



GRAVEL RIDES LAKE DISTRICT

15 gravel bike adventures
in Cumbria



ANDREW BARLOW

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Front cover *On Askham Fell above Ullswater (route 06).*

Back cover *The start of the descent from Askham Fell to Howtown (route 06).*

Opposite *Descent on Askham Fell towards Howtown (route 06).*

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PLEASE GIVE WAY TO HORSES AND PEDESTRIANS.





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Download the Gravel Rides
Lake District GPX files from
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Route grades

- Easy
- Straightforward
- Challenging



Introduction

Firstly, welcome to *Gravel Rides Lake District*. I wanted to create a guide that truly shows off gravel riding in its finest form in the stunning Lake District National Park. This wasn't always straightforward as the Lakes are so vast and we're not as blessed here, compared with some other parts of the UK, with an abundance of gravel in its truest form. There have been some very long days in the saddle to create this collection of routes – rest assured you can pick up this book safe in the knowledge that it will guide you around the very best routes in the area. I do believe all these routes I have created tie in aptly with what we know gravel riding to be: fun and adventurous!

Gravel riding has boomed in the last couple of decades, following its revival in the early 2000s in America. Consequently, cycling brands have been very keen to create the perfect tool to ride on gravel. Ultimately though, what we've always wanted is a vessel that can combine the higher speed and efficiency of road cycling with the capability and freedom to ride on the roughest and, in some cases, extremely technical terrain. Here I have done my best to adapt the 'one true discipline of cycling', as I like to call it, to the terrain that I have right on my own doorstep – all 2,362 square kilometres of the national park.

This guide has a ride for everyone of any ability – the shorter and easier routes are a great starting point, or you can just jump in and tackle one of the more challenging routes straight away if you've got the skills and experience. Take your time and remember, if you feel worried about anything technical, it's always okay to get off and push your bike!

I love gravel riding for its spirit of inclusivity. This genre of cycling accepts everyone from all walks of life – any bike or any shape or size, there are no egos here. We just want to ride bikes and be outside for as long as possible. This guide has been put together in the hope it will inspire others to get outside and enjoy the great outdoors.

Andrew Barlow



TRACK LEADING UP TO FORCE CRAG MINE.

01 FORCE CRAG MINE & THE COLEDALE VALLEY

17.4km/10.8 miles

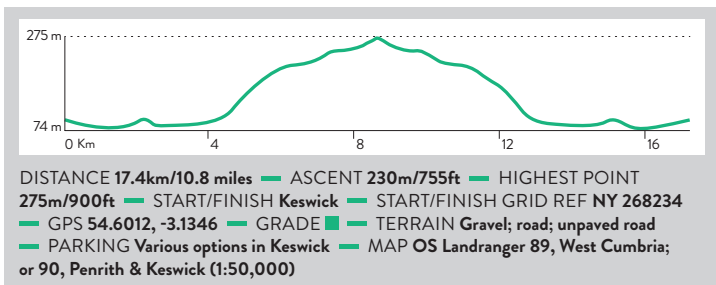
Introduction

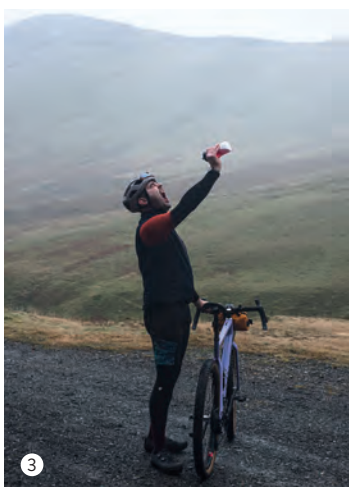
This short and sweet out-and-back ride is ideal for when you're short on time but need a quick blast of fresh air and exercise. Starting in Keswick, minor roads and a brief stint on the A66 take you through the villages of Portinscale and Braithwaite to the bottom of the Coledale Valley. Now for the fun bit – a ribbon of prime gravel hugs the side of the valley and runs away into the distance. The Coledale Beck bubbles to your left and the views of the surrounding mountains get gradually more dramatic as the kilometres tick past.

