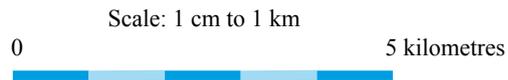
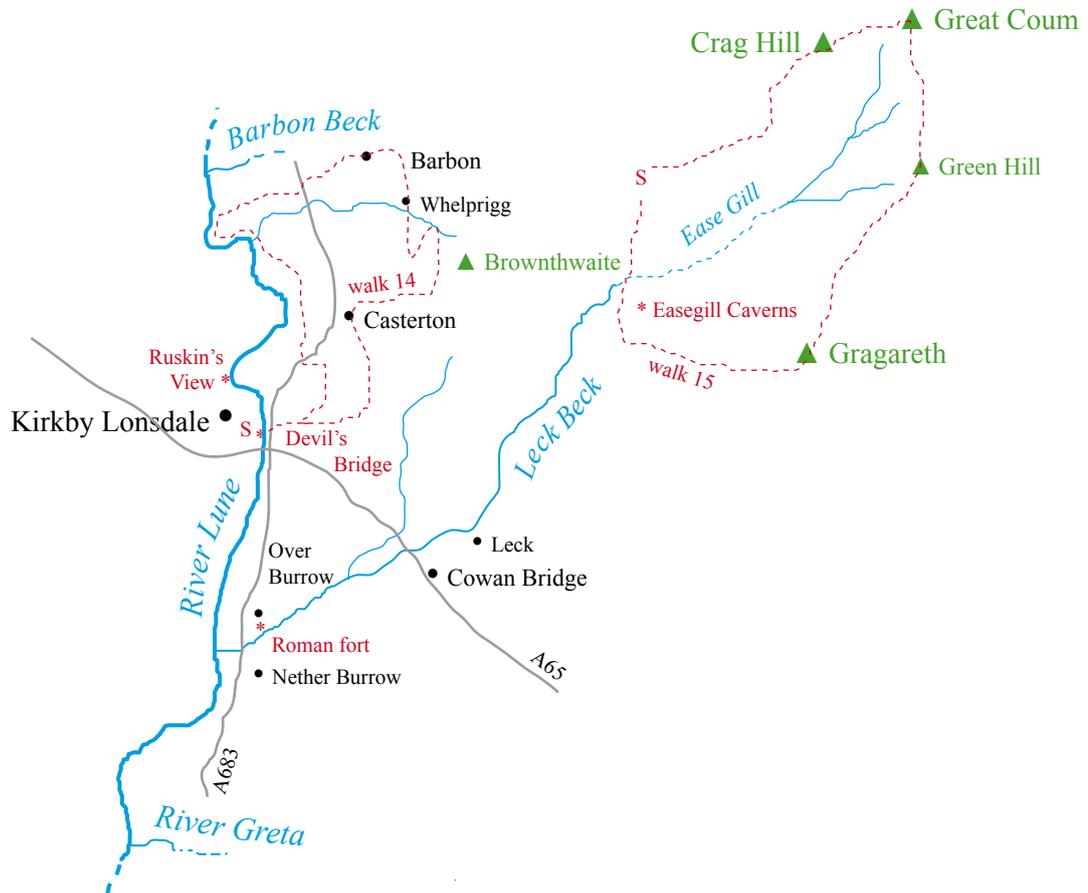




**CHAPTER 7:
Middle Lunesdale
and Leck Fell**



The Lune from Barbon Beck ...

A kilometre from the Barbon Beck junction the Lune passes a badly eroded west bank, just before Underley Bridge. The inordinate ornateness of this bridge reflects its limited functionality, for it was built in 1872 (or 1875, depending which datestone on the bridge you believe) to enable gentry and their lady folk to travel in their coaches from the Underley estate to the Barbon railway station. The bridge was built for Lord Kenlis, later the Earl of Bective, MP for Westmorland, whose father, Lord Bective married Amelia, the daughter of William Thompson, of the wealthy Westmorland Thompson family, who was a Lord Mayor of London and previous owner of the Underley estate. The bridge is adorned with battlements, gargoyles and a motto – *consequitur quodcunque petit*, that is, one attains whatever one seeks (Barbon railway station, I assume).

Before the Lune sweeps south under a dramatic cliff a small beck enters on the left. This has run off Barbon Low Fell through Grove Gill and past Whelprigg, another of Loyne's fine country houses. The Whelprigg estate

belonged to the Gibson family, for whom Whelprigg was built in 1834, in an imposing Victorian style. In the fields by the drive to the house is an ancient cross, on the line of the Roman road, and to the north six trees that seem uniquely honoured by having their types specified on the OS map (four ash and two oak), presumably because they mark the parish boundary.

To the south of Whelprigg runs the old track of Fellfoot Road, where it is difficult to turn a blind eye to the **Goldsworthy Sheepfolds** (as we have done so far): there are sixteen of them, all created in 2003.

