the waymarked route we headed inland to the stone buildings and colourful garden of the Howtown Hotel, tucked below the fells and sheltered by trees.

Currently only available on an exclusive-use basis, the hotel also runs holiday cottages and a tearoom; the only refreshments for miles and so not to be missed. No matter that we were carrying enough water to drown in, we had morning coffee and cake before striding out along the lakeside path.

If you have the time you can detour up Hallin Fell for the panoramic view over Ullswater or visit the 'new' church at Martindale Hause. Dedicated to St Peter, this church was built in the 1880s and has some fine modern stained glass windows. Having visited both these before and with a hot day forecast, I wasn't keen on unnecessary climbing.

We were plastered in sun cream and sporting shady head gear as we climbed uphill to the stony path around the slopes of Hallin Fell. As the way led us back to the shore, a small boat puttered by and the sound of lapping waves gave the illusion of coolness. We could hear canoeists chatting to each other, their voices carrying across the water and someone had disturbed the greylag geese on the opposite bank and their lively honking made me smile.

The shade of Hallinhag Wood was welcome as we negotiated the rocky trail towards Sandwick Bay. We seemed to have the path to ourselves as we stepped over tree roots and ducked under low branches, stopping often to take in the views across the water to Gowbarrow Fell.

Seeing a sign, I clambered up to the Poetry Stones. Lines from Kathleen Raine's poetry are carved into three large mossy stones.


The 'new' church at Martindale Hause

Kathleen moved to Martindale from London during the Second World War and published a book of poems in the 1940s that was well-received. Later she met Gavin Maxwell and spent time at Sandaig with Gavin and Mij the otter. The title of his book, *Ring of Bright Water* was taken from one of her poems. After around 10 years, the carving on the Hallinhag Wood stones is fading but looking online you can read her words: *The lake is in my dream, The tree is in my blood, The past is in my bones, the flowers of the wood, I love with long past loves.* Crossing the beck in Sandwick, we were joined by walkers who had parked at the roadhead. We also came across a regular Lake District sight during the school summer term – groups of over-burdened teenagers completing the outdoor expedition component of the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

By Lowther Barn, once a handy refreshment spot along Ullswater that had ceased trading, we met an enterprising group respectfully using the café's remaining picnic benches. We joined them on a shady bench, feeling lucky not to be carrying heavy packs in the heat.

From Scalehow Beck we traversed the open slopes around Low Birk Fell, the mellow trills and whistles of rising skylarks accompanying us and the occasional piping call of a meadow pipit. These calming sounds were interrupted briefly when the familiar roar of a jet ripped through the natural soundscape.



The Ullswater Steamer is a fantastic way to get around Ullswater

Back in woodland we met another Duke of Edinburgh group. The young people were strung out along the edge of the trail, making the most of the shade. One was checking her feet and we asked if they needed our first aid kit (a silly question, as they are carrying everything!).

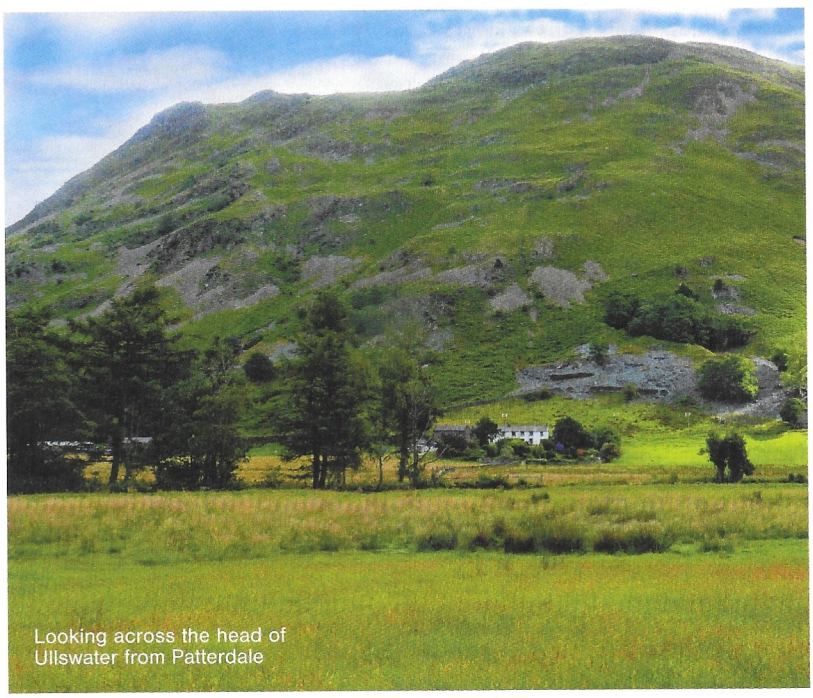
We nattered about their route and campsites they had used. They were full of cheer, as this was their last day and they were all looking forward to returning home to familiar beds and home comforts.

A rocky promontory is the perfect place to take in the views of the fells across Ullswater. We picked out Glenridding Dodd rising steeply from the lake with the distinctive point of Catstye Cam peeping out behind.

Hearing a school group of younger children and their teachers chattering and giggling their way up the slope, we began descending, making way for them at the viewpoint. We stood aside to allow the train of children by and, as they passed, each of the boys fist bumped or high fived us exuberantly. Their energy was infectious and we continued with a renewed spring in our step. As we left the woodland, we could see their canoes pulled up on the shingle of Silver Bay.

Rather than skirting around Silver Crag, we took the steep path through the bracken and juniper bushes to the col below Birk Fell. This is a less-used route and at the top of the pass we picked up a refreshing summer breeze and rested on a patch of lush grass.

We snacked while listening to birdsong, watching butterflies and gazing upon the lake view that had been our awesome companion all day. A grassy path stretched across the fellside above the campsite at Side Farm until a short steep descent led us to the farm track and Patterdale.



Looking across the head of Ullswater from Patterdale

We considered a drink in the Patterdale Hotel before catching the bus, but I could hear the distinct call of ice cream in Glenridding and we carried on the extra mile on the roadside pavement.

Cornets piled high with Lakes Ice Cream were our reward before we hopped on a packed bus back to Pooley Bridge. We had walked around seven miles, caught two buses and seen the quiet side of Ullswater at its best.