

BAGGING THE WAINWRIGHTS

Michael Elcock bags his last Wainwright with Dexter

PICTURES Michael Elcock

Poor old Dexter! He's accompanied me on so many long-distance walks and hiked right through the Lake District that people think he must be completely worn out. They couldn't be further from the truth though because he loves every minute and, at this moment in time, has completed several national trails. We split the Wye Valley Walk into 13 sections and completed these over a couple of years. We walked the Pembrokeshire Coast Path in 14 days and Hadrian's Wall in six but the Width of Wales Walk was more of a challenge, taking 20 days over three years.

In my defence, all I can say is that Dexter doesn't enjoy being left behind. When I get my rucksack out, he stands beside the car, determined that he's joining me on my adventures – a complete change in behaviour because he didn't like the car when he was a puppy and I often had to

lift him inside. He was regularly stuck in the car with me when he was young because I didn't like leaving him home alone. I didn't walk Dexter much in his first year while his limbs were still growing because strenuous exercise whilst young can cause problems when they're older.

THE LAST ONE

We visit the Lakes several times a year and, having climbed another peak in June, have now bagged all 214 of those described by Wainwright. Although I climbed them all before I had Dexter, I thought he'd enjoy doing them with me so did them again and have climbed a few several times. Dexter loves the outdoors and has, as I've discovered on our adventures, excellent route-finding and water-divining skills - these have proved useful on many occasions!



Spectacular views of Ullswater below



Linmore was Dexter's first Wainwright because it's near our holiday home



Dow Crag is popular with rock-climbers

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Evidence of Dexter's many adventures on Crag Hill, Seathwaite Tarn, Striding Edge and the Kentmere Horseshoe



I chose Lingmoor as his first fell because it's near my holiday home and the views of the Langdale Valley are spectacular. After climbing Hardknott (when he was around 11 months old), he joined me on several weekends and tackled 11 high fells in ice, wind and snow. In 2009, he climbed another 20, with 46, 50, 25 and 27 in the following years respectively.

I contrived to complete the Wainwrights on 3 June because a friend was climbing his last Birketts on the same day – the Birketts are Lake District hills that exceed 1,000ft as listed in Bill Birkett's *Complete Lakeland Fells*. I chose Hart Side as our last Wainwright because it's adjacent to Birkett Fell (which was named after Lord Birkett, a judge at the Nuremberg trials, who was instrumental in saving Ullswater from becoming a reservoir).

It was a race against time to get the remaining 32 done before 3 June and there

was a particularly strenuous five days in April, when we climbed 21. Luckily the weather was with us. The most memorable climbs are all horseshoe or ridge walks. These include the Martindale Horseshoe above Ullswater, the Kentmere Horseshoe and the Fairfield Horseshoe. The best ridge walk is that linking Grisedale Pike, Hopegill Head and Whiteside in the northwestern fells, which we completed in March in perfect weather. Dexter has also walked Striding Edge on Helvellyn and Sharp Edge on Blencathra!

A HARDY CLIMBER

Several people have asked whether Dexter has managed the fells without assistance but I've found he's extremely self-confident and knows exactly what he can and can't do. When he's unsure and needs a helping hand (such as when we climbed Pike O' Stickle or were

attempting the bad step on Crinkle Crag), he stands completely still and waits for a lift or a reassuring hold on the collar.

We've climbed the Coniston Fells more than any other because they're the closest to our holiday home. Our favourite is Dow Crag because there's a choice of routes and they vary widely in difficulty, ranging from a scramble up the south gully starting from Goats Water to walking along the ridge from Walna Scar.

Dexter has a natural ability to locate water and has bagged the tarns with as much enthusiasm as the hills – 111 of 301. Next on our list are the 116 outlying fells, of which he has climbed 26 so far. Dexter has been my constant companion over the last seven years and his enthusiasm and friendliness are unbounded. I can't imagine walking the many peaks of the Lake District without him.

Tried & tested **The Lake District**

Admiring Cat Bells in the morning light



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Mapping the route

The Wainwrights are the fells described by Alfred Wainwright in his pictorial guides, *The Eastern Fells*, *The Far Eastern Fells*, *The Central Fells*, *The Southern Fells*, *The Northern Fells*, *The North Western Fells* and *The Western Fells*.

The term 'bagging' is used by those who fancy walking them all. There are many websites where you can print off walking routes – some are free whilst others require a subscription. The latter are usually more detailed, providing GPS data and step-by-step instructions. You can track your progress at www.hill-bagging.co.uk www.wainwright.org.uk www.wainwright-walks.co.uk www.lakedistrictwalks.com and at www.ldwa.org.uk you'll find a register of everyone who has climbed all 214 of the Wainwrights.

Michael Elcock explains, 'I use the Wainwright guides before and after a walk but rarely take them with me because they're first editions. I always take a map, a compass and a dedicated GPS - the battery life on a GPS is much better than that of a mobile. I prepare my route on my laptop using Anquet mapping and download it to my GPS beforehand and always record my track and upload it to my website afterwards.'

USING A SMARTPHONE

Although most smartphones have built-in GPS, you'll need a (free) app so you can download Ordnance Survey mapping and have it work with your phone's GPS. The outstanding app in this field is Viewranger and

you can get it for iOS at itunes.apple.com/gb/app/viewranger-outdoors-gps-open/id404581674?mt=8 and Android at play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.augmentra.viewranger.android&hl=en.

If you've got a tablet or computer the same Viewranger app (or website if on a computer) allows you to view maps and plan walks on a larger scale – you can then sync these back to your mobile. OS mapping is bought and downloaded in 'tiles' – squares of mapping. An investment of about £10 in Viewranger's credits buys plenty of tiles. 1:25,000 (Landranger-scale) maps are cheap, 1:50,000 (Explorer-scale) are much more costly but are extremely detailed and only required where complex navigation is vital.

