
6 Howgill Fells

Theme: Rivers, seas and life

Location

6 Howgill Fells, Cautley Spout — Silurian sediments. There is a pull-in east of the Inn and it is a 2 kilometre walk to Cautley Spout from there [SD 681 975].

Description

Travelling north by rail or road, perhaps the first view you get of Cumbrian fells are the Howgills just south of Tebay. They look steep and lonely and they are.

These big green whalebacks seem to have little rock, few walls and fences and fewer people, so they are quite different to their Lakeland cousins. But that's their appeal, plus they have different aspects of Cumbria's geological story to tell. The bedrock, usually hidden beneath a veneer of glacial clay and debris, is mostly from the Silurian Period. Hundreds of metres of sandstones, mudstones and siltstones are evidence of the infilling and closure of the ancient Iapetus Ocean as two continents collided and one dived below the other 415 million years ago. The sandstones (called turbidites) often have grains of very different sizes and this is because vast amounts of debris slid quickly off the continental shelf into a deep ocean. These catastrophic submarine slides still happen today and occasionally they cut through cables carrying the world wide web. While the Howgill Fells look peaceful enough now, their geology continues to evolve. Clay and stones left by the ice sheets 20,000 years ago, also creep easily down the steep slopes and increased rainfall, helped by people and their animals changing the vegetation, can produce rapid erosion and landslides. If you are lucky you may catch sight of wild fell ponies in the lonely valleys.

Right on the southern margin of the Howgills, where a popular path to Cautley Spout waterfall begins, is the Cross Keys Inn. A place with Quaker associations, it has been a temperance inn since 1902. There is a William Blake quote carved on a lintel 'Great things are done when men and mountains meet. They are not done by jostling in the street.' Few geologists would disagree.

Photographs

(Photo 06-1) 6 View southwest over Great Dummacks and Cautley Spout.

(Photo 06-2) 6 Howgill Fells.



(Photo 06-1) View southwest over Great Dummacks and Cautley Spout.



(Photo 06-2) Howgill Fells.