The Lune next runs by the elegant mansion of Underley Hall. This was rebuilt in 1826 in the Gothic style and later embellished and enlarged by the Earl of Bective. The Earl and his successor at Underley, Lord Cavendish-Bentinck (MP for South Nottingham), who had married the Earl's daughter, Olivia, and, of course, the Countess and Lady, lived in the style that

*Two pages before: The view from Brownthwaite.
Below: Underley Bridge.*



The **Goldsworthy Sheepfolds** were created between 1996 and 2003 by the environmental sculptor Andy Goldsworthy during a project funded by Cumbria County Council. The 46 folds were built from existing folds that were derelict or built anew where they were indicated on old maps. Goldsworthy uses natural materials to create his art forms and “feels the energy from nature and transcends that energy into art form”. Each sheepfold was thus reinvigorated by this new energy and re-connected to the farming traditions of Cumbria. Inspiration, however, seems rather thin along Fellfoot Road: all sixteen folds are similar, with a large boulder enclosed in a small fold.

It is more in the spirit of the project if the sculptures are appreciated by encountering them serendipitously and by being momentarily confused by the strangely modern, possibly functional, structures. (On our journey so far we have passed Goldsworthy Sheepfolds at Raisbeck (see page 22), Scout Green, Bretherdale, Cautley Crag, and Barbondale.) However, now that the project is complete and the folds are listed in leaflets and on websites, inevitably people will set out purposefully to tick them off. Whether they warrant such explicit attention I leave art-connoisseurs to judge.

benefits such names. At one time, the estate employed 163 people, including 26 gardeners. The hall was known for its shooting parties, a regular visitor to which was the young Harold Macmillan, future Prime Minister. In the *Annals of Kirkby Lonsdale* (1930), Lord Cavendish-Bentinck was described as “a magnificent specimen of an English country gentleman”. Perhaps the author, Alexander Pearson, was one of the 163 - at all events, he is unlikely to have been neutral to the influence of the Underley owners in the Kirkby Lonsdale region. On Lady Cavendish-Bentinck’s death in 1939, the estate passed to a cousin, Madeleine Pease. Since 1976 Underley Hall has been a residential school for up to sixty young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties but the estate is still owned by the Pease family.

To the east is the old village of Casterton. It may not be as old as its name suggests since there is no evidence of a Roman castle on the site but it is old enough to have been included in the Domesday Book. It is a small village of class, with scarcely a house lacking style. It has all the essentials of life: a school, a church, a garage-cum-shop, a pub and a golf course.



Underley Hall

Casterton School is an independent boarding and day school for 320 girls (with 20 lucky? boys as day pupils). The school began in the 1830s when Low Wood School, which the Rev. William Carus Wilson had established at Tunstall to train girls to be servants, and the Clergy Daughters' School (of which, more shortly) that he'd started at Cowan Bridge were both transferred to Casterton. To help the clergy daughters feel more at home, he had the Holy Trinity Church built. And to help himself feel at home, he moved into the neo-classical Casterton Hall, which had been built in 1812 for his father.

Below Casterton Hall stands the 17th century Kirfit Hall, with what looks like a peel tower but is apparently a staircase tower. Because of a planning dispute, one of its barns has been garishly painted, in order to enliven **Ruskin's View**, which is a viewpoint at the top of a steep bank of the Lune 1km south.

Near Ruskin's View is Cockpit Hill, a 40m diameter, overgrown mound that is thought to be the site of an old motte and bailey castle, and behind it is Kirkby Lonsdale's Church of St Mary the Virgin, a substantial edifice with many notable features. For most old settlements, the church is the largest and most important structure and it therefore becomes a focus for passing visitors, even for those who rarely venture into churches. Here, there is much of non-specialist interest, both outside and inside the church. Outside, the visitor may contemplate the self-closing mechanism of the churchyard gates, the oddly placed clocks on the tower, the intriguing gazebo painted by Turner in 1818, and the pillar in memory of five young women burned to death in 1820. Inside the church, there's some fine Jacobean wood carving and on the northern side of the nave there are three large Norman arches, two of which have distinctive diamond patterns. Some doorways and part of the tower are also Norman. The church is therefore at least as old as the 12th century and is probably of Saxon origin, although there has been much rebuilding, notably in the 18th century and again in 1866.



Toll Bar Cottage, Casterton

Ruskin commented in 1875 that the church “has been duly patched, botched, plastered and primmed up; and is kept as tidy as a new pin”, in contrast to the bank of what we now call Ruskin's View, which was a “waste of filth, town drainage, broken saucepans, tannin and mill-refuse”.

