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Chapter One: What the Guide Books Do Not Tell You

This is not a guide book. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But I want to start with what the proper guide books *don't* tell you about climbing mountains. I love reading guide books but they always make it sound straightforward and you run the risk of thinking you are the only one that actually (in truth) gets out of breath on the way up. Well, let me assure you that you are not! To me, being *able* to climb a mountain is one thing – the guide books tell you where to start and finish, the route in between and what to expect about the terrain and what you're looking at while you're doing it. I want to talk about how it actually *feels* to climb a mountain. I have taken years to gather first-hand knowledge and I feel I can speak with confidence. By passing on these insights, I hope to add context to the technicalities of maps and guide books that I love.



Striking a pose on the “lion” of Helm Crag.

Brace yourself...

1. The point of the mountain you are looking at that you *think* is the top *never* is. There are always one, two or three more 'tops' to climb before you get to the true summit. In other words it is always further than you think. As Wainwright said, fell-walking and wishful thinking have nothing in common!
2. The shortcut is rarely quicker as it usually turns out to be much steeper (although the longer route always seems very steep anyway so you can't win!) Despite knowing this, I continue time after time to take the 'shortcut'.
3. If there are two paths to choose from, invariably, the path you need is the steep and uninviting one, not the gentle sloping one.
4. The wind is *always* against you. No matter how many times you change direction. This is, of course, unless (for girls and guys with long hair) you decide to put your hair up. At this moment the wind becomes a whirlwind from all directions so there are always strands or chunks that escape and flap around your eyes or get stuck in your lip balm.
5. However steep you think a particular climb is going to be it always feels steeper than you think (whatever the map contours say), or, if you have done it before, steeper than you remember.
6. Just when you think you cannot possibly go any further, that whoever thought of climbing mountains must be seriously deluded and you are staggering to your 15th view stop, someone around the age of 80 will stroll pass you, making it look like a doddle.

But it is worth it because...

1. No matter how good the views are, there are nearly always better ones further on.
2. You will get to the top – it is possible, however hard you are breathing and how much your legs hurt on the way up and however much you feel like giving up! If they're honest, *everyone* feels like that at some point.
3. Whatever the pain of ascent, you will forget it the moment you reach the top and marvel at the wonder of being on top of the world (I gather they say this about child birth but I am not in a position to comment).
4. When you get back down, there is nothing in the world as good as a shandy, glass of wine or hot chocolate (whatever your tippie of choice) as you contemplate what you have achieved.
5. Unless you break a limb on the way up or down, mountain climbing is seriously good for you and will get the endorphins going. Even more than chocolate!

As I said, you will not get these tips in your standard guide book so use this as an addendum to your map or book of choice and rest assured that you are not alone if these things happen to you.

A few basics: what you always wanted to know about physical geography and were afraid to ask!

One of the things that can be a bit bewildering as you start out on the Whole Walking Business is getting to grips with the terminology and the terrain. An Ordnance Survey map (or equivalent) is pretty much essential and with a bit of guidance and practice, you'll soon learn to follow them. However, to get you started, I've given a few basic definitions in the table opposite.

Some advice on what to take while climbing

At this point I should say that my high heels do not make it into my rucksack (although there was a question mark over this when I climbed the Fairfield Horseshoe). They have not done so yet anyway, but I continue to search for the opportunity to combine heels and hills more effectively.

I have been climbing for most of my life so can speak from experience (although I miss the days when I was little and my dad used to carry the rucksack); the most seasoned walker can be caught unawares by the change in weather, dangerous crags or slippery rocks so it is essential to take care. I am fortunate that I have never had to call on the services of the Mountain Rescue teams and it is beholden on us all to be careful so we do not have to. They do an outstanding job, all on a voluntary basis, but are woefully under-resourced so do not take them for granted. It is important to treat mountains with respect.

