

Walkers are Welcome Northern Mini Get-Together
Monday 10th August 2015 Kirkby Stephen
A Visit to Kirkby Stephen



Kirkby Stephen has a population of 1,800 and has a business community in access of what would be expected due to a long tradition of passing trade and the hinterland upper Eden totalling a population of over 5,000 in this very sparsely populated area. Volunteers tend to be in short supply with many doubling up their roles due to the small population but this also allows for close working within the community. There is an independent spirit and this community leads the way.

Kirkby Stephen and District Walkers are Welcome were accredited in 2009 having made themselves responsible for Kirkby Stephen parish PROW's although promoting and also working in the wider upper Eden. We are indebted to Cumbria County Council, Countryside Access Department for their support. Brough Parish Council have joined us and have appointed a representative to sit on our committee. We like to work with as many partners as possible where there can be mutual aims and a sharing of resources.

Kirkby Stephen has ten long distance trails, the most popular being the Wainwright Coast to Coast which has now been brought under the wing of the Wainwright Society enabling a definitive route and waymarking to be completed. This also enables the Wainwright Society to post problems along the route on their website <http://www.wainwright.org.uk/coasttocoast.html> The Coast to Coast is big business with three baggage handling companies and an average £1,000 spend per walker shared over the route. This trail attracts thousands of walkers year on year with peaks after increased national and international publicity.

The Lady Anne's Way written by Shelia Gordon is fast becoming our second most popular trail. Whereas the Coast to Coast caters for the fittest walkers wanting a challenge, the Lady Anne's Way is popular with those that have an interest in history and want a gentler walk. Chris Crogen of Skyware Press <http://www.skyware.co.uk/> publishes this booklet and other Yorkshire walks including a new Pennine Way publication. Chris is also involved with the ride2stride walking festival <http://www.skyware.co.uk/scwf/default.html> in May each year which has walks over a 10 day period reached via the Settle-Carlisle railway. A day is spent a day in Kirkby Stephen with additional entertainment. Friends of the Settle-Carlisle <http://www.foscl.org.uk/> and Friends of Dales rail <http://www.friendsofdalesrail.org/> run regular guided walks in our area alighting at Kirkby Stephen or Garsdale stations.

The Swale Way has been re-launched working with Boroughbridge Walkers are Welcome <http://www.swaleway.org.uk/> Whilst we are not on the Swale river, there is an option to walk into Kirkby Stephen where the train may be accessed. We are also beginning the relaunch of the old Yoredale Way with them.

The Pennine Journey and Howgill and Limestone Trail are the two newest trails based around Alfred Wainwrights wanderings and devised by David and Heather Pitt. Their supporter's club concept where members pay 10p per mile per year ensures that the walks meet the long distance walk criteria. <http://www.penninejourney.org.uk/> <http://howgillsandlimestonetrail.org.uk/>

The Kirkby Stephen Town Council maintain four public outside spaces, Edensyde, Frank's Bridge, Stenkrith Park and Jubilee Park and are very supportive of the Walkers are Welcome accreditation. They also pay our annual WaW subscription and appoint a Councillor to our group. Councillor Janette Hoad has been newly elected.

The Kirkby Stephen Poetry Path was devised by Dick Capel when employed by the East Cumbria Countryside Project. The concept is twelve large stones embracing the farmers' year engraved with poems by local nationally acclaimed poet Meg Peacocke. The path is now ten years old and the stones have been cleaned by the lettering artist Pip Hall with the aid of Town Council funding. There is a video trail produced by Kirkby Stephen Town Forum <http://www.walkeden.org/Walking/Outdoor-sculptures.aspx>

The path receives international publicity and there have been several anniversary events including a walk with The Times writer Christopher Somerville published in January 2015 <http://www.christophersomerville.co.uk/?p=911> and a walk with year one of the Kirkby Stephen Primary School. Working with local resident 'MacGrumpy' (aka Peter) six new Geocaches have been added along the Poetry Path this year. <http://www.walkeden.org/Walking/Geocaching.aspx>

We are also fortunate to have the Eden Benchmarks along the River Eden www.edenbenchmarks.org.uk and the Sheepfolds devised by international landscape artist Andy Goldsworthy www.sheepfoldscumbria.co.uk which are dotted around the upper Eden.

