

Around the watershed – a tour of Dentdale’s Marilyn’s

In this article, a walking enthusiast describes the rewarding challenge offered by the summits encircling Dentdale. The former Whernside Manor Outdoor Centre employee - now a local homeowner - explains why the dale can be a hotspot for ‘peak-baggers’.

While Munros, (the 282 Scottish peaks over 3000 feet high), are now fairly well known, there are a number of less famous lists of hills and mountains in the UK based on various criteria including location, absolute altitude or relative altitude. Many people dislike them, while others avidly spend their time trying to tick off every summit. Websites and Apps such as “hill-bagging.co.uk” and “Hill Lists”, cater for them.

Some contain summits which are little more than small bumps on a boggy moor or minor protuberances on a ridge, but the Marilyn’s, (a joke to complement the name Munro), certainly do not have that problem. To be included a hill has to have a rise of at least 150m on all sides. They are not necessarily high; Mynydd Enlli 168m on Bardsey Island and Arnside Knott 159m both qualify, whereas famous mountains such as Cairngorm, 1245m, or Bowfell, 902m do not. The Marilyn’s are however nearly always excellent viewpoints and many are found in less-frequented parts of Britain.

The list was first published in a book by Alan Dawson (1992) – “The Relative Hills of Britain” (Cicerone Press) and did not include Ireland. It is periodically updated as cols and summits are resurveyed and at present there are 175 Marilyn’s in England, including five in Dentdale. In contrast there are only two in the Howgill Fells and just five in all of the North Pennines between the A66 and the Tyne Gap, so Dentdale is a Marilyn “hotspot”.

Moreover all five are arranged around the watershed of the River Dee and can be combined in a long but rewarding circular walk starting from the village or, (slightly shorter), Barth Bridge. Along the north side of the dale is the ridge of Rise Hill (Aye Gill Pike) and to the east lies Great Knoutberry. The more dissected southern side of the valley holds the 3 summits of Whernside, Great Coum and Calf Top. The last made the news in 2016 when a new survey increased its height very slightly, but critically just sufficient to raise it to over 2000 feet, (making it a new addition to some lists) and, according to some definitions, a mountain rather than just a hill.

So, for those aspiring to join the elite group, (nine claimants so far), who have conquered all 1556 Marilyn’s, a trip to our beautiful valley is a useful way of boosting their total. And by the end they will also have “bagged” four more Hewitts, Nuttalls and SIMMS, not to mention the HUMPS and TUMPS..... There are 16,986 TUMPS, (Thirty & Upward Metre Prominence), so probably best not to get hooked on those!