My tips for safe climbing

1. As Wainwright said: **Watch where you are putting your feet.** It is easy to get subsumed by the views but do not get carried away.
2. If you possibly can, take a **GPS (Global Positioning System)**. I started using one in December 2010 and have never looked back. In mist, they are invaluable. Some walkers think it is heresy to have a GPS – I disagree completely (see Chapter Eight: Getting Lost! to find out why).
3. Yes I am an advocate of GPS but I always have an **Ordnance Survey map and a compass** with me and usually a Wainwright guide as well. If you do take the trouble to take an OS map and compass, make sure you know how to use them, particularly if your GCSE or O-Level geography days were a long time ago!
4. **Tell someone where you are going.** I usually do self-catering so there is no one locally I can tell. So I have a system with my dad, even though he is in Kent – I text him to tell him where I am going and what time I am going to start, and at various points where I have signal on the route. Then when I get back (as soon as I have reception) I text him to say I am safely down. If he had not heard from me by the time it starts to get dark, he would raise the alert and know approximately where I was.

(Definitions of 'fell', 'ridge', 'scree', 'bog', 'cairn', and 'ghyll' taken from www.macmillandictionary.com; definition of 'tarn', 'crag', 'force', 'packhorse bridge', 'col' and 'gully' are author's own.)

Term	Definition	What it means for you!
Fell	A barren or stony hill	Mountain – takes a lot of effort to get to the top but worth it when you do!
Ridge	The long narrow top of a mountain or group of mountains	A triumph and some good views (the latter being weather dependent!)
Ghyll/gill	A rocky stream or river on a mountain	Admire and take photos but avoid falling in (like I did once) unless you wish to try 'gill scrambling', the very purpose of which is to climb/ jump/scramble down gills!
Bog	An area of ground that is always wet and soft	Potential trouble! This is when you get to test your footwear and your waterproofs. Undignified if you fall in (see Chapter Four: Bogs and Screes)
Crag	Rocky outcrops on mountains (sometimes included in the name of mountains ie. Eagle Crag)	Admire and avoid unless you are a rock climber!
Scree	A slope covered with small pieces of rock; small loose pieces of broken rock at the bottom of a cliff or along the slopes of a mountain	Much energy will be exerted in the two steps forward, one step back approach unless you have good grip!
Tarn	A mountain lake or pool	A joy to look at – pretty and a good lunch spot or place to paddle (you can even swim in some)
Gully	A small or large ravine, often caused by water but sometimes by footpath erosion	Avoid unless it forms part of an official route
Cairn	A pile of stones that marks the top of the mountain (and sometimes the route up or down)	Either: You've made it! Or: Good news – you are actually on a path of some description!
Col	The low point between mountains or ridges	The dip in between mountains (chance to get your breath back!)
Packhorse bridge	Stone bridge with low arches originally constructed for the use of pack horses carrying loads	Quaint little bridges over pretty streams – photo opportunity!
Force (as in Stockghyll Force)	Waterfall	Lovely part of a mountain walk if you are lucky enough to pass one

5. **Do not take unnecessary risks.** You will see from my stories that I have climbed in all sorts of weather. I do that as I am confident in my GPS and in my sensible approach and I have lots of experience. I am never complacent, however, and there have been times when I have decided it is too late, too misty or just too risky to continue and have turned around or taken an exit-route. It can be soul-destroying when you have come so far but better than broken limbs or worse.

6. **Take waterproofs** – even when it is sunny when you start. Good quality ones that are genuinely waterproof and not ‘water-resistant’ or ‘shower-proof’. Trust me, there is a difference! Even if it does not rain on the journey, they are another useful tool against the wind and cold as the temperatures can surprise you at the top. I have not yet found a glamorous alternative to waterproof over-trousers sadly but I remain optimistic.

7. **Take a First Aid kit** – I include plasters, blister plasters (which are absolutely amazing), one of the antibacterial hand gels, bandages, mini scissors, bite cream, hayfever tablets, ibuprofen and moisturiser. That is just me though – there may be other things you need.

