



BMC
thebmc.co.uk

THE LAKE DISTRICT GREEN CLIMBING GUIDE

ACCESS, CONSERVATION & ENVIRONMENT



THE LAKE DISTRICT GREEN CLIMBING GUIDE



ACCESS AND CONSERVATION

The Lake District is England's only truly mountainous area and was designated as a National Park in 1951. It covers 2,292 km² (880 miles²) and receives around 15 million visitors per year – around one third of England's entire population! It has many nationally significant climbing sites, a rich diversity of wildlife and geology, England's deepest lake, over 1,880 miles of rights of way and nearly 500 square miles of access land for the public to enjoy.

Many of the Lake District crags and climbing venues are located in either Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations with a high level of legal protection for wildlife and geology. This reflects the environmental value of upland cliffs and crags.

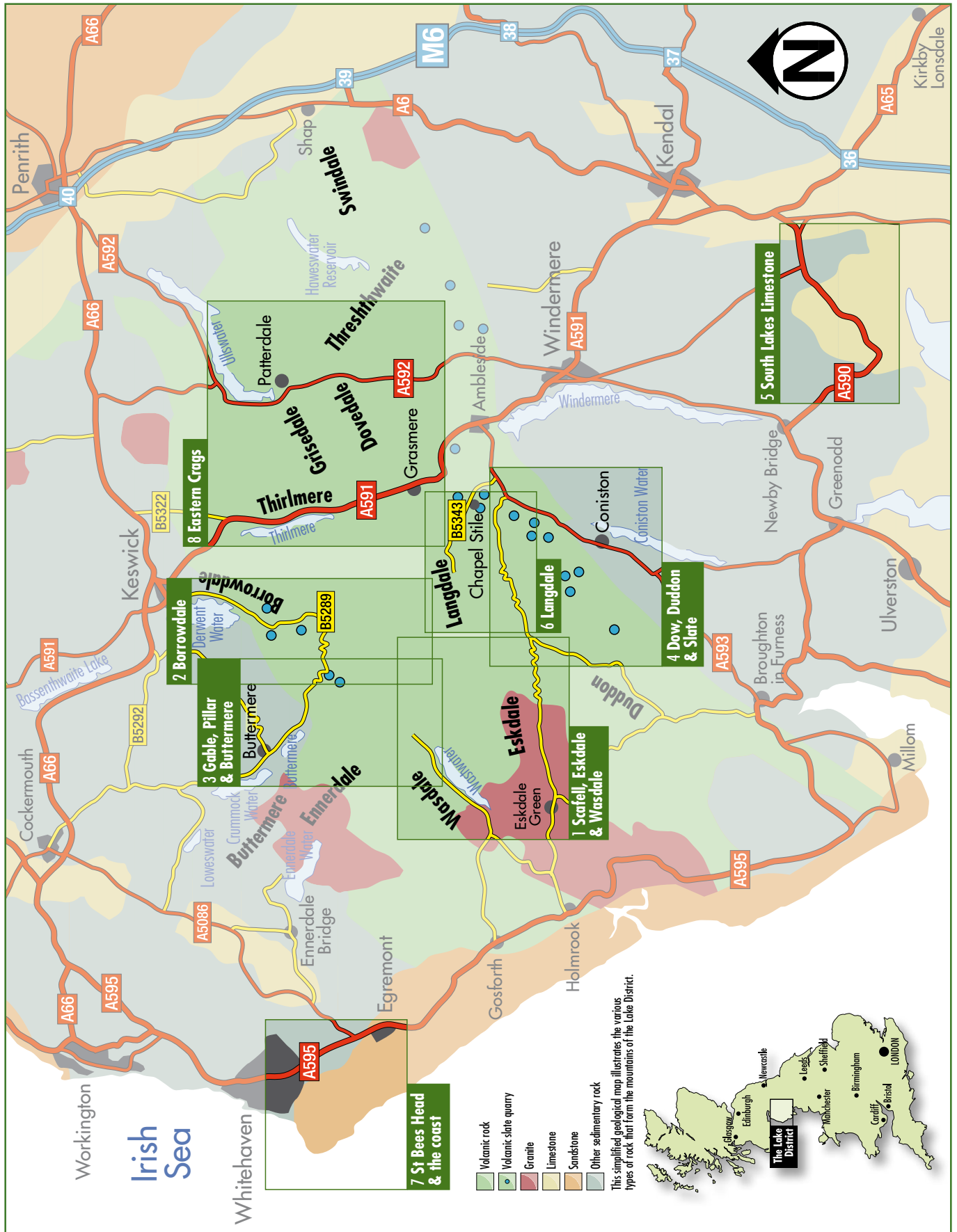
Natural England is the Government's advisor on conservation issues. They have worked in partnership with BMC, the National Trust and Lake District National Park Authority to produce this publication.

