

Closure of the Cumbria Way between Dalston and Cummersdale (Carlisle)

An alternative footpath for intrepid walkers following the east side of the Caldew River along Public Rights of Way 114042 and 129001

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Background

A high pressure gas pipeline is to be tunnelled under the Caldew River near Cummersdale on the southern edge of Carlisle. The works are extensive and potentially dangerous. Accordingly sections of the Cumbria Way footpath which also serves as the Caldew Cycleway between Dalston and Cummersdale will be closed at around its midway point from August 15th 2022 for at least 6 months. In total around 1 km of the route will be closed and there are no safe ways to bypass the closed sections. I would strongly advise walkers (and cyclists) not to attempt to get through.

Cyclists are advised to use the B5299 road but this is not safe for walkers as this is a busy road and there is no pathway. There are train services from Dalston to Carlisle every hour or so in daytime. The station is on the northern edge of the town. The bus timetable is very limited. At present the last bus leaves Dalston at 1.30pm.

For those wanting to walk the only reasonable option is to use footpaths 114042 and 129001 which together form a neglected route on the eastern side of the Caldew, mostly at a distance from the river. The path (114042) starts at Dalston and there is no river crossing until Cummersdale. About half way along the route becomes 119001 on the definitive map. Look for Dalston on https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/roads-transport/public-transport-road-safety/countryside-access/Rights_of_way/Map.asp

Mostly the path is through woods or through pastures on the flood plain. Grazing cattle might be a problem for walkers with dogs. There are only occasional views of the river. In the earlier sections there is the possibility to use a rough path closer to the river rather than the official path.

When it was laid out forty years ago or more, the path was liberally equipped with stiles, steps, signs and wooden walkways but very little has been done since then. Many signs have disappeared but it is still possible to trace the path. The main problem is that it is overgrown in the woodland areas and hugely infested with Himalayan Balsam. Long grass may be a problem on the flood plains.

Disclaimer: This is the personal assessment of Tony Vaux and is not an official document of the Ramblers Association. Anyone using it does so at their own risk.

Description of the Path

From the car park in the centre of Dalston opposite the Co-op take the pedestrian-only lane south across the meadow and cross over the Caldew on the 'White Bridge'. After 100m turn sharp left at a footpath sign and proceed along the edge of a field. The path dips down to the edge of a beck and this could be an obstacle in time of flood (see picture).



← *Flood-prone area at the start of the walk*

The path emerges at a grassy field. A tractor track comes in from the left and peters out. The path divides (372500) but there is no sign. The official path goes to the right over a stile into Ike's Wood. The path is signed and generally good but at one point there is an awkward fallen tree. The left turn goes to the river edge and proceeds past some nice bays linked by sections of rough woodland. Both paths converge just before a footbridge (378508).

Footbridge at the end of the first wooded section (378508) →

At or around this point 114042 becomes 119001. After the footbridge turn sharp left on an indistinct path through pasture along the floodplain keeping the fence on your left. You pass the wreckage of a small footbridge that has been swept out of position in a flood but the beck was dry when I crossed it and so no obstacle. The next two sections of woodland are quite challenging but not dangerous. The path enters Blackhall Wood at a stile (382515).



Stile to enter Blackhall Wood (382515)



Initially the path vanishes into nettles but very soon a clear but overgrown path is found. Old signs help to ensure that the walker is unlikely to stray off the path but there are no real alternatives. There are slippery sections and several fallen trees including one massive one which I had to crawl under. Here and there you can look down to the river but only at a couple of points is there a good view beyond the woods.

← *A rare glimpse of the Caldew Valley from Ike's Wood*

The wood extends for nearly a mile of rough going. It emerges in another overgrown area but very soon a rickety stile (391517) opens onto another stretch of pasture. Walk straight across, finding another rickety stile next to a large metal gate and then aim in a straight line for the woods ahead (Peastree Wood).

Stile on the floodplain between the Woods



The next wooded section is similar to Blackhall Wood but shorter. On emerging at the far end there is another overgrown stretch going into a field of long grasses. Keep along the edge closest to the river past recent earthworks for the gas-pipe tunnel. Pass through an archway under the railway to emerge, after a stile, on another floodplain from which there is a path and bridge over the Caldew into Cummersdale. Cross the footbridge, noting that there is no sign pointing back in the way you have come. After crossing the Caldew you can turn right to rejoin the Cumbria Way into Carlisle. Alternatively you can continue on a path along the eastern bank through Denton Holme.



Gully under the railway



Rejoining the Cumbria Way after crossing the footbridge at Cummersdale

From Cummersdale (Carlisle) to Dalston

When walking the path in reverse watch out for-

1. The signpost at the initial footbridge in Cummersdale does not mark 129001. Turn sharp tight along the river bank and follow through a gully under the railway.
2. Keep right through a field of long grass and note the earthworks connected with the gas pipeline. Head along a tongue of wasteland to the entry to Peastree Wood. This section is seriously overgrown but as you enter the wood bear left and upwards, ignoring other paths along the river bank.
3. After Peastree Wood head for the right-hand (western) end of the woods in the distance and, after reaching the stile at its edge, struggle through the short overgrown section before heading left up the hill into Blackhall Wood.
4. After Blackhall Wood, keep the fence close on your right hand side until you find the footbridge pictured above. After the footbridge the path divides. The left hand fork is the official route going through Ike's Wood and some pleasant open 'rides'. Ignore a tractor track heading right across a small beck and into a field beyond. The right hand fork from the footbridge goes much closer to the river and offers some pleasant spots by the water, rejoining the main path in an open space as described above.

General Points

1. The path is about 4km or 3 miles in length and takes about 2 hours.
2. The family groups of cattle on this route are not used to being disturbed and may object to the presence of a dog.
3. The route is away from the river but crosses some becks that might be a problem in flood conditions. At all times there will be slippery sections in the woods and walking poles are a great help.
4. The more people use this route the easier it will become.
5. There is great scope for balsam-bashing.