Passing through the churchyard, we enter Kirkby Lonsdale, the most desirable location in Loyne, or so estate agents tell us. It lies by the A65, midway between the Lakes and the Dales, and does not try too hard to detain tourists travelling between the two. The narrow main street has shops and restaurants of refinement, even



St Mary's Church, Kirkby Lonsdale

Ruskin's View is the only point along the Lune that the Ordnance Survey considers worthy of a viewpoint symbol. I'd prefer that OS maps kept to matters of fact rather than opinion. For what it's worth, my opinion is that the view is OK, but neither high enough to provide an extensive view of the Lune valley, with its fine surrounding hills receding into the distance, nor low enough to enable an appreciation of the sights and sounds of the riverside. Instead, we see one bland bend of the Lune, with a backdrop of Brownthwaite and Middleton Fell, among the least impressive of Loyne's hills.

The viewpoint is called Ruskin's View, in thanks to the art critic and thinker John Ruskin, whose opinion was that "Here are moorland, sweet river and English forest at their best ... [the view is] one of the loveliest in England and therefore in the world". According to the *Cumbrian Directory*, Ruskin said this in the 1870s after seeing J.M.W. Turner's 1818 painting of the view. One might query Ruskin's status as an art critic if he really considered this view comparable to the one from his own window at Brantwood, looking over Coniston Water.

Ruskin was a fervent promoter and protector of Turner's reputation. So much so that art historians had always believed his statement in 1858 that he had destroyed a set of erotic paintings by Turner, not wanting his reputation to be sullied. However, the paintings were found in 2005. Ruskin himself was fond of young girls. So that's two reputations sullied.

My point is that we should not just follow the opinions of others – eminent aesthetes such as Turner or Ruskin, or the OS, or, certainly, me. It is better to form your own judgements about this and other views of the Lune.



trendiness (as epitomised by the renaming of the Green Dragon as the Snooty Fox), and there is a profusion of hanging baskets and other floral decorations. The market square, however, has an unstylish crown-shaped structure, now serving as a bus shelter, which used to have a sort of dome with a cross atop. It was donated in 1905 by the vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale, whose generosity could presumably not be declined.

The ambience is suburban, rather than rural, for, apart from Ruskin's View, Kirkby Lonsdale is inward-looking, focused on its own business, with little outlook onto the surrounding fields. The older buildings are of limestone, which outcrops locally. Apart from the church and pubs, there are few buildings earlier than the 18th century and on the outskirts many standard 20th century houses.

Although there are few features of antiquity, Kirkby Lonsdale is old, appearing in the Domesday Book as Cherkeby Lownesdale and being granted its market charter in 1227. The manor of Kirkby Lonsdale, including the church, was given to St Mary's Abbey in York in the 1090s and after the Dissolution of the Monasteries the church rights were granted to Trinity College, Cambridge. Kirkby Lonsdale used to play up to its history, without going back quite that far, by holding a Victorian Fair in September, with participants in period dress. This tradition was ended in 2008, being considered to have outlived its usefulness.

Up to the 19th century there was a series of mills by what is now called Mill Brow. From the market square Jingling Lane drops down towards the Lune. The lane meets up with the footpath that proceeds from below Ruskin's View alongside the Lune, where there was a millrace for further mills. Anyone walking along this path will notice the flood debris in the tree branches above their head, indicating the torrents that sometimes rage through this narrow valley. All the more surprising, then, that the elegant, three-arched Devil's Bridge has withstood the Lune for five centuries, or even longer. The date of the bridge is unknown but, to be on the safe side, it is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Some think it to be Roman, but this seems unlikely; others can detect the same Norman hands as built the church; others refer to records of repairs in 1275 and 1365

Left: The other view from Ruskin's View, looking to The Island.

The Top 10 bridges in Loynes

1. Devil's Bridge, Kirkby Lonsdale
2. Batty Moss (Ribblehead) Viaduct
3. Loyn Bridge, Hornby
4. Lowgill Viaduct
5. Lune Aqueduct, Lancaster Canal
6. Skerton Bridge, Lancaster
7. Crook of Lune Bridge, Lowgill
8. Artengill Viaduct, Dentdale
9. Lune's Bridge, Tebay
10. Waterside Viaduct

(which show only that there was *a* bridge here but not necessarily this one); others consider the form of the arches to be late 15th century at the earliest.

The name of the bridge is more recent, for until the 19th century it was simply the Kirkby Lonsdale Bridge. The uncertainty about the origin of the bridge's remarkable design encourages thoughts of a supernatural agency. The legend is, in brief, that a woman entered a Faustian deal with the devil to get the bridge built and

then sacrificed her dog to meet the conditions of the deal.

For many people, hurrying between the Lakes and the Dales and pausing at the Devil's Bridge, this is the only glimpse they will have of the Lune. It is a pity that quiet contemplation of the bridge and the scenery is difficult. There are normally crowds milling around the snack bars and over the bridge and, at weekends, motorcyclists, canoeists, picnickers, and maybe even divers off the bridge. If we could but focus upon it we'd appreciate the unique beauty and elegance of the old bridge, 12m high, with ribbed, almost semi-circular arches, two of 17m and one of 9m span. The breakwaters continue to the parapet to provide refuges in the roadway, which with a width of only 3.5m is too narrow for modern vehicular traffic. Below, the Lune swirls through sloping crags.