This guide is intended to help climbers and hill walkers understand more about the flora, fauna, and geology found in the Lakes. The BMC hopes climbers and hillwalkers appreciate the environmental sensitivity of the mountain environment and continue to contribute towards its conservation. The Best Practice guidelines within this leaflet outline practical ways that climbers, mountaineers and hill walkers can help in protecting our shared natural heritage.

NATURAL ENGLAND – CONSERVATION STATEMENT

Natural England is the Government agency advising on access, recreation, conservation and landscape. The agency formed in 2006 following the merger of **English Nature**, **The Countryside Agency** and the **Rural Development Service**.

"The Lake District upland environment provides opportunities for climbing, walking and the quiet enjoyment of landscape, wildlife and geology. Many of the high crags and buttresses represent rich and sensitive environments containing heathers, rare arctic alpins, colourful flowering herbs, dwarf trees, and rare birds. If future generations are to continue enjoying the Lake District, it is essential that we all contribute towards its long term conservation."



1 SCAFELL, ESKDALE AND WASDALE



SCAFELL IN FULL WINTER DRESS

This area contains England's highest mountain – *Scafell Pike* (3206 ft), and with the associated East and Central buttresses, some of the finest high-mountain climbing in the country.

It is composed of an upland massif stretching from the head of Borrowdale, south over Great End, Broad Crag and Scafell, to Hard Knott overlooking the valley of the River Esk.

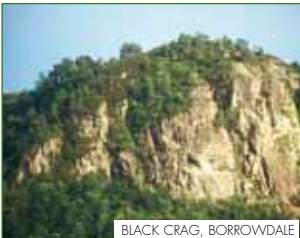
The montane vegetation found in the summit boulder fields is one of the ecological highlights of this area and spectacular plant communities are also found in the gills. Piers Gill, Skew Gill and Greta Gill are rich with arctic alpines and dense with flowering herbs. This colourful tall herb vegetation is also found amongst the more base-rich crags.

The area also supports breeding peregrine, raven, ring ouzel and wheatear.



TALL HERB LEDGE VEGETATION

2 BORROWDALE



BLACK CRAG, BORROWDALE

The Borrowdale Valley is one of the best examples in England of wet oceanic woodland, and is typified by dense oaks and crags emerging through the leafy canopies. The woods are full of ferns, mosses and lichens (reflecting the high rainfall and clean air) and the upper parts of the river system and Derwent Water itself are natural and unpolluted freshwaters full of salmon, trout, otter and birdlife.

The high fells on either side of the valley are also ecologically stunning with rich bird life including significant numbers of peregrines and ring ouzels. High above Goat Crag are the extensive fells of the Buttermere and Derwent Commons. Purple heathlands and rich upland grasslands are found here. On the eastern side the Fells of Armboth show the wetter upland communities with blanket bogs crammed with colourful bog-mosses, cotton grasses and bog asphodels.



