

Cartmel, Holker Hall and Cark Circular

Length 5 1/2 miles

Duration: 2 hours 30 mins

Map: OS Explorer, Sheet OL 7, 'The English Lakes, South-Eastern Area'.

Difficulty: Moderate. Most of this walk involves quiet lanes, well-marked bridleways and footpaths which may be muddy in places. There are some steep climbs, however these are fairly short in nature. Suitable walking footwear is recommended.

This is one of our favourite walks that starts and finishes from the picturesque village of Cartmel. The route has lots of variety with some stunning views over the Morecambe Bay area as well as a visit to the Holker Hall grounds.

The walk starts and finishes at Cartmel's large, public carpark next to the racecourse grounds. The postcode for the carpark (for Sat Nav purposes) is LA11 6QF). Payment for parking is made by card/cash operated machines (you pay when you leave). There are public toilets at the carpark and the village centre with its many shops, cafes and pubs is just a couple of minutes walk away.

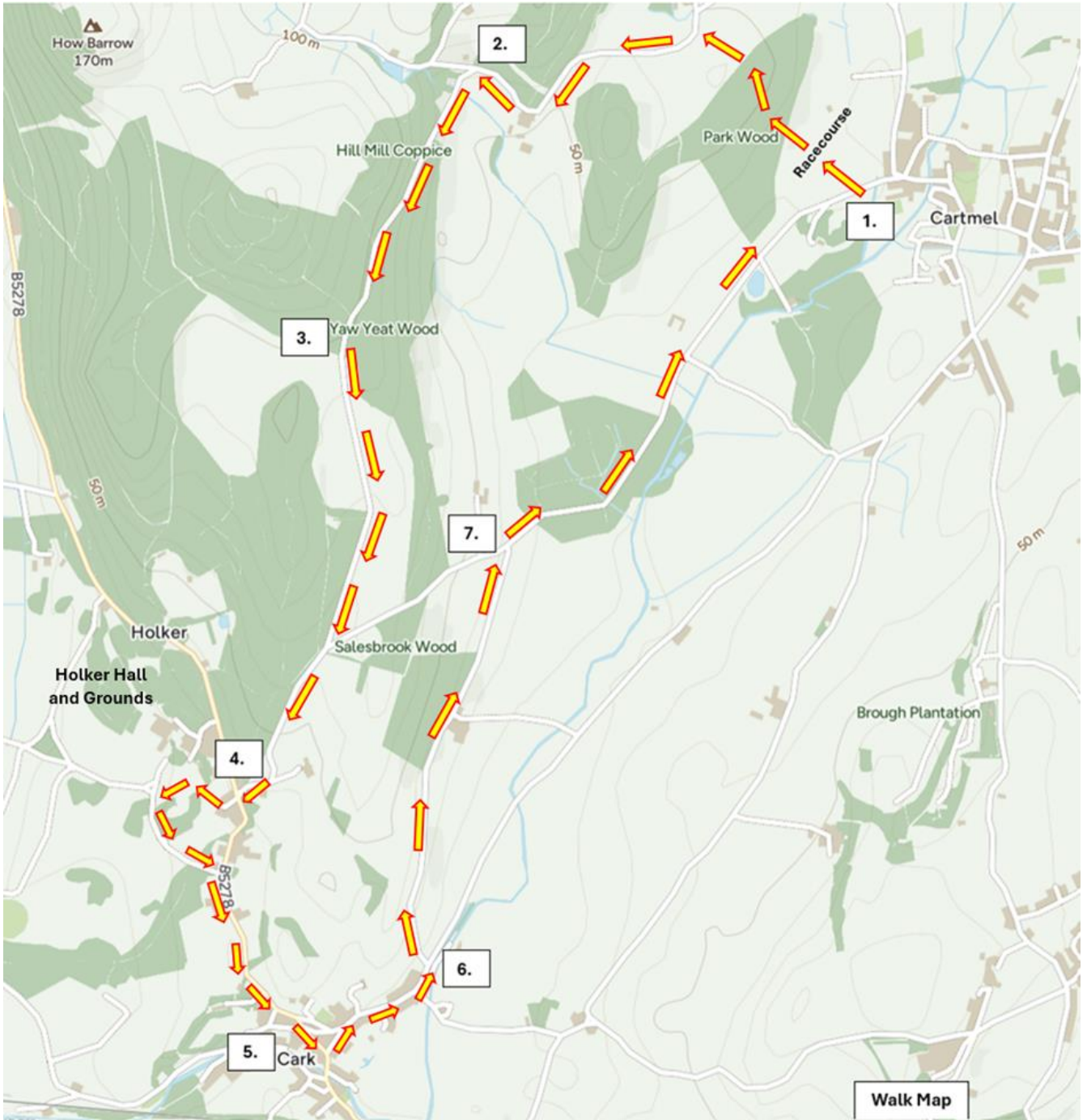


Cartmel Racecourse Buildings

Cartmel is about a 25-minute drive from the lodges. An alternative method to travel there would be to catch the train from Carnforth to Cark in Cartmel (on the Barrow line), Cark village centre (point 5 on my route map) is a five minute walk from the railway station (just leave the station carpark and turn right onto the road).

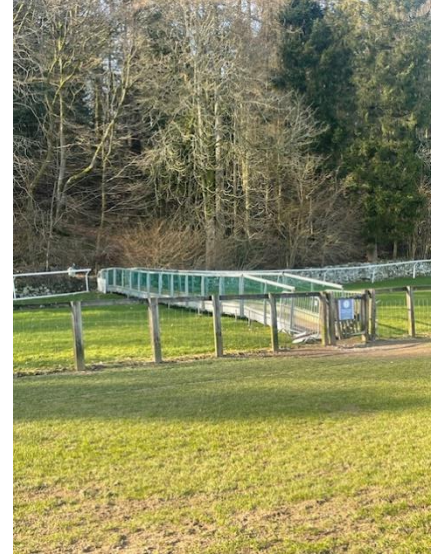
We have walked this route in all seasons and all weathers. The only times I would advise against visiting the area for the purposes of this outing is on the few occasions each year when the Cartmel racecourse is in operation. This is simply because the village becomes very busy and vehicle access to the area is severely restricted. You can easily check when the race days are by visiting the racecourse website at <https://cartmel-racecourse.co.uk/>.

Route Map:



Directions:

1. From the carpark, stand with your back to the front of the public toilets building and set off across the racecourse field keeping the racecourse buildings off to your righthand side. You are heading towards the obvious woods at the far side of the racecourse. When you reach them you have to cross the race track by way of an elevated metal footbridge that leads to a gate in the wall.



Racecourse Footbridge