8. This one may sound excessive and I have never used it but always take it with me – a **hypothermia bag** (which looks like a large foil bag that you get into to keep warm). You just never know and if you injure yourself and you cannot communicate with anyone, you do not know how long you will be out there for.

9. **Make sure you have suncream and a hat** in the summer as, if you are lucky and it is sunny, there is often little shade (NB please do try and avoid unsightly sock marks from suntan/burn).

10. **Remember to take a torch** – even if you plan to be back down well before darkness falls; if you have an accident or get lost, you may be out there longer than you thought. I have a head torch so I can keep my hands free.

11. It’s worth having some **spare bootlaces** (also useful if you forget 12, below).

12. One for the girls or guys with long hair – **hair bands!** Whilst the cold can surprise you, so too can how hot it gets, even on a cold day when walking. It can also be a safety device – to keep your hair out of your eyes in the wind!

13. Take **water** – lots of it, again, even when it is cold. I personally do not like replenishing my water supply from streams on the way so I take more than enough, but I have seen plenty of people do that!

14. **Think about food** – you will need enough not just for lunch, but also to snack on the way – when your legs start to feel tired, it is amazing what a boost an apple or banana can give; also, try some of the high energy options like Kendal Mint Cake.

15. If it is winter, I always have a **snood, warm hat and thick gloves**. I actually take the hat and gloves with me in the summer as well and have used them on occasion when it has been chilly on the top. I also take thin gloves with me in the summer

because they are useful for moments when you have to scramble – I may love fell-walking but I also like having nice fingernails! They were invaluable when I made my way down the Dore-Head scree (missing the nice green path next to it!)

16. In winter, wear **thermals** – no, they are not glamorous and definitely avoid being seen in them early on in a relationship, but they are essential when walking.

17. Make sure you have a **fully charged mobile phone**.

18. Take **spare batteries** for your torch, GPS and any other gadget you may be using.

19. Finally, you will need a reliable **Sherpa** to carry it all for you! Or failing that, a good quality **waterproof rucksack** (with the waterproof lining that goes over it when it is really tipping it down).



My trusty rucksack.

With all that you will not go far wrong!

Planning your route

My last piece of proper advice is about planning your route and the time it takes to complete it. (If you are a seasoned fell walker then skip to Chapter Two at this point.)

Climbing fells is not the same as walking in flat areas or low hills. It takes longer and is more strenuous to climb, owing to the gradients, terrain and weather (which change all the time). One of the most common formulas for calculating how long a walk will take is **Naismith's Rule**, which was devised by a Scottish mountaineer called W.W. Naismith in 1892. This formula states:

'A fit person will travel an average of five kilometres per hour and will take an extra 30 minutes for every 300 metres of ascent.'

(A Wainwright: A Walker's Notebook', 2007)

This, however, is not an exact science and you will only start to become more accurate by trial and error and understanding your own fitness level.

When planning the route, do pay attention to contours on the map and check whether they are inclines or declines. It sounds obvious but I doubt I am the only one who has got it wrong. I learned the lesson quickly though! The most critical point is that if you have not climbed mountains before, be realistic about what you can achieve – you will not become a fell-runner or SAS navigator overnight. I went ice-skating in New York once with someone who had never been ice-skating before. He thought he could rival Torvill and Dean the moment he stepped on the ice, however, and would master spins and twists in minutes simply because he used to roller skate a lot when younger. He spent most of his time sprawled out flat on the ice though (I spent most of the time chuckling at the edge as it was hilarious to watch!). This shows what misplaced confidence can do! Be sensible and know your limits.

I do not apply the same rule to high heels. With those, limits are there to be tested!