FERNS



TROUTDALE PINNACLE S, BLACK CRAG



P. JAMES ON APHASIA E2, SERGEANT CRAG SLABS

3 GABLE, PILLAR AND BUTTERMERE



NEEDLE RIDGE, NAPES

Great Gable rises high over the central fells of the Lake District and the valleys of Ennerdale and Buttermere. Ennerdale is known for its sequence of habitats running from lakeside to mountain summit – a brilliant example of "altitudinal succession". The upland heaths in Ennerdale form purple swathes of fellside running into the craggy sides of Pillar. Pillar Rock itself is cloaked in junipers and some of the gullies and ledges in this valley are rich in herbs and flowers.

As a result of the range of habitats the area supports one of the best upland breeding bird assemblages in West Cumbria. Breeding species include buzzard, peregrine, merlin, raven, red grouse, wheatear, whinchat and ring-ouzel.

The Buttermere fells are covered in diverse heath, the rare bear-berry also occurs here and Hobcarton Crag is the only English locality for Alpine Catchfly – a beautiful pink flower that clings to the crags and gully sides.

Honister is a key locality for upland plants. The tall, herb-rich ledges on both sides of the pass have been dubbed the "hanging gardens of Honister" with Globe flower, roseroot and crane's-bill forming a swathe of summer colour across the rock faces.



ROSEROOT

ALPINE CATCHFLY

4 DOW, DUDDON AND SLATE



BURNT CRAG, DUDDON

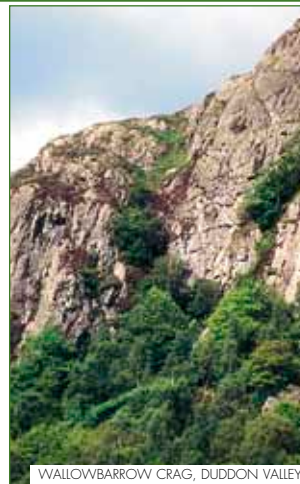
The south eastern parts of the Lake District have a high woodland cover with climbing crags rising from above the woods or hidden amongst the remains of the slate mining industry.

The Duddon Valley Woodlands are one of the largest woodlands in the Lake District with a wide range of different woodland communities amongst a mosaic of flushes and mires. The woodlands support a good range of birds characteristic of this habitat, including tawny owl, pied flycatcher, redstart and siskin.

The higher fells around Dow Crag and Seathwaite are generally more heavily grazed and most of the heathlands and trees are confined to the steeper crags. The valley sides often have stands of juniper (a native conifer) associated with old areas of mining. It is possible that the miners planted these as high-quality gunpowder could be made from juniper charcoal.



COMMON JUNIPER



WALLOWBARROW CRAG, DUDDON VALLEY

5 SOUTH LAKES LIMESTONE



B. SMITH ON **MANGUSTINE SCATOUFLANGE**, CHAPEL HEAD

A ring of carboniferous limestone runs around the southern Lake District, fringing Morecambe Bay. The limestone outcrops as pavements and scars set amongst ash-hazel woodland and colourful grassland studded with thyme and rockrose.

The steep crags such as Chapel Head Scar, Scout Scar and Humphrey Head are also of botanical importance with a rich assemblage of flowers such as spiked speedwell and spring cinquefoil. The rare Lancashire whitebeam grows on these crags (it only lives within 5km of Morecambe Bay) and along the cliff tops grows the rare hoary rockrose (lower-offs are better than topping out in this case).

The range of natural habitats means that this area is notable for its butterflies particularly the fritillaries. The area is also of high geological value and the high scars have breeding peregrine.



CHAPEL HEAD SCAR

ROCK ROSE

6 LANGDALE



BRACKEN CLOCK, PAVEY ARK

The Langdale Fells and crags are well known for their geological features. The crags of Raven Crag and Gimmer consist of rocks illustrating the volcanic origins of the Lake District and a giant crater collapsing to form an ancient caldera lake.

The gills and crags are also well vegetated, with the famous Dungeon Gill containing a fantastic collection of mosses, ferns and liverworts.

7 ST BEES HEAD AND THE COAST



G. SUTCLIFFE ON **TOXIC ROCK**, ST BEES

St Bees has a number of different habitats – natural cliff-top grassland and heath, cliff face, coastal shingle and rocky wave-cut platform. The outstanding interest lies in the large breeding colonies of guillemots, fulmar, kittiwake, razorbill, cormorant, puffin, shag and herring gull. The cliffs are also unique in providing the only English breeding site for black guillemots.

