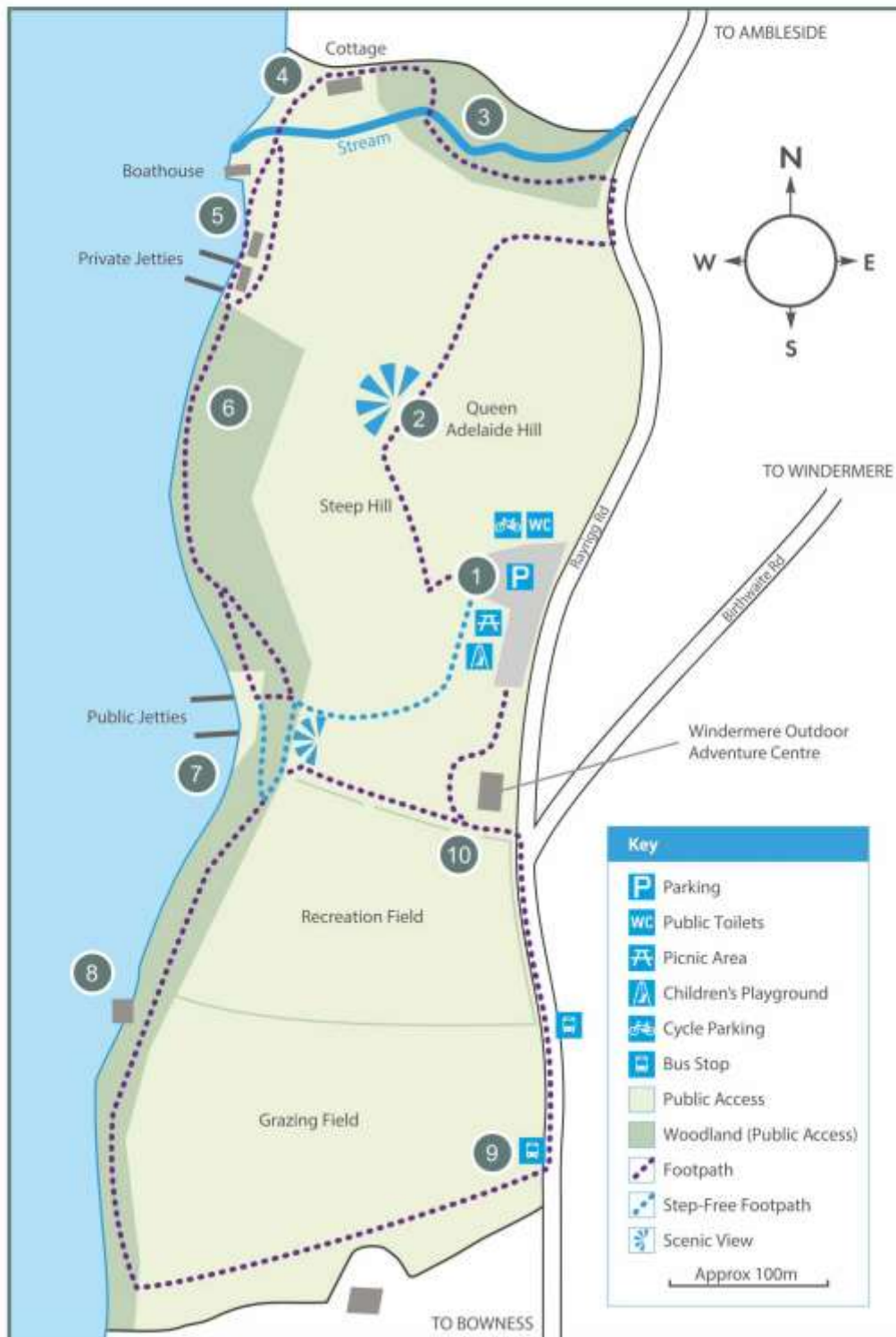


Millerground & Rayrigg Meadow

Windermere & Bowness Civic Society self-guided walk & information leaflet

Please take care as the ground is
uneven in places and may be wet and slippery
This walk is about 2km (1.3 miles) and will take approx 1 hr



