

Bowled over

Bowl of Bleasdale from Beacon Fell



Water Aven



Bluebells and Stitchwort



View from Beacon Fell

Andy Rowett takes us for a walk through this beautiful local landscape

Bowl of Bleasdale? Never heard of it? Well, read on...

This is one of the best upland landscapes in the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Designated in 1964, 13% of the AONB is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The Bowl of Bleasdale is formed by the hills around the headwater of the River Brock, Parlick, Fairsnape, Oaken Clough Fell and Beacon Fell. At the heart is the hamlet of Bleasdale with its Church, school and eco-friendly village hall, with a wind turbine bought by Lancashire Environmental Fund!

Walk around and you will experience the best of Lancashire's biodiversity habitats from river valleys through oak woodland to open moorland. A visit in late April and May will coincide with the annual carpeting of the Brock woodlands with Bluebells. Within the mass of blue are others that bloom at the same time; Water Avens, stitchworts and Marsh Marigolds. **Such colours!**

Brockmill is a convenient starting place. The first objective is the summit of Beacon Fell. Dominated by conifers, the hillside's dark flanks appear to hold little interest, but there are Siskins, crossbills and Sparrowhawks here. If you are lucky, the shy and elusive Roe Deer can be seen and the peaty ponds buzz with dragonflies in summer, when you can pick Bilberries. The ranks of conifers obscure the view to the south and west, but to the north you can see the high fells surrounding Bleasdale.

Next on the hill walker's tick-list is Parlick (432mtrs). The most popular ascent is straight up from Fell Foot but the discerning walker should follow the old zig-zag sledge track that makes for an easier climb. No doubt you will pass the odd thrill seeker carrying his paragliding kit. The fell is a popular launch site and on fine days throughout the year the multi-coloured aerobatics add to the interest.

Parlick summit affords fine views for a little effort. The way ahead is along the sweeping curve of the fell to the ancient cairn of Paddy's Pole on Fairsnape Fell. The small hollow half way between the two summits, curiously named Nick's Chair, has been the subject of much speculation as to its origin. Did Old Nick sit here and taunt the local residents?

It is a good place to sit out of the wind in the sun on a winter's day to enjoy a break. The River Brock rises just below. Bowland is famed for its upland birds and you'll always be accompanied by the sweet lament of the Meadow Pipit, the cry of the Curlew or lark ascending.

From Fairsnape it is a short stroll to the highest point on the walk. Nameless on the map, I have always known it as 1707; the spot height given on older OS maps. Note the boundary stones hereabouts marking the WW2 training areas. Heed the warning signs. If you find anything bomb-like, don't touch! At this point you will encounter a change in the landscape.

The seeming flat, pathless expanse of peat and heather seems to go on forever as you cross the Brock/Hodder watershed to Fiendsdale Head. This is not a place for agoraphobics and the "go-back, go-back" call of a startled Red Grouse adds to the sense of wilderness. For the lucky few who walk this way, you may be rewarded by the sight of a Hen Harrier sky-dancing or hunting over the heather.

On reaching Fiendsdale Head, a good path leads down into the Bowl of Bleasdale where a visit to Bleasdale Circle is a must. Site of a Bronze Age Wood Henge, the timber posts were long ago replaced by concrete to retain the sense of place.

The fields of Bleasdale hide the elusive Brown Hare and nesting sites of the acrobatic Lapwing. Follow the woodland paths along the Brock, on the way back to Brockmill. If you can divert your gaze from the woodland flora, you may just catch a glimpse of a Dipper or Grey Wagtail foraging the gravelly river bed, or Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler in the woodland canopy.

Next time you fancy a hill walk, stick close to home and discover the beauty on your doorstep.

The walks start at Map Ref **SD548431** and is about 10 miles.

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After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality and so on - have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear - what remains? Nature remains.

Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892)



Bluebells along Brock Valley