The Lune runs under the A65 at Stanley Bridge, built in 1932 150m south of the Devil's Bridge. Stanley – that is, Oliver Stanley, MP for Westmorland, after whom the bridge was named – does not compete with the devil. Instead, the new bridge, with its off-yellow



Devil's Bridge

colouring and bold single span, provides a strong, if inelegant, contrast. Just south of Stanley Bridge the Lune enters the county of Lancashire.

Below Kirkby Lonsdale the Lune is accompanied by the Lune Valley Ramble, which continues, mainly on its west bank, for 26km to Lancaster. Since the more varied and major part of the Lune valley lies to the north of Kirkby Lonsdale it should perhaps be called the Lower Lune Valley Ramble. This may seem pedantic but the Lune is often underrated because the remit of the body most concerned with its support and promotion, Lancaster City Council, seems to end at the county border. Its 2009 brochure describes the Lune valley as “a pocket-sized part of England” that runs for “15-20 miles between Lancaster and Kirkby Lonsdale”. Its ‘official Lune Valley visitor website’ similarly considers the Lune valley to begin at Kirkby Lonsdale. So I’ve managed to write over a hundred pages about a river that has not existed until this point.

The Ramble is a fine walk, the part here being best tackled on a bright morning with the sun sparkling on the rippling surface, with distant views of Leck Fell,

Ingleborough and the Bowland Fells. South of the bridges oystercatchers assemble in March on their way to their nesting sites on the shingle of the Lune. These birds of the lower Lune, easily recognised by their long, straight, dark red bill, red legs, and black and white colouring, are more often seen in small numbers, flying fast, with a shrill call.

One kilometre from Kirkby Lonsdale the Lune passes under the 130km Haweswater Aqueduct, which transports up to 500 million litres of water every day to Manchester. It was completed in 1955, 36 years after permission for the controversial Haweswater Reservoir had been granted.

Showing excessive concern for walkers’ safety, there are warnings to keep on the landward side of a small embankment for flood protection. I assume the real intention is to keep us away from fishermen, but if they are absent the river-edge is much the better place to be.

The next significant tributary is Leck Beck, joining from the east.

Walk 14: A Loop between Kirkby Lonsdale and Barbon

Map: OL2 (please read the general note about the walks in the Introduction).

Starting point: Near the Devil’s Bridge (617783).

This is a walk along country lanes and tracks, passing a variety of rural houses and reaching no great height. There is the chance to refuel in Barbon.

Head east, past the caravan park, towards Chapel House and then follow Chapelhouse Lane to High Casterton, passing the golf course on your left. After the Old Manor, cross the junction, following the sign to Low Casterton. Turn right at the Holy Trinity church towards Langthwaite.

Immediately after Langthwaite take the footpath south to Fellfoot Road, which you follow north, past some Goldsworthy Sheepfolds, until it drops down to a road. Turn left at the road and walk to Fell Garth. Take the path north past Whelprigg to Underfell, to drop into Barbon by the church. From Barbon, walk southwest along Scaleber Lane to Low Beckfoot. You could take a short detour north to see the packhorse bridge at Beckfoot Farm. At Low Beckfoot take the path west to the Lune.

At the Lune turn south to follow the long bend past Underley Bridge and then swing back to join Lowfields Lane. Walk east and take the path south, below Underley Grange, to the wood below Gildard Hill, with views on the way across the river to Underley Hall. If you should, accidentally, of course, stray west from the path in the wood, you would have a view down the steepest and highest Luneside bank.

The path continues south to Casterton Hall and then across the field to the A683, where it is best to turn left for 100m or so (take care) and follow the track (Laiha Lane) south from Toll Bar Cottage. This returns you to the Devil’s Bridge if you turn right at the end (or via a short cut through the caravan park on the right).

Short walk variation: For a short walk it is necessary to forego Barbon. Follow the long walk as far as the junction after the Old Manor and then turn right for 1km, over the old railway line and past Fell Yeat, the home of Brownthwaite Hardy Plants, which deals with speciality perennials. Turn left at Fellfoot Road and walk north for 1km past some Goldsworthy Sheepfolds. Then turn west past Langthwaite and on to Casterton. Cross the A683 and walk through the school to pick up the footpath that goes south past Casterton Hall. Follow the last part of the long walk back to the Devil’s Bridge.

Leck Beck

The mature beck that gushes from the fellside at Leck Beck Head emerges after an eventful and secretive infancy. The waters that drain the southern slopes below the fine ridge that arches from Crag Hill to Great Coum and Gragareth form the becks of Aygill and Ease Gill, which proceed normally enough over the high moorland until they reach beds of limestone at about the 350m contour, at which point they begin to disappear through various potholes and caves.