Several other birds are known to use this site regularly for breeding and these include the tawny owl, sparrowhawk, peregrine, raven and the rare rock pipit.

8 EASTERN CRAGS



D. STRINGFELLOW ON **BLOODHOUND E2**, GOUTHER CRAG, SWINDALE

The Eastern crags are scattered across a wide area including the Thirlmere, and Ullswater valleys. The north-south ridge of Helvellyn and Fairfield is the most important area in England for arctic alpine plants (such as saxifrages) and mountain vegetation. The base-rich rock outcrops (often centred on the gully lines), harsh climates and steep ground means that this area is botanically exceptional. Large stands of tall herb vegetation (looking like meadows) cover many of the crags in summer. Stands of juniper occur on the outcrops and in some places they form dense and continuous stands. The eastern coves of Helvellyn also have the only English location for downy willow (clinging to the steep ground just below the summit ridge). The site has a good montane bird fauna with peregrine falcon, buzzard, raven and ring ouzel recorded as breeding. Snow buntings frequent the summits in the winter.

The other Eastern Crags also have good flora especially the High Street range. Much like the Coniston Fells the crags are often the best place for heathers and trees, out of the reach of grazing sheep.

The Haweswater valley is the only English location for golden eagle. This magnificent bird of prey has held territory in the Mardale Head area for many years.



PURPLE SAXIFRAGE

Conservation and climbing

Statutory conservation sites cover a significant proportion of the land in the Lake District and comprise a number of designations including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Although there is much of interest and to conserve outside these sites, they do form the central core of the statutory conservation system and are important for the habitats, wildlife, geology and landforms they support. They also meet the UK's national and international obligations for conservation.

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Rio Convention on biodiversity in 1992 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 provide the main legislation under which conservation of sites and species is secured in the UK. However, they don't just give powers to government to designate and protect special sites, they also provide for many positive initiatives to conserve our wildlife including mechanisms for grants, management agreements, action plans as well as access provision.

All wild birds, (including nests and eggs) and plants are legally protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (amended in the England and Wales by the CROW Act 2000).

As the central pages to this guide illustrate, most climbing and hill walking in the Lake District occurs in these special sites. Generally there is no conflict and outdoor recreation happily co-exists with conservation interests. However, there are exceptions such as birds nesting on climbing cliffs and rare mountain plants.

Such exceptions are usually covered by a relatively small number of voluntary agreements and seasonal nesting restrictions (between the BMC and local statutory bodies) to avoid the unpalatable alternative of bans, or fines/prosecution/imprisonment if disturbance were to occur. In general terms, all wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected and it is illegal to remove any wild plant except with the permission of the landowner. In addition to this general protection, there are lists of specially protected plants, birds and animals (the reckless disturbance of protected species can carry severe penalties including a maximum £20,000 fine and/or imprisonment) and details of these together with the legislation outlined above can be found on the website of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1377> and on the RSPB website – www.rspb.org.uk.

Although this legislation may seem over the top, it is needed to protect the wildlife in the Lake District from increasing public pressure, of which outdoor recreational activities are just one small part. Climbing/hill walking are by no means the major culprits in the decline suffered by some of our wild habitats over the years, but by its very nature, it usually takes place in some of the regions major refuges for wildlife and so extra effort is needed to minimise damage and disturbance.

The most likely ways in which damage occurs whilst climbing is through the excessive removal of vegetation or disturbance to nesting birds. However, with a little effort and consideration, even these can be avoided, particularly if you take time to find out about the wildlife interest in your area.

LAKES NESTING RESTRICTIONS

The Lakes nesting restrictions are summarised on the BMC's annual **Nesting Restrictions** poster (available at the main gear shops, Kendal Wall, or the BMC office) and on the BMC (www.thebmc.co.uk) and FRCC (www.frcc.co.uk) websites.



