

Delight for walkers as new stretch of the England Coast Path is officially launched in Cumbria

As part of the England Coast Path National Trail, the new stretch covers over 52km (almost 33 miles) of trails from Whitehaven to Silecroft where the Lake District dips down to the Irish Sea.

The new trail and many areas of associated coastal access land are now publicly accessible. The trail comprises of coastal terrain such as beaches, dunes and cliff tops, picturesque towns and villages, the fascinating Sellafield skyline, views of both mountain and sea and many visitor hotspots including:

- The historic Georgian town of Whitehaven – reputed to be the inspiration for Lilliput in Gulliver’s Travels
- The towering red sandstone cliffs of St Bees Head – the only area of high sea cliffs in the North West
- The majestic Muncaster Castle – a historic and supposedly haunted castle with beautiful gardens and owl sanctuary
- Ravenglass, the coastal village which is in two UNESCO World Heritage sites – The Lake District and Hadrian’s Wall
- Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway – known as La’al Ratty – one of the oldest and longest narrow gauge heritage railways in England

The Whitehaven to Silecroft stretch, which initially opened to local communities in March 2021 during the COVID-19 restrictions, joins Allonby to Whitehaven and Walney Island and brings the total length of England Coast Path in Cumbria to 70 miles.

A national celebration and launch event will take place today at St Bees, where guests will be treated to presentations, speeches and activities as part of the celebrations. It will be an opportunity to thank the many partners, stakeholders and community groups who have played vital roles in making the route happen. Guests include campaigners for increased BAME and disabled access to the outdoors and landowners from along the coast.

The England Coast Path is funded through Defra’s Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and delivered by Natural England.

Once complete it will create a new National Trail all around England’s coast, which at 2,700 miles, will be the longest continuous coastal walking route in the world.

Promotion of the Countryside Code, recently refreshed by Natural England will also be a key message throughout the day, helping walkers to ensure their day out will be safe and enjoyable for all.

A special thank you will be given to the 'ECP Pioneers', a band of local walkers who, when COVID-19 restrictions prevented an in-person event in March 2021, kindly walked the route and shared their photos, videos and thoughts.

A [new video featuring incredible drone footage of the new section's scenery and variety of terrain and landscape](#), along with interviews from Defra Minister, Lord Benyon and Natural England Chair Tony Juniper, will also be premiered, and is available to view online.

Mark Hesketh, Deputy Area Manager for Cumbria, Natural England said:

At a time when it has become apparent that people need nature more than ever, it's fabulous that we can celebrate the opening up of this section of footpath here in Cumbria. The county is well known for its appeal to outdoor enthusiasts and this new trail will add a further dimension to the visitor offer, while connecting local communities.

The path not only opens up some stunning new countryside to the public, but aims to improve infrastructure and waymarking to make it easier for as many people as possible to experience the coast.

The focus of today's event will be on connecting people with nature, a fundamental part of the Government's 25 year Environment Plan. Here in Cumbria we've been lucky to have the help of the local council, landowners and various stakeholders and partners – a truly joined up project.

Cllr Keith Little, Cumbria County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, said:

I am delighted to see the new sections of the path being opened up to the public – an impressive 33 miles of new trails are now available for people to enjoy.

The England Coast Path is a fantastic initiative and will enable people to enjoy our wonderful coastlines and scenery in ways they haven't been able to before.

The new trails will also help to make local people and visitors more aware of what's on offer in this part of the county – fantastic views, fantastic scenery and local communities that are very welcoming.