We have flirted with potholes and caves in Dentdale and Barbondale but a confession is now required. My guiding principle has been to write only about what I have seen, wherever possible, and this has led me to visit every one of Loyne's 1285 sq km – but I draw the line at going under them as well. This is unfortunate because potholes are one of the few things in Loyne for which we can dust off our superlatives, as it is undoubtedly England's best potholing region. However, I cannot imagine ever standing at the entrance to a pothole and opting to spend the next few hours in the damp, dark, dangerous depths when I could be striding the hills, with fresh air in my lungs, the wind in my hair, a spring in my step, and a view in all directions. I can appreciate the

physical, mental and scientific challenge of potholing but I prefer to resist it.

Therefore, apart from modest forays into cave entrances and the tourist trips into White Scar Caves, Ingleborough Cave and Gaping Gill, all the potholes and caves are unknown territory to me. The little that I say about them is passed on, second hand, in good faith. Those who wish to venture seriously (and there should be no other way) into potholes should consult more reliable first-hand sources.

The potholes into which Ease Gill disappears are part of the Easegill Caverns, which form, according to Natural England's description of the Leck Beck Head Catchment Area Site of Special Scientific Interest, the longest cave system in Britain and the 11th longest in the world. Some call it, or used to call it, the Three Counties System, as it stretches from Aygill (in Cumbria) across Leck Fell (in Lancashire) to Ireby Fell (on the North Yorkshire border). The caves under Casterton Fell (from Lancaster Hole, Bull Pot of the Witches and others) have 60km of connected passages and these have a flooded connection to a further 12km under Leck Fell (from Lost John's Cave and others). An additional 12km of passage under southern Leck Fell are, as yet, unconnected. An idea that there would be an eastern link to the Kingsdale



The ridge to Gragareth from Great Coum



1. Ease Gill runs from the slopes of Great Coum ...



2. ... and gradually disappears through limestone ...



3. ... the bed becoming completely dry in places ...



4. ... though there's usually a trickle at Cow Dub ...



5. ... below which the valley is dry and quiet ...



6. ... with eerie grottos and waterless waterfalls ...



7. ... meanwhile the underground waters of Ease Gill are exploring the Easegill Caverns, as many potholers also do by, for example, entering Lancaster Hole ...



8. ... and eventually, as the waters reach the impermeable rock below the layer of limestone, they re-emerge at Leck Beck Head near Ease Gill Kirk to form Leck Beck.

Walk 15: Leck Fell, Gragareth and Great Coum

Map: OL2 (please read the general note about the walks in the Introduction).

Starting point: The track near Bullpot Farm (663815).

This expedition provides a surface exploration of some potholes of the Easegill Caverns followed by a high-level ridge walk.

From Bullpot Farm walk south 1km to cross a stile below Hellot Scales Barn. (In the very unlikely circumstance that Ease Gill cannot be forded at this point, be sensible: abandon the suggested walk. Content yourself with a walk along the north bank to view the rare sight of waterfalls in the Ease Gill valley and return to Bullpot Farm.)

Detour for 100m up the dry bed to view a chamber with a U-shaped (dry!) waterfall (see photograph left). Some people call this Ease Gill Kirk but the name is properly applied to a less accessible but larger and more spectacular amphitheatre with overhanging cliffs about 200m downstream from the stile. The Kirk (or Church, as it used to be called) is said to have been a clandestine meeting place for Quakers. Returning to the stile, cross the bed of Ease Gill (leaving Cumbria for Lancashire) and follow the footpath south. At a grassy slope a side-path allows a detour to see the real Ease Gill Kirk.

Leave the footpath before reaching a wall and head southeast across a field, viewing Big Meanie and Rumbling Hole en route. Note the Three Men of Gragareth, the central group of a set of cairns, on the horizon as you cross the field. These are your next objective. On reaching the road, take the track above Leck Fell House north for 100m and then scramble up to the Three Men.

From the cairns, take a faint path east for 1km to the Gragareth trig point, and then continue for 150m to reach a wall (peer over the wall into North Yorkshire). Walk north by the wall for 5km, passing Green Hill (628m, the highest point of Lancashire) and the County Stone (the northernmost point of Lancashire) to reach Great Coum, from which there is an excellent view of the Lakeland hills, the Howgills, the nearby Yorkshire Dales peaks, the lower Lune and Morecambe Bay.

Walk west by the wall to Crag Hill (1km) and continue southwest to Richard Man, a rather inconspicuous set of stones (a further 1km). At this point walk south for 250m to a parallel wall, which you then follow southwest for 2km to reach the Bullpot Farm track.

Short walk variation: Follow the long walk as far as the track above Leck Fell House and then follow that track north for 2km. Leave the track to follow the wall as it drops down to Ease Gill. Follow Ease Gill south for 1km until you reach a rather rickety bridge. It is worth a short detour beyond the bridge to see Cow Dub. Return to cross the bridge and then follow the path northwest for 1.5km back to Bullpot Farm.

caves seems to be dormant. To the west the cave system is ended by the Dent Fault.

