

SOLANGE BERCHEMIN

111  
PLACES  
IN THE LAKE  
DISTRICT  
THAT YOU  
SHOULDN'T  
MISS



emons:

# 1 Jenkin's Crag

*Hug the tallest trees in England*

This attractive, energetic walk will call on all your senses. For a convenient start head to Waterhead at the northern end of Lake Windermere. The crag offers an outlook over the lake and the central peaks of the Langdales with the unmistakable shape of the Old Man of Coniston. It is easy to find, and clearly signposted all the way. Like all walks, it can be made as short or as long as you wish, with the option to continue on to Troutbeck. It may not seem very promising at first as it climbs steeply through an alleyway backing houses. But the path soon reaches an open field where you can pick up the trail into the ancient woodland of Skelghyll Wood via a four-step stile. In the spring the woodland is filled with the pungent aroma of wild garlic whilst a carpet of bluebells covers the ground. At any other time a damp-moss smell creates a special atmosphere.

Skelghyll Wood is renowned for its monumental trees. You'll find one of the tallest grand fir trees in England, which stood at 57.8 metres at the last measure in 2012. Understandably, Lake District rangers are not sent too often to the top to measure its progress. The tallest grand fir in the world is near Vancouver, Canada. At 75.29 metres it is comparable in height to the giant sequoias in California. This walk links nicely with the Ambleside Champion Tree Trail, a 45-minute circular route through the woods, which is signposted from the car park. Just follow the tree symbols. On the way back, you may have just enough energy for a detour to the National Trust's pretty Stagshaw Garden, which can be found via a gate on the opposite side of the small car park. It includes a lovely collection of plants including rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias. It is also your opportunity to indulge in an ice cream or a cream cake. After all, you've just walked enough to burn the calories.



**Address** Start at Waterhead car park, Borrans Road, Ambleside, LA22 0ES | **Getting there** South of Ambleside town centre, opposite the Windermere Cruise launch site, park in the pay-and-display car park. Walk back onto Borrans Road, turn left towards the Waterhead Hotel, cross (carefully) over A 591. A sign to Jenkins Crag is directly opposite. | **Access** Year-round; parts can be muddy | **Tip** The nearby Stock Ghyll Force is another local walk through the woods, and leads to a waterfall (Ambleside, LA22 0QT).

## 2\_\_ Low Wood Bay Sculptures

### *Local fauna in 3D*

Cumbria is certainly not short of sculpture trails, nor is there a lack of talented artists working in the area. As often, the adverse weather conditions can be an impediment; after a while, sculptures are so weather-worn that they lose definition. As you may expect, some resist better than others, a good few are now difficult to identify. Learning from past mistakes the new trails should last for longer.

Low Wood Bay Sculpture Trail was commissioned by the Low Wood Bay Resort & Spa, and created by local artist and stone mason Shawn Williamson, who has been working as a sculptor for a quarter of a century and is best known for his big stone sculptures such as his 19-ton Herdwick ram. In 1985, he was pupil and assistant to the internationally known Lakeland artist Josefina de Vasconcellos (see ch. 44), who had herself been mentored by no less than Rodin, the French master. For the duration of the project, Williamson became the artist in residence at the resort.

He worked with 12 reclaimed boulders chosen from among the material unearthed during the excavations undertaken during the resort's major renovations. The trail theme turns exclusively around the local fauna, and the result is a trail of animals on the Ambleside shore of Lake Windermere.

Lakeland has extraordinary wildlife and this type of project also has an educational purpose. The boulders are here to show tourists and the local public the type of creatures that can be found in the surrounding countryside and in the lake. This is a nice walk to do with young children. Start by the jetty, opposite the resort, with the fish boulder. Continue along the path and very soon you'll see the otter and other animal stones. There is one stone – an odd man out – that doesn't represent local fauna on this trail. It is a 3D portrait of Michael Berry, former owner of the resort, with his dog.

**Address** Ambleside Road, near Ambleside, Windermere, LA23 1LP | **Getting there** The sculptures are mostly dotted along the shoreline. The easiest way to see them is to park in the ticketed car park opposite the resort. Low Wood Bay is on A591 between Ambleside and Windermere; it is a brisk 30-minute walk from the centre of Ambleside; bus 555 stops near the resort. | **Access** Year-round | **Tip** Low Wood Bay is located next to the jetties where the annual Great North Swim is launched. The Great North is a major open-water swim taking place over three days with around 10,000 participants ([www.greatrun.org/great-swim](http://www.greatrun.org/great-swim)).



### 3\_\_ Schwitters at the Armit

#### *Dada in Cumbria*

The Armit is a fascinating museum, gallery and library. Since it is located in the heart of the Lake District, in the town of Ambleside, it would be natural for visitors to expect only works by local artists. For that reason, several rooms devoted to the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters come as a surprise. In fact, the permanent collection here houses the largest number of works by this artist, one of the 20th-century greats.