Go through the gate and follow the path initially to the right as it winds quite steeply up into the woods. After a short while, the path begins to level out and you will arrive at a footpath wooden finger post. You can go either left or right here. Take the right-hand path and you will shortly arrive at a narrow gap in the stone wall that marks the boundary between the woods and adjacent fields. Go through the gap and head directly across the field. The path quickly drops down and takes you to a gate that leads onto a narrow country lane. Go through the gate and turn left onto the lane.

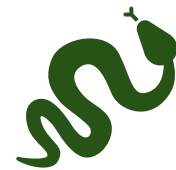
Walk along the lane and after a few hundred metres this bends sharply to the right as you pass the entrance to Walton Farm. The lane now starts to climb uphill. After about 200 metres you will see a small building that looks like someone's detached garage on the left of the road. Directly in front of this a track leads off to the left. A footpath sign here shows that as a 'Bridleway'. Walk down this track.

2. You will quickly pass the front of a detached dwelling house. This is the site of a former mill that was powered by a water wheel that was turned by the stream that runs next to the house. You may well think that the stream does not look powerful enough to turn a water wheel of any size. In normal conditions, it isn't. However, above the building in the woods is small man-made lake. At milling times, a sluice gate was opened that allowed a torrent of water to come tumbling down the beck which was then sufficient to turn the water wheel and power the mill.

Continue along the track which now begins to rise uphill past another dwelling house.

You will shortly arrive at a gate (usually left open) where the track enters some woods. A sign on the gate warns you of 'adders' in the area and that you should stick to the path and keep dogs on leads.

I've seen other such warnings in this area, usually attached to gates or footpath signs, but I've certainly never actually seen any snakes slithering about. Perhaps this is just the landowners way of trying to ensure that dogs are properly controlled so the local wild life and farm stock remains protected. That said, adders or 'vipers' do exist in this part of the country, so best do as the farmers says.



The track now leads steeply uphill through the woods. In wet weather it may get quite muddy in places.