Grisedale Pike rises to your right as you ascend, Causey Pike is to your left as you look over the Coledale Beck, and Crag Hill heads the valley with Force Crag, which gives the mine its name, sitting underneath. Once you're at the head of this spectacular valley you'll arrive

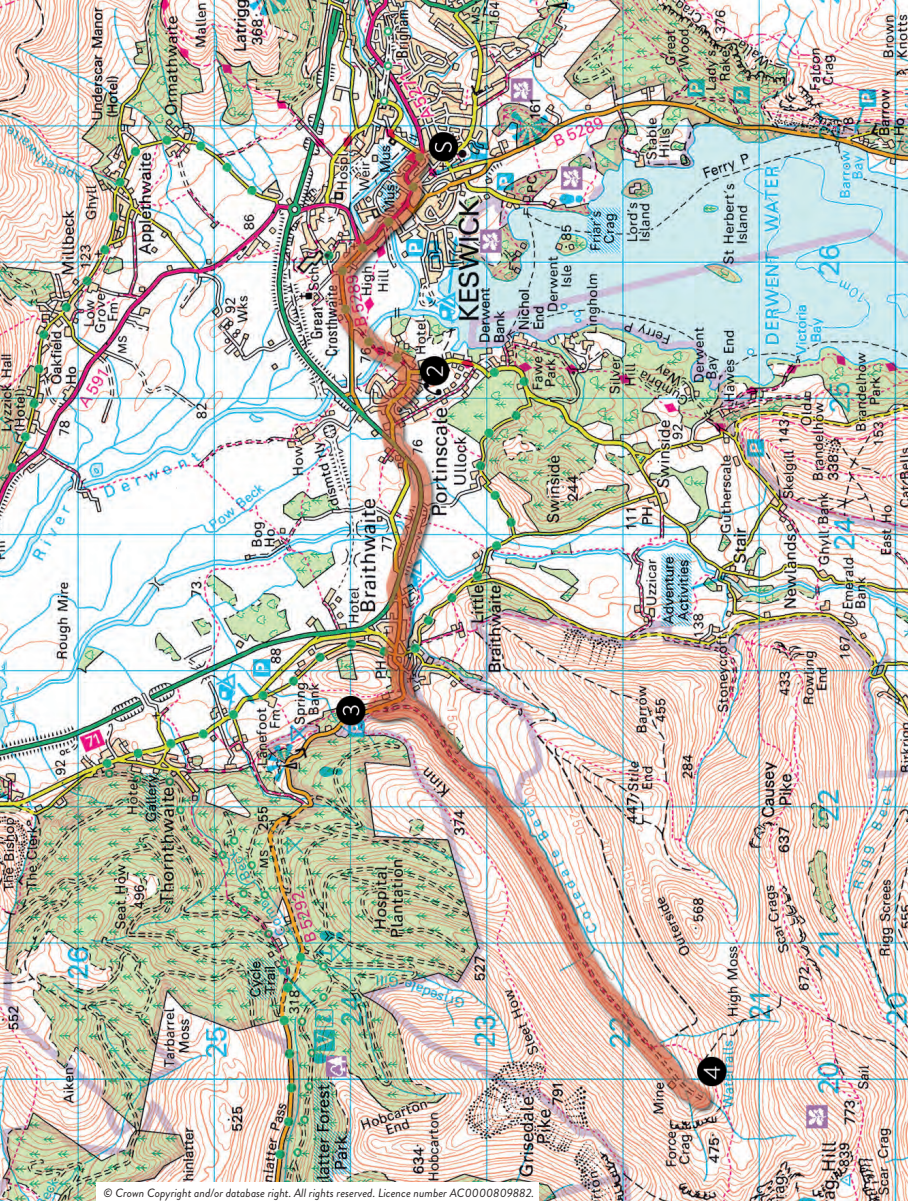
at Force Crag Mine – this was the last working metal mine in the Lake District when it closed in 1991. It is a Scheduled Monument, meaning it has real historical importance, along with being a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest: please treat it with respect. The National Trust occasionally runs open days to look round the processing mill; unfortunately, the underground tunnels have collapsed.