It must be galling to the Yorkshire Dales National Park, renowned for its potholing, to find that its borders exclude Britain's longest cave system. The old county border that ran from Gragareth to Great Coum and into Barbondale neatly steals the Easegill Caverns from the Yorkshire Dales. Perhaps this will be remedied by the review of the **National Park boundaries**.

The details of this three-dimensional underworld are complex to unravel but the cause of the cave system is as we have seen before. Water runs off the shale and sandstone upper slopes to sink at the limestone boundary, to make its way underground to the impermeable lower layer and eventually re-emerge, in this case at Leck Beck Head. Normally the bed of Ease Gill is dry for 2km above Leck Beck Head but in flood conditions the caves fill and Ease Gill becomes a torrent. Leck Beck actually emerges about 100m north of the present line of the bed of Ease Gill.

On the surface there is the barest indication of the wonders underneath. At Lancaster Hole, for example, there is only a manhole cover to see, unless it happens to be raised, in which case you can peer down the 35m shaft. The discovery of Lancaster Hole in 1946, which really began the exploration of the Easegill Caverns, has entered potholing legend: a resting caver noticed the grass moving more than the breeze warranted, inferred that a draught was issuing from underground, and shifted a few rocks to reveal the pothole.

As Leck Beck runs through Springs Wood, a natural wood unlike the many conifer plantations in the area, it passes below Castle Hill to the east. Here are the remains of – well, what exactly? There appears to be a roughly circular ditch, 100m in diameter, with gaps to the north and south. Within the ditch, there is some unevenness and a few piles of rocks but no real sign of any building – certainly no castle. It probably enclosed a few Iron Age settlements. One thing we can be sure of: whoever lived here had an excellent view of the lower Lune valley.

Across Leck Beck at High Park are the remains of ancient settlements, visible on the ground as earthworks and jumbled lines of rocks. Archaeologists tell us that they date from 300 AD or so. Even older is the Casterton stone circle, which lies southwest of Brownthwaite Pike and dates from the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age (2000-600 BC). There are about eighteen stones, none higher than 30cm and some sunk in the grass,

in a 20m-diameter circle. It is said that 1,800 finds, including drinking vessels, flint arrowheads and a bronze spearhead, have been made here. The circle is not, however, an impressive sight. In the same field are many large piles of rocks, the remains of thick walls, which are rather more intriguing.

You cannot see Kirkby Lonsdale from the stone circle, as you might have expected since the stone circle is marked on the display at Ruskin's View. However, if you climb to the prominent cairn on Brownthwaite Pike, you are rewarded with an excellent view of Kirkby Lonsdale, with Morecambe Bay behind, the Lakes skyline to the right and the middle reaches of the Lune to the left.

The Lakes and Dales **National Park boundaries** are to be reviewed by Natural England (the review was postponed until a decision on a South Downs proposal was reached, which it finally was in April 2009). It seems likely to propose that the Dales be extended westward to include the northern part of the Howgills, Middleton Fell, Leck Fell and Wild Boar Fell and that the Lakes be extended eastward to include Birkbeck Fells – in short, that the upper Lune becomes a border between the two National Parks.

There are many factors involved in determining National Parks, as they are legal entities with administrative roles. One factor concerns their role in conservation. It is assumed that 'undesirable' developments would not be permitted within a National Park. Therefore, by extending the boundaries, the area protected from such developments would, it is hoped, be increased.

In a rational world boundaries would not be determined by politics or history but by natural properties that give a region its coherence. In our case, the Dent Fault suggests that Wild Boar Fell and Leck Fell (but not the Howgills and Middleton Fell) belong to the Dales. The characteristic areas of the Lake District are on igneous rocks that differ from Loyne's sedimentary rocks, including the Shap Fells, which are now within the Lake District National Park (but if we follow this line of reasoning we might conclude that the areas south of Windermere and Coniston don't belong in the National Park either!).

Geologically, the Shap Fells, Birkbeck Fells, the Howgills and Middleton Fell form a homogeneous region. Perhaps this region could be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for even the strongest supporter could not claim it equal to the two National Parks. It is, however, unlikely that areas already within the National Parks (the Shap Fells and the southern Howgills) will be excluded. Let's leave it to the experts.



The Leck Beck valley

Leck Beck runs by the village of Leck, which is not the traditional cluster of stone cottages: it is not a cluster at all. The ingredients – an old mill, parsonage, church, and school – are there but they do not seem to be integrated to make a community. An ignored triangular field looks like it would make a fine village green – perhaps it once was, for many houses here were burnt down in the 1800s after a smallpox outbreak. Leck Hall, which was rebuilt in the early 19th century and bought by the Kay-Shuttleworth family in 1952, stands apart. From this outpost Lord Charles Shuttleworth serves as Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, a post instituted by Henry VIII to deal with local defence. Perhaps the need to repel Yorkshire invaders explains all the noise of shooting heard hereabouts. Today, the Lord Lieutenant's role is to represent the Queen at events in the county and to prepare programmes for royal visits to Lancashire.