The Northern Viaduct Trust (NVT) <http://www.nvt.org.uk/> maintain three magnificent viaducts on disused railways in Kirkby Stephen and nearby Swardale. The NVT have an all-weather surfaced walk with disabled access along the disused Stainmore Railway line where they have also built the Millennium Bridge allowing access from Stenkrith Park and spectacular views down onto the Stenkrith gorge. Mike Sunderland, Chairman of NVT has joined our group. Cumbria Wildlife Trust (CWT) <http://www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk/> maintain a nature reserve at the

Smardale viaduct as well as other local reserves. The local CWT representative, Margaret Albon has been a founding member of our group. CWT have a summer programme of activities and walks.

We are on the edge of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, <http://www.northpennines.org.uk/> the old Stainmore Railway line forming the boundary and many of our nearby parishes are within their area. The permissive path across open access land to the iconic Nine Standards, part of the Coast to Coast, is being eroded on the peat uplands and is currently receiving attention with plans to replace with a new bridleway. We work with Di Denby at the Friends of the North Pennines on the North Pennines Walking Festival <http://friendsofthenorthpennines.org.uk/north-pennines-walking-festival/> providing walk leaders and walks in our area and helping with the publicity. Alston Walkers are Welcome are also involved in this festival.

Undoubtedly, our closest partner is the Countryside Access Ranger at Cumbria County Council, Tony Burns who is also part of our steering group. We keep a close eye on our local PROW network and this relationship enables us to have expert advice and problem solving on hand. We also have a postcard and online problem reporting service which is invaluable for walkers to be able them to report faults easily and receive feedback. <http://www.walkeden.org/Walking/Report-a-problem.aspx> With the aid of Cumbria County Council we devised a programme of repairs to two ancient lanes last year which dealt with our worst spots. £10,000 was raised with funding from Cumbria County Council, Friends of the Lake District, HF Holidays, Nurture Eden and Co-operative Community Fund.

Four years ago we were faced with losing our Tourist Information Centre then run by Eden District Council (EDC); we worked with a panel of local interested parties raising £25,000 and negotiating a lease on the building from EDC. The new Upper Eden Visitor Centre http://visituppereden.org.uk/?page_id=214 has one part-time assistant and a large force of local enthusiastic volunteers. The Visitor Centre is run by the Upper Eden CIC and a good example for a voluntary led scheme saving a vital service. The centre stocks a wide range of walking books including the local Peter McWilliam guides. The Centre enables walking information to have a base and be easily promoted. We have recently produced two family adventure walks in Kirkby Stephen and Brough to fill the gap of children's entertainment and are available free at the centre on to download online <http://www.walkeden.org/Things-to-do.aspx> The Tourism Assistant, Fiona Poole is also on our committee.

Our Dawdle health walks were started two years ago and are weekly one hour walks on a Thursday morning aimed at social walking and increasing fitness. The numbers vary according to the weather and other commitments but have been incredibly successful in allowing people to make new friends and enjoy the outside. The walk highlight is coffee (and cake) with many that have been unable to go on the walk coming to coffee anyway. Programmes are distributed locally, available at the Community and Council Centre, published in the Herald during the summer and other online event information.

Despite lobbying, we have seen a constant decline in Public Transport over the years due to cuts in government expenditure leading to Cumbria County Council dropping all bus subsidies as a non-compulsory service. We do now have a tarmacked footpath to the station but this is no substitute for a regular bus service particularly as the station out of town is up a steep incline. There have however been two new heritage bus routes to replace some lost services. The lack of transport to the station remains our worst transport problem.

We have fostered a close relationship with the local newspaper, Cumberland and District Herald allowing us to issue regular news stories and they publish our summer Dawdle programme. We use facebook to advertise walks and activities and anything walking related as an instant news feed. Twitter messages are the best media for quick short messages to thousands of people and can be a very successful means of promoting events and the area even overseas particularly when linked to a photograph and weblink. We are lucky to have on our committee, David Stewart of Walkingworld who runs our website <http://www.walkeden.org/>. David is also a member of the Kirkby Stephen Mountain Rescue and First Responders.

Local businesses display the Walkers are Welcome logo stickers and just about every business is supportive as we promote the area generally as well as for walking. Last year we introduced a Boots2Garden project with businesses and residents planting up boots around the town which will be repeated again this year. Several of our group also run bed and breakfasts and we have a quarterly newsletter for accommodation providers.

Some of the more quirky aspects of the town are the free-flying Macaws <http://www.walkeden.org/Walking/The-macaws.aspx> and the red squirrels <http://www.walkeden.org/Walking/Red-squirrels.aspx> which the biggest smiles and incredible publicity. Added here is the 'Boot Tree' on Ash Fell as you drive into Kirkby Stephen from the south. This is the second tree to be covered in used boots, the first received international publicity and a BBC report. Members of the public add the fruits and we promote it.

We believe that with partnership working we can extend what we are able to achieve for our area.