Because the surface of this track is so good, this ride is a great year-round option. As an added winter bonus, when the becks are in full spate they look incredible. In the summer, there are a few little dipping pools in the beck if you need to cool off. If you've got time to linger, there are few nicer places to spend your time. This ride can be linked with routes 05, 07, 08 or 14 for a bigger day out.





1 EEL CRAG. **2** THE FIRST AND ONLY GATE ALONG THIS TRACK. **3** WHATEVER THE WEATHER, ALWAYS KEEP HYDRATED.



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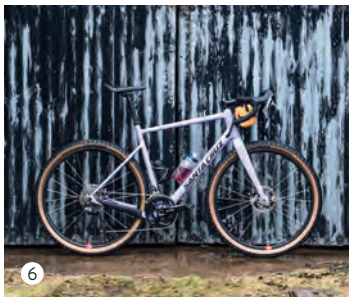


Directions

- S** Head west out of Keswick on the A5271. Cross the River Greta and keep left on the B5289 (also NCN route 71). After a few hundred metres turn **L** at a junction signed as a dead end road (still following NCN route 71) then dismount to cross an iron bridge over the River Derwent. Go **SA** on to a road and continue on, passing the Derwentwater Hotel, to reach a junction in Portinscale.
- 2** Turn **R**, following the signpost for *Keswick* and *Cockermouth*. Pass the Farmers Arms then turn **L** on to a cycle path which runs alongside the A66 (following the signpost for *Workington*, *Cockermouth* and *Braithwaite*). Follow the cycle path round to the **L** then follow the B5292 into Braithwaite. Carry on **SA** through the village passing the Royal Oak and continue until you reach a small car park on the left. (This car park can make a decent alternative start point, but it shortens the ride and is popular, so you have to get there early or late in the day.)



5



6

Coffee and food

Fellpack, Lake Road Brunch, The Square Orange or Cafe West, Keswick.

Bike shops

Biketreks, Keswick.

4 GOOD TRACK TO THE MINES. 5 CLIMBING UP THE TRACK LEADING TO THE MINES. 6 SANTA CRUZ STIGMATA.

- 3 Turn **L** through the car park and go through the barrier, following the signpost for *Force Crag Mine*. It's a footpath on the map, but the National Trust permits cycling. You're now on a gravel track climbing all the way to the head of the valley. The climbing is sustained, but as you gain height you get fantastic views of Coledale Beck and the surrounding mountains. Head through the gate and cross a little beck. Continue on to reach the mine buildings and pools underneath Force Crag.
- 4 Once you've spent some time exploring the site, retrace your steps to return to Keswick. The descent down the valley is super fun; there is little to no effort required on your return journey, just watch out for the 'speed bumps' in the track. Also be aware that this is a multi-recreational route so watch out for others enjoying the trail.



LOOKING OVER TO BLENCATHRA.

05 ST JOHN'S IN THE VALE & KESWICK RAILWAY PATH

19.3km/12 miles

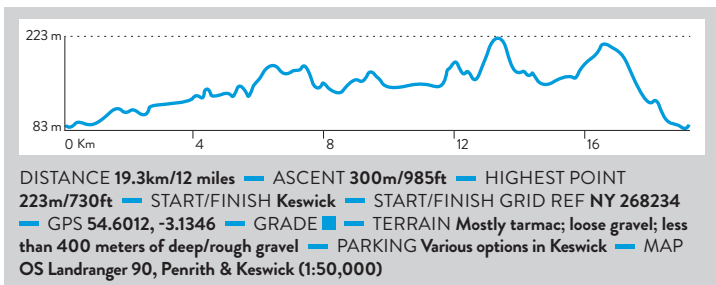
Introduction

This is one of those rides to enjoy if you're a little short on time. You're never too far from civilisation and it offers some truly stunning views in exchange for little effort. The terrain is a mix of gravel trails, bridleways and roads, with a few sections of more technical singletrack and deeper gravel to test your skills.