At Cowan Bridge, Leck Beck passes under an overgrown five-arched bridge for the old Lowgill-Clapham railway line. Cowan Bridge itself is bisected by the busy A65. This is an ancient road along which

tolls were collected as early as the 16th century but the traffic associated with the Yorkshire and Cumbria woollen trade had died down by 1824, when the Brontë sisters came. Cowan Bridge is now most remarked upon because of its **Brontë connection**, excessively so, given that it is the grim pestilence of the place that is recalled.

South of Leck Beck, on Woodman Lane, there is a poultry farm that is surprisingly large for such a quiet rural area. Perhaps the authorities, too, were surprised, for the buildings had neither planning permission nor an IPPC (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) licence. To avoid getting myself entangled in this legal dispute I should clarify that 'agricultural permitted development tolerances' allow a small amount of construction every two years without planning permission. Lancaster City Council refused a retrospective application in 2005, a decision for which the council was later fined £87,000 as it was deemed unreasonable. Presumably this ensures the future of Mayfield Chicks, if not the chicks.

Leck Beck next passes under Burrow Bridge, whose two arches seem almost too low for the beck

The **Brontë connection** began when the Rev. Patrick Brontë sent four of his five daughters to the Clergy Daughters' School opened by the Rev. William Carus Wilson in Cowan Bridge in 1824. They were only there for a year, illness forcing them back to Haworth. Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis in 1825, although Charlotte and Emily did, of course, survive to write novels. All they wrote whilst at Cowan Bridge, however, was "Dearest father, please, please get us out of this place".

Elizabeth Gaskell's biography (1857) of Charlotte Brontë painted a harsh picture of the Clergy Daughters' School (Lowood of *Jane Eyre*, perhaps derived from the Low Wood School we met at Casterton) and of the Rev. Carus Wilson (Mr. Brocklehurst), so much so that threatened legal action brought changes to the third edition. To put the Brontës' illnesses into context, child mortality in the region was so high at the time that average life expectancy was only 26 years.

A plaque on the wall of Brontë Cottage by the old road bridge commemorates the Brontë sisters' brief and unhappy time at the Cowan Bridge school.

when it is in flood. In alcoves on the bridge there are acknowledgements to the work of those who built the bridge in 1733 – labourers (on the west) separated from management (on the east).

The bridge is midway between Nether Burrow and Over Burrow, which together yield the novel parish name of Burrow-with-Burrow. At the former is the 18th century coaching inn, the Highwayman Inn, which has recently been refurbished and resurrected as a 'Ribble Valley Inn', a geographically remarkable transmogrification.



Roman stonework in Over Burrow barn

If you walk to the gate at the drive of Burrow Hall in Over Burrow and then 20m to the barn to the north and look at the wall near the north end, about head high, you will see a red sandstone block with carvings on it. This is a remnant of Roman stonework and is all that can be seen of the Roman fort that existed at Over Burrow from the 1st to the 4th century.

The rest you must imagine. The gate to the hall driveway is probably at the east entrance to the fort, midway along the east wall. Burrow Hall itself, visible up the drive, 140m away, is on the west wall of the fort. The fort was roughly square, so the south wall was 70m south of the drive, across the green field. The north wall was similarly 70m north, where there are buildings now. The fort thus enclosed about 2ha, enough space for a thousand soldiers.

How do we know this, when there is so little to see? The Roman's Antonine Itinerary listed a fort called Calacum 27 Roman miles from Bremetenacum (Ribchester) and 30 Roman miles from Galava (Ambleside) – in other words, here. In the past, Burrow was regarded as a very old place and, not so long ago, there was more evidence than there is today: William Camden, in his great work *Britannia* (1610), the first historical survey of Great Britain, wrote "... by divers and sundry monuments exceeding ancient, by engraven stones, pavements of square checker worke, peeces of Roman coine, and by this new name Burrow, which with us signifieth a Burgh, that place should seeme to bee of great antiquity."

Various excavations have been carried out, particularly in the 1950s, to confirm the lines of the walls and positions of the gates. About thirty coins have been found, from Vespasian (69-79 AD) to Constantius I (305-306 AD), but none from the 3rd century. Of course, much remains unknown and may always be so. It is assumed that a road went west across the Lune to Galava although its route has not been traced. The road from Low Borrowbridge, which we have been tracking south, runs 1km to the east of the fort.

Burrow Hall is a substantial Grade I listed Georgian mansion, best seen from the footpath to the north. After the Civil War the Burrow estate was given to a Colonel Briggs, who built the first hall in the 1650s. The estate was sold to the Fenwick family in 1690 and Robert Fenwick, Attorney General and MP for Lancaster, rebuilt the hall, as we see it now, in 1740. After passing through various hands, the estate was offered for sale in 2005 for £3.5m

and so, for what it's worth, we have the estate agent's description of the interior of the building: the Baroque ceilings, the marble fireplaces, the delicate cornicing of its five grand reception rooms, the sumptuous master suite, the stunning atrium with fabulous views, and so on. The Burrow estate also includes 0.5km of fishing on the Lune, which Leck Beck joins 300m below Burrow Bridge.