Kurt Schwitters was best known for his collages, harbingers of pop art. Born in Hanover in 1887, in his early years Schwitters experimented with several genres and media: Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Constructivism to name but a few. In 1937, he fled Nazi Germany, narrowly escaping arrest by the Gestapo. On hearing about the concentration camps, Schwitters renounced his German nationality. From then on, he refused to speak a word of German and fled first to Norway, then to Great Britain where he was interned for over a year. On release, with his health declining, he moved to rural Cumbria. Ambleside must have looked like a strange and rustic town to the artist, but it inspired simultaneously some of his most conventional and his most avant-garde works. In the hope of making a living whilst in Ambleside, he painted portraits, flowers and landscapes in a traditional manner to appeal to the tourists and the wealthy locals. Thirty of his paintings and pencil drawings can be seen at the Armit Museum, including a striking 1945 painting of the Bridge House.

Schwitters' most influential work was his Merz Barns, installations in barns containing 3D abstract collages made out of all sorts of discarded and broken items. There is very little left of his Lake District barn, in Elterwater, unfinished at his death in 1948, but the Armit Museum collection includes one of his collages called *Wood on Wood*.



**Address** Rydal Road, Ambleside, LA22 9BL | **Getting there** From the south, follow A 591, pass the Bridge House, cross the mini-roundabout, take the first right turn. From the north, follow A 591 past Green Bank Road, take the left turn just before the mini-roundabout. Bus 555 and 599 will take you to Ambleside, Keswick or Lancaster. The pay-and-display car park is opposite the museum. | **Hours** Tue–Sat 10.30am–4.30pm | **Tip** Schwitters is buried in St Mary's Church in Ambleside. His grave is marked with one of his sculptures, *Die Herbstzeilose*.

## 46 Grizedale Forest

*Giants, Ancient Foresters and Clockwork Forest*

Grizedale Forest is 2,000 hectares of woodland, owned by the Forestry Commission. This is a forest for art, adventure, nature and families. There is walking, mountain biking, cycling, Segway trails, and many works of art. Visitors can fly through the trees on a zip wire, and orienteering courses of various lengths are available. The visitor centre is easy to spot with its large welcome banner, and indeed a warm welcome is given to all.

Each walking route is colour coded. Some are low-level such as the yellow low-level Millwood Trail, a short loop on a gravel-surfaced path, or the blue Ridding Wood Trail, which goes past some unusual and ornate trees. The Silurian Way is the ultimate ten-mile Grizedale walk. The trail is named after the geological time period during which the forest's characteristic grey slates were formed. The walk is categorised as 'strenuous', and it includes the Carron Crag, the highest point in the forest at 314 metres, with spectacular views. The walk passes most of the sculptures that populate the forest.

Indeed, Grizedale is famous for featuring the largest collection of site-specific artwork in the UK, the result of a collaboration between the Grizedale Society (now Grizedale Arts) and the Forestry Commission, begun in 1977. Sculptors of international renown, such as David Nash, have been included. There is no specific sculpture trail. Instead, works of art are found along the various walks. Embark on the pink Bogle Crag trail to take in Andy Goldsworthy's iconic *Taking a wall for a walk*. Each piece of art is in symbiosis with the environment and makes use of the natural surroundings. Most are carved out of wood, stone or other natural materials but not all. Some of the trail markers may be obscured by vegetation so a bit of forward planning could go a long way. Maps are available at the visitor centre, or downloadable for free.





**Address** Hawkshead, Ambleside, LA22 0QJ, +44 (0)300 067 4495, [www.forestryengland.uk/grizedale](http://www.forestryengland.uk/grizedale), [grizedale@forestryengland.uk](mailto:grizedale@forestryengland.uk) | **Getting there** From the south, follow B 5286 till 2 miles after Hawkshead, then take first right and follow brown tourist signs. From the north, take A 591 to Ambleside, follow the direction to Langdale/Coniston, take B 5286 to Hawkshead then follow the signs. Parking for a fee on site. | **Hours** Visitor Centre & Forest Café, daily 10am–4pm, summer 10am–5pm | **Tip** If you love forest walks and mountain biking, another great destination is Whinlatter Forest (see ch. 106).

## 48 — Farrer's of Kendal

*Cuppa in a TARDIS*

The history of coffee is made of fabulous legends, lightly shrouded in mystery. However, we know that the first English coffee house was established in Oxford, in 1654. It is still running today; a remarkable longevity but not unique. Farrer's of Kendal, on Stricklandgate in the centre of the town, is a family business with a similar story. The company has been blending and selling teas and coffees since 1819. Coffee is no longer roasted on the premises, but with the new coffee craze engulfing England, the shop is busier than ever.

The black-and-white, double-bow-window frontage, reminiscent of another era, is very quaint. From the outside, the premises look far too small to accommodate the flow of punters going in, and one can't help wondering how they all fit.