Starting from Keswick, the first section of the route takes you east on a disused railway line. Now a popular, five-kilometre ribbon of tarmac, this is part of an old railway that ran from Cockermouth to Penrith. This multi-use path can be better in the early mornings or evenings, when it's quieter. After crossing the A66, the route takes you south on to some quiet back lanes to reach St John's in the Vale, a picturesque, glacial valley dotted with farms. Even in the height of summer,

I've never passed many other people here. There are great views of the Helvellyn mountain range as you drop down into the valley – Clough Head and Great Dodd stand tall.

Moving on, you cross St John's Beck and head over fields to reach one of my favourite bridleways which contours around High Rigg to reach St John's Church. This narrow path really feels like a singletrack roller coaster, and a fairly technical, steep climb at the end has some deep gravel to really test the best riders. The views are unreal as you pass the church and ride in between Low Rigg and High Rigg. Some more quiet roads take you to the A591, then a climb and a fast descent take you back into Keswick for a post-ride beverage.





1



2

1 LOOKING OVER TO CLOUGH HEAD. 2 START OF THE OFF-ROAD SECTION.

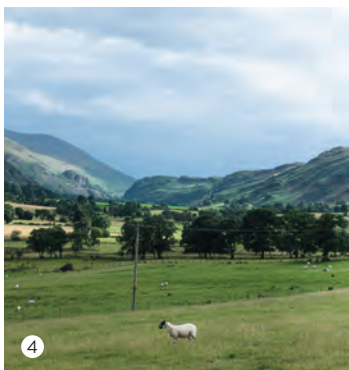


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Directions

- 1 Head north out of Keswick, crossing the River Greta on Station Road. Where the road curves to the right, go **SA** on to a cycle path (NCN route 71). Bear **R** to join the old railway line; continue for 5km to reach the A66.
- 2 Turn **L** on to the A66; shortly afterwards turn **R** (staying with NCN route 71 and following the signpost for *Castlerigg Stone Circle* and *Burns Farm*). Take the next **L** turn (following the signpost for *St John's in the Vale*) – this is a really fast descent, watch out for some tight corners. Cross St John's Beck and continue until you reach a T-junction with the B5322. (Notice the size of Clough Head in front of you; the Helvellyn range can truly make you feel small at times.)
- 3 Turn **R** on to the B5322 through St John's in the Vale. After 2.3km turn **R** (going back on yourself) on to a bridleway. Cross a stone bridge then go through a gate and head diagonally **R** across a field, heading for a gate in the middle of the wall. Go through the gate then turn **R** on to a bridleway underneath High Rigg.



Coffee and food

Fellpack, Lake Road Brunch,
The Square Orange or Cafe West,
Keswick.

Bike shops

Biketreks, Keswick.

3 GRASSY BRIDLEWAY HEADING BACK TOWARDS KESWICK. **4** VIEWS LOOKING DOWN ST JOHN'S IN THE VALE.

Climb, descend then climb again on the bridleway (there is also some really nice singletrack and some technical, lumpy, tree root climbs, with deeper parts of gravel) before you pop out on to a road near St John's Church.

- 4 Turn **L** on to the road and keep climbing to reach the church. Continue **SA** on to a gravel track, which sits between High Rigg and Low Rigg, to start the descent. Parts of this 4x4 track are a little sketchy (I once had a spectacular crash down here) and there are some very deep sections of gravel that you can easily wash out on. Go round a couple of zigzags to reach a narrow road. Turn **L** on to the road.
- 5 After 600m turn **R** through a gate on to a road passing through Naddle to reach the A591. Turn **R** on to the A591 (this section can be busy but the road is nice and wide) for a last climb then a super-fast descent into Keswick. Turn **L** on to Manor Brow (signposted *Castlerigg Manor*), turn **R** on to Eskin Street, go **SA** on to Greta Street and finally turn **L** on to Penrith Road to get back to your starting point.