This walk starts at the kissing-gate at the bottom of the hill in Rayrigg Meadow car park. If you are at the information board near the outdoor adventure centre, you need firstly to go to the car park either by walking to your right along the road, or by going through the field. [Note: reference sources are given in square brackets]

1. Queen Adelaide Hill - gate: Go through the kissing gate and walk up the steep path on the hill's eastern flank. This path has recently been much improved by the National Trust, local volunteers and school students; it had become very muddy and slippery so the mud and turf was cut back to expose the drumlin's gravel [1]. This improves the grip on the steep slope. Some steps were also added at the steepest sections. *[If you would prefer to avoid the steep climb, although the view from the top is worth the effort, go out of the car park and turn left along the road for about 250m to rejoin the walk at 3 below.]*

This large, rounded, elongated hill is a drumlin - a large pile of gravel, stone and mud from glacial erosion later deposited as the glacier melted. The steep north facing slope which once faced the ice flow (stoss end) rises to the hill's highest point; the long south facing slope (lee slope) tapers down gradually in the direction of the former ice flow [1].

At the top of the gravel path continue across the grass to the top of the hill.

2. Queen Adelaide Hill - summit: This hill, originally called Rayrigg Bank or Oakbank, was renamed 'Queen Adelaide's Hill' after the visit of the Dowager Queen Adelaide (widow of King William IV and Queen Victoria's aunt) on 26th July 1840. When Queen Adelaide and her party reached the summit they admired the view. It is reported that the Royal standard was flown from the hill, and a map dated 1926 marks a flagstaff at the summit though there is no sign of it today. [2,3]

A commemorative plaque was placed near the lakeshore where Queen Adelaide landed (see 8). She also gave her name to the city of Adelaide in Australia.

The hill offers a spectacular view of Windermere lake and the surrounding fells, some of which are indicated below, looking north-west. Of the distinctive Langdale Pikes, the highest is Harrison Stickle at 736m (2415ft). To the south, Belle Isle and yachts moored in Bowness Bay can be seen.



Walk on across the top of Queen Adelaide Hill to the north to meet a wide flat grassy path that curves back down to Rayrigg Road. Go out through the gate, turn left and walk about 25 metres to a National Trust gate and path near a stream.

3. Stream Path - gate: Go through the National Trust gate and follow the path and stream down the hill. This stream is called Wynlass Beck. The amount of water in the beck varies widely dependent upon recent rainfall; it can be a trickle or a torrent! The power of the water was used in the past to power a corn mill, believed to have been situated near the footbridge further down this path. The mill, and associated grain drying kiln, may have been in use since medieval times until the late 17th century. The walls of the derelict mill were still standing in the mid 19th century [3].

In the springtime this area is full of spring flowers including bluebells and ramsons (wild garlic) which are easily identified by their scent. In summer there are patches of native English touch-me-not balsam, feed plant for the rare netted carpet moth [4].



Dippers, birds around 20cm long, are also seen flying above the stream, paddling and dipping into in the water. Dippers forage for small animal prey in and along the margins of fast-flowing freshwater streams and rivers. They perch on rocks and feed at the edge of the water, but they often also grip the rocks firmly and walk down them beneath the water until partly or wholly submerged. They then search underwater for prey between and beneath stones and debris; they can also swim with their wings. They can be underwater for at least 30 seconds [6].

Continue down the footpath and over the bridge until you pass Low Millerground Cottage on your left and reach the lake shore.