3. Eventually, and thankfully, the track levels out and then leads you on to a gate that marks the end of the woods. Go through the gate and follow the track straight ahead (don't turn right here). A footpath finger post points this as the 'Cumbria Coastal Way'.

The track heads pleasantly downhill with open fields to your left. If you are interested in geology, you will see some examples of erratic boulders here, large blocks of limestone deposited during the last ice age.

At the bottom of the hill, the track comes to a gate that leads out on to a quiet lane. Go through the gate and go straight ahead on the lane that then winds steeply downhill until it reaches the busy B5278 road.



Holker Hall

4. The next part of the route takes you through the grounds of Holker Hall following a public right of way. Holker Hall is an impressive privately owned country house that dates from the 16th century. It sits in extensive grounds consisting of formal gardens, woodland and open grazing land where large herds of deer may be seen. When open to the public, you may visit the house and gardens as well as the café, gift shops, toilets etc.

For dates when the estate is open to the public, check their website at www.holker.co.uk.

If you decide not to walk through the estate, just turn left on the B5278 (there is a footpath on the righthand side) and follow the road for about a quarter of a mile until you reach the main vehicle entrance for the grounds. This is where the estate stretch of our route comes out.

Assuming you are intending to walk through Holker Hall grounds, and perhaps make use of the amenities there, walk directly (and carefully) across the B5278 from the end of the lane. Having crossed the road, go straight ahead between some estate buildings. This access road then turns round to the right and you will see the rear access point to the estate.

Pass the cattle grid by the footpath gate on the right and follow the road into the grounds. The toilets, café and gift shops are off to your right.

To continue the walk, walk across the carpark area and follow the road that crosses another cattle grid (footpath gate on the left) before bending round to the left towards the main vehicle entrance gate.

As you walk up towards the entrance gates, look to the open fields on your right where you will often see large numbers of the estate deer population. You will also notice what appears to be a tall pile of rocks that may be accessed by a path from the road.

This structure is actually a work of art titled “Out of the ground, a thread of air” and was created in 2023 by the artist Julie Brook. If you take the

time to walk over to the attraction, you will discover a flight of stone steps leading up the rear of the construction to its summit.



‘Out of the ground, a thread of air’

When you arrive at the estate entrance gateway, pass the cattle grid by going through a footpath gate on the right and pass some garages to arrive back on the B5278. Turn right on the road and head towards the village of Cark.

5. Stay on the B5278 and after about half a mile you will arrive into Cark village. As you drop down into the main village area look for a detached dwelling on the left of the road called ‘Old Bank House’. Directly after this house, a road leads off to the left. The route continues along this road.

However, before leaving Cark, you may wish to make use of the village store, public toilets and the village pub (Engine Arms).

For those more energetic and enthusiastic walkers, you may want to now use Cark as the start and finish point for one of our other suggested walks, ‘Cark Coastal to Flookburgh Circular’. By taking this extra loop and then continuing onto the main route start point at Cartmel racecourse, you will have completed a walk of about 10 miles in length.

To continue with this walk, return to the road junction by the 'Old Bank House' and take this road (footpath on the righthand side) out of the village.

6. After about a quarter of a mile as you head back out into the country, the road swings round to the left and you pass a road junction to your right. Now look for the derestricted road speed signs (white circle with a black stripe) in front of you. Directly before these signs, a gated track/bridleway leads off on the lefthand side of the road. This bridleway will return you to Cartmel village.



Bridleway from Cark to Cartmel

Go through the gate and follow the quiet lane that climbs up away from the road before levelling out and passing by some farm buildings. You will pass through another gate on the lane, although it is usually open.

7. Eventually, the lane meets another track at a T-junction. A footpath directly in front of you points towards Cartmel. Turn right here and drop down to another gate beyond which the track continues into what appears to be a recently felled forest area.

Go through this the gate and continue straight ahead. The track is now taking you through what was, until fairly recently a beautiful area of countryside known as the Lane Park Woodland. Sadly, in November 2021 a huge storm (Storm Arwen) passed through here and destroyed 90 per cent of the woods. Since then, the Holker Estate with the help of local children has planted over 37,000 new saplings with a view to the area regaining its former glory.

Continue pleasantly along the track and after a couple of gates you will arrive back at Cartmel Racecourse and the finish of the walk.