What to wear – combining fells with clothes, shopping and make-up

I know what you're thinking – sensible and stylish cannot, surely, co-exist in the same kagool?! But oh yes, it can be done! I have a whole wardrobe of clothes for climbing in the Lake District – the overriding colour that features is pink because, to quote Reese Witherspoon's character in the film *Legally Blonde*, pink 'is not just a colour. It is a state of mind'. It is true in my view. Pink is a cheerful colour but it also holds a practical purpose whether you are climbing or walking in summer or winter as if you fall or get lost or have an accident of some sort, it is a good colour to stand out against snow, rocks, grass or any other terrain you may find yourself on (assuming you avoid Flamingo parks).

Serious fell-walkers may find all this a bit girly, but I make no apology for that – I am what I am! I have a pink raincoat for the summer and a pink ski jacket for the winter, along with a white ski jacket with pink detail (I have only ever been skiing once and was more a fan of the *après-ski* than the *actual-ski* but the skiing sections of outdoor clothes shops are useful for winter fell-walking too). For those times of fabulous sunshine I also have a pink sun hat and a pink winter hat. My trousers are green khaki-type trousers with lots of pockets for lip balm, hair bands, mobile phone etc.

I love shopping for outdoor clothes almost as much as heels and I see no reason at all why you cannot climb in style. I have not climbed a mountain in heels yet (although I saw a pair of Stiletto Hiking Boots in Harvey Nichols that could have worked a treat!). However, I have managed to combine shopping with climbing on Fleetwith Pike: if you park in the Honister Slate Mine carpark it is £5 for all day but you get that back if you spend £10 in the shop. What is a girl to do? Clearly, the moment I got back down I headed to the shop and purchased some slate gifts (coasters and key rings) and some quirky jewellery – a pretty pink necklace of polished stones and matching bracelet. So shopping and fells can be combined and I aim to find further ways of doing this. If someone could open up a shop that sells heels and outdoor clothing that would be great.



High heels: an extreme sport?



Anyone for skiing?



Lipstick and mascara – essential walking gear.



A mountain climber? Really?

Make-up can also be combined with walking. I do not wear a lot of make-up but I cannot go anywhere without mascara. One of my closest friends once told me my eyes were one of my best features so for many years I have worn mascara, particularly since I began wearing contact lenses rather than glasses (which then opened a whole new world of shopping involving sunglasses!). I digress.

I also use waterproof mascara even though it is more difficult to take off in the evenings (or usually in the mornings for me as I can rarely be bothered before I go to bed) as you never know when you are going to get caught in a rain shower or when a scene from a film (or even an episode of Masterchef) will catch you unawares.... I confess I can be a little emotional. When I climb mountains, therefore, I wear mascara. I usually add lipstick as well (although on a sunny day it does tend to melt in the rucksack!). To some it may sound strange to put make-up on to climb a mountain, but why not? When I get back down to the car, before I go into any pub, café or bar I top-up the lipstick and add face powder (no blusher required owing to either heat, cold or a wind-burnt complexion!).

I also change my clothes. You may think I have lost the plot but unless I am absolutely exhausted and do not have the energy to undo a boot lace I change from my walking clothes to something more refined (this could be anything from summer skirts to jeans) combined with either flip-flops or heels or sometimes trainers. There are only a handful of occasions where I have not done this, the most recent being having completed the Wainwright's and not getting to the pub at Wasdale Head until nearly 7pm. Other than these occasions, if you saw me in a pub or café after a walk, you would imagine I was someone who visited the Lakes to sip champagne and stroll in flip-flops between shops or around tarns and had never been up a mountain in my life – there is nothing wrong at all with people who come to the Lakes to do just that, but appearances can be deceptive.

I try and keep my fingernails intact and sometimes wear gloves at rocky points for this reason, plus I wear nail polish on my toes. I discovered a marvellous polish on a spa day in Kent with a friend last year that is a vibrant pink (of course). I wore it climbing my final five Wainwright's and it did not chip. A miracle polish and I wore flip flops for the rest of the week without having to redo my toes. Excellent.

My point really is that you do not have to be a naturally 'outdoorsy' type to climb a mountain in the Lake District. I like my creature comforts and you will not catch me camping until they invent an en-suite and mini bar (not forgetting central heating). You may surprise yourself how much you enjoy being out and about anyway.