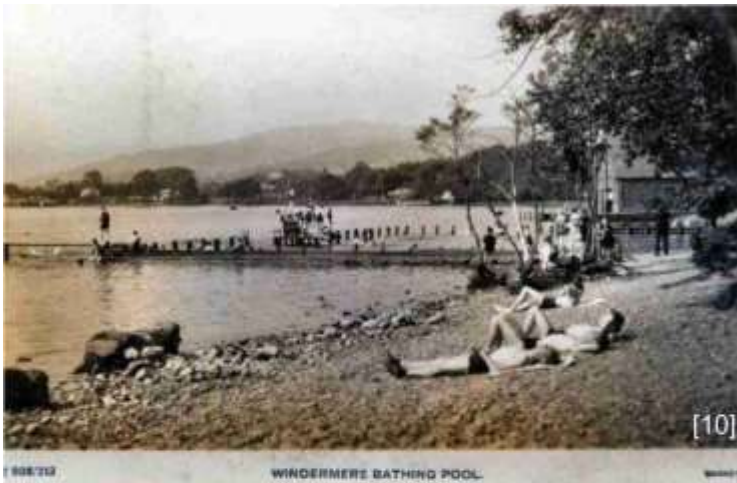
4. Low Millerground Cottage: This Cottage is Grade II listed and believed to date from the early 17th century. Local legend is that there was a public ferry across the lake here, with a bell in the tower to summon the ferryman. However there is little firm evidence to suggest this is true, though there may have been 'ferrying' of goods to and from the nearby corn mill. The occupants of the cottage were generally fishermen and agricultural labourers [3]. It is now owned by the National Trust and let to tenants.

Queen Adelaide's Hill, the land around Wynlass Beck and much of the land along the lake shore is owned by the National Trust. This land was purchased by National Trust in 1913 for £5000 mainly with funds from public subscriptions. At the time HD Rawnsley, then Honorary Secretary of National Trust and one of its founders said "*We believe that the public very much appreciate the use of the hill and lakeshore, and we are confident that these benefits will be more and more valued as time passes.*" [7]

Until National Trust became the landowners, the Rayrigg Estate strictly controlled the access to the lake, and there was no public right of way [3]. The National Trust today describes itself as "a charity that works to preserve and protect historic places and spaces — for ever, for everyone." [8]

For many years until the 1960s rowing boats were available for public hire from the cottage, and teas and ice cream were sold [3, 9].

Continue walking to the left (with the lake on your right) along the lake shore path, past a stone boathouse, until you come to a wooden hut.



5. The Bathing Pool: These wooden huts were originally the changing rooms for the Windermere Bathing Pool – see how popular it was in these photographs from the 1940s. Before the installation of the weir at Newby Bridge, the lake levels were often lower than nowadays.

Many of the now elderly residents of Windermere & Bowness learnt to swim at Millerground as children and the cold temperatures of the water didn't bother most of them. There was also a diving board some 4m above the water level

which provided much entertainment. There are stories of lads of the day jumping off the top of the diving board 'at attention' to see who could get their legs deepest into the mud at the bottom of the lake - but only the best swimmers could try it as they obviously then had to escape from the mud! Apparently it was possible to get into mud up to your knees.



Others would cover themselves in mud, then dive in to emerge all clean while carefully noting which girls had been watching them [9].



Once the indoor pool at Troutbeck Bridge was opened, the Swimming Club, changing rooms and diving boards here were considered old-fashioned, and swimming was discouraged.

The area is still popular with youngsters for swimming in the summer, especially to enjoy the long, warm evenings when they have finished their exams. The increased participation in open-water swimming and the Great North Swim further north on the lake has meant that swimmers may be seen here throughout the year, though usually with the protection of a wetsuit.

The wooden huts are now used for by Windermere Outdoor Adventure Centre, which offers watersports tuition: for more details call in at their office near **10** on this walk.

6. Cleared Woodland Bank: Continue along the lake shore and walk through the edge of the woodland. This section of banking was being stifled by brambles, beech regeneration and self-seeded holly bushes. Much has now been

removed by National Trust, local volunteers and school students allowing oak, ash, hazel, hawthorn and holly to flourish in balance [12]. In May bluebell flowers cover the now sun-dappled area. Wildlife habitat boxes will be installed in future. Another task is to restore the paths along the foreshore to allow easier access for all.