The Top 10 pubs in Loyne

(This 'top 10' has provoked more comment than all the others combined. I think that I had better play safe and list the pubs (generously, more than ten) in alphabetical order. I am open to persuasion, financial or gustatory, from any owner who feels their pub has been neglected.)

- 1= Barbon Inn, Barbon
- 1= Cross Keys Inn, Tebay
- 1= Fenwick Arms, Claughton
- 1= Game Cock, Austwick
- 1= Golden Ball, Lancaster
- 1= Hill Inn, Chapel-le-Dale
- 1= Lunesdale Arms, Tunstall
- 1= Marton Arms, Thornton-in-Lonsdale
- 1= Redwell Inn, Gressingham/Arkholme
- 1= Ship Inn, Caton
- 1= Stork, Conder Green
- 1= Sun Inn, Dent
- 1= The Head, Middleton
- 1= The Sun, Lancaster
- 1= Water Witch, Lancaster

P.S. The Highwayman Inn is disqualified for calling itself a Ribble Valley Inn.

The Lune from Leck Beck ...

The map shows a ford across the Lune immediately after Leck Beck has entered the Lune and I can vouch for the fact that it is indeed fordable, on foot (sometimes). If the paddling expedition is from the east and is timed properly, it is possible to sneak in on the Whittington point to point steeplechases that are held on Easter Saturdays in the fields opposite.

The Lune valley has now flattened out, giving long views to the south, east and north. An island (when the river is high) has been formed, with its shores strewn with large boulders and tree-trunks washed down in floods. The riverside fields show evidence of old river channels, with the lagoons left by the shifting Lune being favourite haunts of the heron, a bird that, unlike others, rises with graceful dignity if disturbed and with slow beats of its wings drifts off to settle in the long reeds where it can keep a better eye on you than vice versa.

This is a magnificent spot for seeing the **salmon** leap. Settle on the west bank on a fine autumn day, at a point opposite the island, where a deep stretch of Lune runs straight towards you from the north. There will be little noise, apart from the splashing salmon. If the salmon should be resting, there will be, apart from the heron, a display of bird-life such as oystercatcher, snipe and kingfisher, if you are lucky – and all this with a backdrop of the Howgills, Leck Fell and Ingleborough. This beats Ruskin's View by far!

The 1847 OS map shows that, south of the island, the Lune swept in a wide curve half the way to Tunstall, that is, 500m from its present course. All the fields east and west of the Lune from Kirkby Lonsdale were marked



Logs and the Lune at the 'island'

as “liable to flooding”. The Lune floodplain, about 1km wide and running 15km from Kirkby Lonsdale to Caton, has all the characteristics of a textbook floodplain. In normal conditions, the Lune meanders gently among wide, flat and tranquil pastures, where glacial till and regular alluvium deposits create rich soils to provide fertile grazing land for sheep and cattle. Abandoned channels and protected hollows create lagoons that are replenished by floods and heavy rain to provide important wetland habitats for birds, fish and plants. Kingfishers and sand martins are able to nest in the eroded riverbanks.

For obvious reasons, there are no human habitations in the floodplain, increasing the sense that the area is a haven for wildlife. The floodplain rises gently to its undulating fringes, where homesteads have been built and along which important lines of communication have always existed. Communication across the floodplain was more difficult, although there were several fords between settlements on opposite banks. In general, the Lune is fortunate that, although there has been some drainage and flood protection work, there has been no major urban or industrial development to affect these ecologically important areas of grassland and wet meadows.

The Lune continues south, to be joined by the major tributary of the River Greta.

The **salmon** is the Lune’s jewel. The Lune has one of the most important populations of Atlantic salmon in England, salmon being found through much of the Lune’s catchment area. The eggs are laid in autumn, with the young salmon staying in their native beck for up to three years. The mature salmon then spend two or three years in the sea before returning to their beck in early summer in order to spawn and then, usually, to die.

The Lune was once one of the best salmon fisheries in England but numbers dropped in the 1960s because of disease (ulcerative dermal necrosis, which certainly sounds bad). There may well have been other factors, such as the loss of spawning habitats, excessive fishing, poor water quality, and barriers to the salmon’s swim upstream, as well as causes external to the Lune. The Lune’s problems are not unique as global catches of Atlantic salmon fell by 80% in the 30 years from 1970. Although the numbers of Lune salmon have since revived they are not yet back to previous levels and the numbers of sea-trout also remain disappointing.

The Environment Agency now monitors salmon populations through automatic counters at Forge Bank Weir, Caton and Broadrairie Weir, Killington and has developed a ‘salmon action plan’ for the Lune. This includes giving nature a hand by releasing four-month-old salmon fry, reared from Lune eggs, into upstream tributaries.



The Lune at the ‘island’, with Leck Fell and Ingleborough beyond