Now, we are ready to walk.

Chapter Two: Divided by a Common Language

As you know by now, I am Kentish born and bred and now live in Sussex. I love those two counties but it makes me very southern (for me 'The North' starts somewhere above the M4) and I sound very southern. This is very apparent in the Lake District where pronunciations are a constant source of surprise to me and I, with my attempts at mastering a more northern dialect, am a constant source of entertainment for locals.

An example is the hamlet of Watendlath, near Keswick. Now, all my life I have pronounced this in true southern-style as 'what-end-larth', with the emphasis on 'larth' and yes inserting the letter 'r'. My friend Malcolm, who was born and bred in the Lakes and actually grew up near Watendlath, fell about laughing when I said it. After he recovered (about 10 minutes later) he told me how it is actually pronounced – 'wat-end-l'th' with the emphasis on 'end' and with a few letters missing. How is someone as southern as me supposed to get that? It is like 'Threshwaite' being pronounced 'Thresh'et'. You are supposed to know things like this in order to avoid sounding daft (a trap I have not avoided – far from it!) One of my Christmas presents was a mini book entitled 'Cumbrian English' – I have perused this at length and am ever hopeful that I will one day get it right!

There are also complications with places being called the same names. There are two villages called Troutbeck very near each other, several Sour Milk Gills and Mosedale, two Red Pikes, two Harter Fells and many Eagle Craggs, as well as at least two Red Tarns. It is a minefield of complications that newcomers are bound to fall foul of from time to time. Rest assured, however, this is perfectly normal and there is usually a friendly soul to help you out!

This brings me to the names of mountains. They are just fantastic! Some, like the Buttermere Red Pike and Stone Arthur look like they sound. Other names are very poetic and descriptive, such as Catbells and Haystacks. There are also those that take their names from the surrounding rivers or valleys, like Illgill Head. And then there are those mountains that seem to be named totally randomly but are just wonderful names. I have looked into the meanings of some place names using online search engines and a book by David Watson (2009) called *Making sense of the place names of the Lake District*. My favourites are:

Hartsop 'Hart' in Cumbria translates as 'deer' and the word 'sop' means valley, therefore the small hamlet of Hartsop means the 'valley of the deer'.

Yewbarrow I never saw a Yew tree on the way up it! It is conceivable that the top looks like an upturned wheelbarrow (albeit a rather bumpy, well-used one) but that is probably not



The Skiddaw Range – definite mountains.



The Froswick Range – definite mountains.



If it looks like a mountain, it is a mountain. Or is it?

the first description that would spring to mind. If you look at Old English, Yew probably means ‘sheep’ and barrow ‘hill’ so that effectively means it is the ‘hill where sheep graze’ – that and the other 213 fells as I do not think I have been on a fell where there are not sheep grazing somewhere! One of the most striking parts of Yewbarrow is a crag called ‘Bell Rib’ – this translates from the French word ‘Bell’ meaning beautiful and the Old English word ‘Rib’, which refers to the shape. So ‘beautiful rib’ – not something anyone has ever said to me!

Great Cock-Up Well, I mean, who could resist putting that on the list? What is that name about? Did nature make a mistake when this mountain was created? In my view it is the most amusing mountain name in the Lake District if perhaps not the prettiest! There is no definitive answer about where the fell name comes from but some sources suggest it stems from the Old English words ‘cocc’ (woodcock) and ‘hop’ (secluded



valley), therefore ‘valley of the woodcock’ and the word Great being included to denote it is higher than its neighbouring fell Little Cock-Up (I promise I am not making this up!). Secluded valley is certainly apt as it is the northern fells and you can walk there for hours without meeting another soul.

Catbells One of the most popular mountains for climbers of all ages and an iconic part of the Keswick and Derwent Water scenery. It literally translates as ‘the bell-shaped hill where wild cats are found’. I have seen no evidence of wild cats there mind you, which is rather a relief!