In the 18th century the woods at Millerground were producing charcoal and bark [3]. The accounts of the owner Fletcher Fleming in 1771 record:

<i>The Product of Millerground Woods</i>	<i>£</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>By Coals (charcoal) 26 doz 6St</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>By Bark 28 Quarter at 12s per Qr</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>61</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>6</i>

You will notice at one point that several mature trees between the path and the water are lying with their upper branches resting in the lake. This has been done deliberately. The trunks are not cut all the way through but are 'laid' like a hedge, so will continue to grow in their present position. The aim is to create a calm area of water within the branches and so encourage the growth of reeds at this location.

Continue your walk keeping along the lake shore until you reach the next open area with two jetties.

7. SLDC Beach & Bank: This section of the lake shore is owned by South Lakeland District Council, whereas the shore to the north and south is National Trust land. SLDC also owns the car park and Rayrigg Meadow - the flat grass fields above the shore line. The jetties are for public use, with boats allowed to moor free of charge for up to 2 hours.

The bank here had become very overgrown with trees and shrubbery making the whole area dark, damp and unwelcoming. The lake was invisible from the top of the bank once the trees were in leaf. By contrast, historic photographs taken in 1926 show very few trees in this area, and a stunning view from the top of the bank.

(see http://www.francisfrith.com/windermere/windermere-from-miller-ground-1926_79183)



Recently some trees have been removed and the light allowed to come back in. Some of the tree trunks have been retained and made into natural seating on the beach, including some attractive carved decoration. A small plaque on a stump nearby indicates how overgrown trees which destroy views are unpopular with many people.

There is some limited finance in place to help restore the paths in this area with the aim of getting a good quality step-free path from the car park to the lake shore. Additional seating will then be installed, undergrowth controlled and wildflowers planted.

If you wish to cut short your walk at this point, take one of the paths to the top of this bank and then go to your left across the field to return to the car park. To continue the walk proceed along the footpath just above the beach and then take the right fork (not a sharp left) to go back into woodland.

8. South Lake Shore: Walk along this path for about 125m and you will see a large flat rock just to the right of the path. Look carefully to see screw holes. This marks the spot where Queen Adelaide came ashore in 1840. Originally a brass plaque was affixed to a tree nearby, but when the tree had to be felled the plaque was instead attached to this rock [9]. Unfortunately the plaque was stolen some years ago but hopefully a replacement can be installed in the future.

Some 60m further on, look out for a square concrete plinth about 1m across between the footpath and the lake. This was the location of a WW2 anti-aircraft machine gun emplacement [9]. The concrete plinth was surrounded by sandbags filled with concrete to protect the gun operators.



Some pillow-shaped concrete lumps can still be identified around the plinth and on the shoreline nearby though the canvas of the sandbags has long rotted away.

This machine gun was manned by the local Home Guard as part of the protection of the Short's Sunderland Flying Boat factory which was situated at White Cross Bay about 2.5 km further north. You can see that the current undergrowth obscures the open aspect that the gunners must have required.

The Home Guard also patrolled the lake in boats with mounted machine guns. It must have been very difficult to shoot with any accuracy as the boat rocked across the waves, even before the effect of any recoil from firing.

Continue along the path through the woods until you come to a gate on your left. Go through the gate into the field.

9. Rayrigg Meadow: This grazing field, the adjacent recreation ground field and the lakeshore you have just walked along makes up 17.5 acres of land bought by public subscription to commemorate the coronation of HM King George VI in 1937 [13]. Mr Samuel Scott, chairman of the fund-raising committee declared

"...it will be one of the most picturesque and delightful public beauty spots in the Lake District with unrivalled views of the north end of Lake Windermere and the delectable mountains beyond."