RAD (Regional Access Database)

The BMC's *Regional Access Database (RAD)* should be every climber's first stop for up-to-date access and conservation information in the Lakes.

The RAD offers a searchable database of all English and Welsh crags with special access and conservation considerations, including all the agreed nesting restrictions. The Lakes is internationally recognised for its wintering, migratory and nesting birds populations and the BMC has worked with the statutory conservation bodies, RSPB, the National Park and local ornithologists to agree the least restrictive option for climbers during the nesting period.

There is a general acceptance amongst the conservation bodies that restrictions should be flexible, monitored and reviewed to ensure they reflect nesting patterns and maintain credibility with climbers – the RAD plays an important part in this, so why not log-on and check it out?

The RAD can be accessed directly at www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag

New and established routes – conservation advice

The valleys and coves of the Lake District contain many crags, and these areas have some of the most important cliff plant communities in the country.

Climbers should be fully aware of the importance of this flora – especially the species illustrated in this leaflet. Threatened upland birds such as the ring ouzel are also dependant on vegetated ledges for nesting opportunities.

The BMC and local partners strongly encourage an awareness of potential impacts to the crag environment from climbing. If new route preparation will result in the destruction of upland vegetation or bird habitat then it should not go ahead. *Climbers should fully consider the following before embarking upon any new route activities:*

- **What degree of route preparation is required?**

If a new line on some remote and far-flung buttress needs to be dug out of the fell-side before it is climbable, then it should be left alone.

- **Will the new route be followed by more than your second?**

If not, the exhumed crackline you thought would be a 3 star mega classic will eventually return to nature and become re-colonised by more common species. As a result a unique niche habitat will have been lost, and the rare mosses and ferns (see this guide for details) removed may take many years to re-establish – if at all.

- **Could your efforts be better spent elsewhere?**

As a result of the changing whims of climbing fashion (and possibly climate change) quality routes on some high crags are becoming neglected; so if you want that pioneering feeling – why not have a few adventurous days rediscovering them!

Finally, if challenged while climbing – avoid conflict and ascertain the challenger’s identity, the organisation they represent, and their exact concerns. Remain calm and report the incident to the BMC – who have regular climbing liaison group meetings with the National Park Authority and other partners.

Further advice can be gained from the organisations listed on the last page of this publication



PEREGRINE FALCON



RING OUZEL

Birds of the Lakeland fells

From the lower fells to the high mountain crags the Lake District has many locally and nationally important bird species, many of which depend on inaccessible crags/ledges and heather/mixed heath environments as breeding sites. During this period they can be vulnerable to disturbance.

On the heather and mixed heath, a number of nationally **Red Listed** species (High conservation concern and declining numbers) breed in small but important groups in the period April – July. The keen eyed can see **merlin**, our smallest bird of prey, **red grouse**, rare in the Lakes, and the **short eared owl**. The **golden plover** also occurs in small numbers in, for example, the Duddon Valley.

In the high fell and crag environment important species include the **Red Listed ring ouzel** – a migrant visitor to the high fells with small populations scattered on crags and steep heather slopes above 250m. Unfortunately, the number and range of these birds appear to be declining and climbers are asked to contribute towards its conservation by avoiding areas with obvious ring ouzel activity (listen for their alarm calls in the March breeding period) and by not removing vegetated crag ledges if preparing new routes.

Peregrine falcon and **raven**, are part of the history and culture of the Lakes and are frequently seen on the high fells and crags. Thanks to conservation initiatives like negotiated nesting restrictions and progressive habitat/visitor management, populations of these majestic mountain birds appear to be increasing.

To continue contributing towards minimising recreational influence during the important nesting period (March – end of June) climbers should observe the widely publicised nesting restrictions and LDNPA on-site signing.

The **golden eagle** still inhabits the eastern fells (its only English location) and unfortunately it requires continued protection and quiet areas in the hope that breeding will occur once again. Anyone wishing to see Lakeland golden eagles is advised to contact the **RSPB** on 01931 713376.