Once inside, the layout becomes clearer. The décor is a real delight – converted gas lamps, squeaky wooden floorboards, low-beamed ceilings. The antique counter's backdrop consists of rows of large, black metal tea containers, showing only a copper-painted number. At the front, there is a display of colourful treats. A glass jar filled with small pink sugar mice from bygone times sits next to a tiny copper bell, there for attracting attention. However, it is not until a friendly member of staff takes you to a table that you realise how big this coffee house is, three storeys high with a multitude of landings.

Farrer's offers tea blends with strange and exotic names such as Formosa Oolong, Keemun, Silver Needles or Dragon Phoenix Pearl Jasmine. The company doesn't believe in 'one size fits all', which explains their long and varied coffee list. Ask for an Americano, a café au lait or a Mochaccino, and it will soon appear on your table with a complimentary biscuit. There is also a light lunch menu and a selection of cakes. This is a place without plastic trays or an internet password.

**Address** 13 Stricklandgate, Kendal, LA9 4LY, +44 (0)1539 731707, [farrerscoffee.co.uk](http://farrerscoffee.co.uk), [sales@farrerscoffee.co.uk](mailto:sales@farrerscoffee.co.uk) | **Getting there** Stricklandgate is in a pedestrian zone. From the north, follow A6 through to the roundabout at Kendal station, go straight ahead and follow the one-way system round the multistorey pay-on-exit car park. | **Hours** Mon – Sat 9am – 5.30pm | **Tip** Kendal Mint Cake is the original energy bar, created in 1918. It can be found in stores or direct from the Romney's factory on the Mintsfeet Industrial Estate (Kendal, LA9 6NA, [www.mintcake.co.uk](http://www.mintcake.co.uk)).





**Address** Stramongate, Kendal, LA9 4BH, +44(0)1539 722975, [www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk](http://www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk), [info@quaker-tapestry.co.uk](mailto:info@quaker-tapestry.co.uk) | **Getting there** Friends Meeting House is very near the town centre. The nearest public car parks are a few minutes' walk away on either side of Blackhall Road. | **Hours** Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; closed early Dec–mid-Feb, check website for exact dates | **Tip** Swarthmoor Hall in Ulverston was the exact birthplace of Quakerism. It's a fully functioning Quaker centre with courses and rooms to stay ([www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk](http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk)).

## 53 — Serpentine Woods

*C has a name that means one hundred feet*

Serpentine Woods are a piece of local history sitting at the top of Beast Banks outside Kendal. There are three miles of footpaths, covering an Alphabet and a Nature Trail. From the start, meet *A*, a one-metre-tall, weather-beaten, carved-wood acorn. Walk a hundred metres and look up and there is *B*, a butterfly installation with beautiful wings. And so it goes.

Originally pasture, the land was planted with trees at the end of the 18th century, and in 1824 walks were set out amongst them. The woodland became very popular very quickly and the woods suffered as a result. There is only one tree left from this period, but other Victorian features remain, including a wishing well, the Fairy Glen and a recently restored cottage. In the days when carrying a watch was the privilege of the few, Serpentine Woods were also the home of Kendal's 'time gun'. The gun was fired daily at 1.00pm, set off by electricity through the telegraph wire. The loud bang marked the workers' lunch break. The first three guns wore out, and the fourth was stolen in 1950, but its pedestal remains between the letters *R* and *Q* of the Alphabet Trail.

The Alphabet Trail was put together in 1992. A kids' quiz can be obtained from the Kendal Tourist Information Centre or the Library for a small fee. It can also be downloaded for free, and if you've left it to the last minute, there is a QR code in the woods. As the trail was never intended as a permanent exhibition, some letters have disappeared, but a new trail was developed, keeping the original letters wherever possible. Some letters are a little difficult to spot, like the *Z* for zebra which is a black-and-white picture high up in a tree. Others are interactive; you can play on *X* for xylophone. The woods are also home to a wide range of bird species, foxes and squirrels. Make sure to bring your wellies as it can get a little mucky.

## *Acknowledgements*

It's impossible to write a book like this alone, and I could not have done it without the following people: Simon for his invaluable support, Claire for her warmth and marmalade, Alison who worked tirelessly editing this book, every single person who showed me around, gifted me their time. You are too many for me to name each one, but you know who you are. Thank you so much.



### *The author*

**Solange Berchemin** was 18 when she travelled solo to the other side of the world, four years later, her partner took her to visit the Lake District. It was love at first sight. She has always enjoyed words and has a passion for people's stories. If there is a story somewhere she will find it. Ten years ago, after an atypical career path which led her to pick cotton in Greece and manage the largest languages department in London (not at the same time), she turned to writing. Columnist for the *Greenwich Visitor*, her articles have appeared in national and international publications such as *The Toronto Star*, *BBC Good Food*, *The Sunday Times*. She writes a blog and is the author of five books but when it gets too much she returns to the Lakes to collect more stories. To read her complete biography go to [www.solangeberchemin.com](http://www.solangeberchemin.com).