Most of the lake frontage was gifted to the National Trust with the remainder held by Windermere Urban District Council as a public park and playing fields for the benefit of the people of Windermere & Bowness, with the condition that no buildings were erected "except shelters for the public or other buildings incidental, or conducive to, the better enjoyment of said land by the public" [14]. The ownership of the WUDC land passed to South Lakeland District Council in 1974 on local government reorganisation, and now is held as Rayrigg Meadow Trust with covenants to protect its use [15].

The land briefly came into the limelight in 1974 when a plan was put forward to build a £2.5M theatre, restaurant and conference hall on the site [14]. This scheme never came to fruition but a new theatre did come to Bowness in 1992 with the conversion of a redundant laundry into the Old Laundry Theatre.

Walk straight across the field and through the gate to the road on the far side. Just after exiting the field, look carefully behind the footpath fingerpost to see the brass plaque built into the wall commemorating the coronation of King George VI, and noting the public purchase of the field.

Now walk back along the pavement to the north for about 200m, then re-enter the field down a tarmac slope.

10. Recreation Ground: The football field is open for general use by the public, and is also used for matches by Heathwaite Junior Football Club. The grass cutting regimes are currently being updated to encourage a wildflower

border around the meadow following a survey that revealed a wide variety of interesting plant species were already present.

In this old photograph (1930s) you can see a 'Putting Green' on Rayrigg Meadow by the stone cottage which is now the Windermere Outdoor Adventure office. The putting green was also shown on some maps from the time [13], but is not recalled as being present by the war years [9]. The lake is



clearly visible even at this distance, again showing how much the trees have encroached over time.

Now walk towards the lake, down the stone steps then across the top path to the right. Continue up the last bit of the bank then follow the path to the left to return to your starting point in the car park.

As you near the car park there is a small children's playground which it is hoped to update in the future. There is also an area of picnic tables which are currently rather delapidated but are awaiting repair/replacement. Some new picnic tables may be re-located to take advantage of the view down to the SLDC jetties.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk and learning about the history of this beautiful area.

Thank you for your interest in our project.

**If you would like to get involved please send your contact details to
info@windermerebownesscivicsociety.org.uk**

Red squirrels at Millerground?

We are supporting Westmorland Red Squirrels (westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk) in their endeavours to bring reds back to this area. They were quite common in Windermere until 1996 but have not been seen for many years. Recently however, the reds have been spreading from the north into the locality again, helped by the control of invasive non-native grey squirrels. Red squirrels have been seen on land adjacent to Millerground so we hope they will soon decide that the woods you have walked through are a nice place to live.

To continue this work it is vital to have as much data as possible, so if you see any red or grey squirrels please report the date and location via the website or tel 01539 821714.

References

1. <http://centralandeastlakesrangers.blogspot.co.uk/2015/02/millerground-enhancement-group-path.html>
2. The Westmorland Gazette, August 12 1994
3. Millerground by Charlotte Kipling, 1989; Private papers of her descendants
4. <http://centralandeastlakesrangers.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/to-serve-and-protect-netted-carpet.html>
5. Photograph courtesy of Denis Greenough
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dipper>
7. Document: Purchase of Queen Adelaide Hill, Windermere; June 18th 1914
8. <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/what-we-do/>
9. Information from local residents including Colin Tyson, Jack Castling, Barry Tullett, Ruth Richards, Chris Goodwin
10. Photographs from the collection of Colin Tyson
11. Photograph courtesy of Jack Castling. See also: <http://www.cumbriacrack.com/2014/11/19/backing-jacks-dream-millerground/>
12. <http://centralandeastlakesrangers.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/millerground-enhancement-groupcommunity.html>
13. Document: Proposed Purchase of Rayrigg Meadows and Foreshore, Windermere; 1937(?). Also: The Gazette, November 20th 1937
14. Lancashire Evening Post, 16 April 1979
15. Charity Commission registered charity 1116348



Windermere & Bowness Civic Society

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