Haystacks I need look for no reference for this mountain. When you look at Haystacks, it quite clearly resembles old-fashioned stacks of hay before hay was packed into neat rectangular or circular bales. A perfect name for an attractive fell.

Bannerdale Crags I do not think the word ‘Bannerdale’ is particularly attractive but I think its meaning is. The word ‘banner’ means ‘holly’ and ‘dale’ is ‘valley’ therefore Bannerdale is the ‘valley of holly’ and Bannerdale Crags would be ‘the crags in the valley of holly’. I think a valley of holly sounds simply lovely! That said, I have climbed Bannerdale Crags from Bannerdale and I did not see any holly so that is rather disappointing! Just like I have never seen deer in the ‘Valley of the Deer’ (but I know they are there and will continue to look!)

Mellbreak I had to include this as one of my favourite mountains but the meaning is not entirely clear. The best guess is that it is a Gaelic word that possibly means ‘dappled hill’. That seems to fit – the fell is dappled with crags and heather and sections of scree. At various points it is probably dappled with people having view stops too!

Ullscarf I include this mountain name as it refers to ‘the pass of wolves’. Wolves used to roam the fells and valleys of the Lake District but have been gone from there for many years and therefore the mountains of the Lake District, unlike many of the mountain areas in the USA for example, are predator-free as far as people are concerned. There are many dangers when walking and climbing but being mauled by a wolf or bear is not one of them I am glad to say!

Loughrigg I will end with this name as it is such a popular sight. It is easily translated with ‘lough’ meaning ‘lake’ and ‘rig’ meaning ‘ridge’, therefore Loughrigg is ‘the ridge by the lake’. Extremely apt I would say!

There are many different interpretations of place and fell names and my research showed there is little agreement on the derivation of some of them. I do not claim that all these are accurate – it is simply a bit of fun!

Then there is the question of how you define a mountain. Now, I have pondered this for some time. When is a mountain not a mountain? Frankly, I have no idea. I am a massive Wainwright fan and extol the virtues of his guide book series to all and sundry. He is part of the reason I love the Lake District. I have climbed not just the 214 Wainwright’s but several other mountains as well.

And therein lies my point. How is a mountain defined? When is a mountain not a mountain? It seems quite arbitrary to me in many ways. How can somewhere as flat, with such little resemblance to a mountain and with such few metres of height between it and its neighbour be a mountain, yet something that has many more metres between its neighbour and itself and frankly look more like a mountain should, not be classed as a separate fell? I am thinking first and foremost of Mungrisdale Common near Blencathra (those of you who have been there will understand what I mean), which in my view is flat and dull and indistinguishable from the route to Blencathra. How can this be a separate fell when Stile End between Barrow and Outerside, which has clear sides and height from its neighbours and looks like a mountain should (pointy) is not? Another example is that Armboth Fell (second only to Mungrisdale Common in my list of fells to be avoided) is a mountain but the towering, larger, more distinguished Bell Crags, but a stone’s throw away, is not? The

latest Cicerone guide for this area has Bell Crag as a separate fell so even the experts do not always agree.

Nab Scar seems just a part of Heron Pike to me as part of the Fairfield Horseshoe and Stone Arthur is virtually indistinguishable as part of the route to Blea Rigg (although the rocky top is distinctive from Grasmere). Broad Crag and Ill Crag near Scafell Pike are both over 3,000 feet/914 metres but neither are classed as separate fells. I could go on.

It seems very random to me. I am sure there are technical explanations but I doubt they will convince me so I will maintain the view that it is more arbitrary than anything else. Whilst I will continue to be a huge Wainwright fan, I disagree with some of the judgments in his 214 fells. I will still look upon Mungrisdale Common as a flat marsh that is merely a part of Blencathra, as Armboth Fell as the devil's own work and a part of Bell Crag and Stile End as a cracking little fell in its own right.