Other species of the Lakeland fells you are likely to see are **wheatear**, **stonechat**, **whinchat**, **buzzard** and **kestrel**.

Most of the Lakeland species live and breed in relatively hostile, remote environments and your help is needed to minimise impacts when in these territories.

If you come across an obviously distressed or agitated bird (they often give out loud alarm calls), especially during the vulnerable breeding periods, then retreat from the area to avoid unnecessary disturbance.

The **BMC**, **Lake District National Park Authority**, **Cumbria Raptor Study Group** and **Natural England** hold a series of liaison meetings throughout the year to discuss population trends, nesting sites and visitor management measures. This co-operative partnership approach has proven very successful and worked well for many years. Climbers have an excellent record of adhering to the agreed nesting restrictions and are encouraged to continue doing so. The Lakes nesting restrictions are summarised on the BMC's annual **Nesting Restrictions** poster (available in the main gear shops, Kendal Wall, or the BMC office) or on the BMC (www.thebmc.co.uk) and FRCC (www.frcc.co.uk) websites.





GOLDEN EAGLE (AQUILA CHRYSAETOS) ADULT PREPARING TO LAND



RAVEN



COMMON BUZZARD



WHEATEAR



SHORT-EARED OWL



MERLIN



A Best Practice guide to climbing and walking in the Lake District

- 1 Take care not to damage crag flora.
- 2 Take care with setting belays in the fragile crag-top environment – this may disrupt important cliff edge habitats.
- 3 Adhere to the negotiated bird nesting restrictions, annually updated and available to download from the BMC website at, www.thebmc.co.uk and also on the FRCC website at, www.frcc.co.uk
- 4 If you experience obvious 'alarm calling' birds – retreat from the area.
- 5 'Tread Lightly' when walking in the mountain environment – see the BMC's Green Guide to the Uplands for more information and available to download – www.thebmc.co.uk/Download.aspx?id=350 or from the BMC office.
- 6 Avoid walking on scree slopes when possible – if you must cross them, use established paths and try not to dislodge additional rocks.
- 7 Put rucksacks on exposed rock surfaces (rather than on vegetation) – this considerably reduces ground erosion at popular sites.
- 8 'Go before you go' – if 'nature calls' make sure the waste is buried, bag and take home toilet paper.
- 9 Take home all litter, even fruit skins – studies have shown these can attract valley predators into the high mountain habitat.
- 10 Observe the 'Countryside Code' – available from the Countryside Agency website – <http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk/>

BMC Access Representatives:

The BMC has a network of volunteer access representatives covering the region on your behalf. If you have an access enquiry, please contact the **Cumbria Coordinator – Peter Latimer**:
T: 01539 738391 E: peter@latimerp.fsnet.co.uk

Or see the BMC website for the contact details of individual area representatives – www.thebmc.co.uk/Pages.aspx?page=107

BMC Access and Conservation Officers:

Guy Keating
T: 0161 438 3309
E: guy@thebmc.co.uk

Catherine Flitcroft
T: 0161 438 3333
E: cath@thebmc.co.uk



THE NATIONAL TRUST



Lake District National Park Authority

Murley Moss,
Oxenholme Road,
Kendal,
Cumbria
LA9 7RL
Tel: (01539) 724555

Natural England

Juniper House
Murley Moss
Oxenholme Road
Kendal,
Cumbria
LA9 7RL
Tel: (01539) 792800

National Trust

The Hollens
Grasmere
Ambleside
Cumbria
LA22 9QZ
Tel: (0870) 609 5391

Many thanks to everyone who contributed towards this publication.

Photos: Stephen Reid, The Fell and Rock Climbing Club, Alex Messenger, NE, Mike Richardson RSPB, Peter Llewellyn, Iain Pringle (winter Scafell), nesc123, R. Fielding.

Text: Colyn Earnshaw (BMC), Pete Barron & Mark Eccles (LDNPA), Barbara Jones (CCW), Simon Webb (NE), Jim Loxham (NT)