



*'It's just over the next hill.
Another hill, that is'*

A LITTLE SLICE OF PARADISE

Trip review: **Rhalou Allerhand** checks out Hassness Country House on a guided walking holiday in the Lake District



Ordinarily it would never occur to me to go on a guided walking holiday. You don't need to pay someone to show you how to walk, do you? Surely you can just pull your boots on, open the door and trundle off into the distance?

But it's rarely, if ever, that simple. Adventure holidays usually involve plenty of kit, organisation and meticulous planning before you've even closed your front door. To truly appreciate the wilderness, you need to do your homework.

So what if someone else did the planning, orienteering, organising and cooking for you? Imagine how much more relaxing your holiday would be if you didn't have to do a single thing except walk, smile and soak up the stunning landscape. This is where Ramblers Countrywide Holidays steps in.

WELCOME TO SERENITY

After an adventurous drive into the mountains, my photographer and I arrived in the sleepy village of Buttermere in the Lake District on a sunny afternoon in August not sure what to expect. But as soon as we stepped into Hassness Country House, we were instantly enveloped by the serene atmosphere.

The house is a walker's paradise: set beside Lake Buttermere, nestled in the rugged mountainsides of the western fells, with a striking vista of dramatic mountains, magical waterfalls, lush green grass and sun-dappled trees framing the sparkling lake from almost every window.

Upon our arrival, our hosts, Brian and Carole, warmly welcomed us into the lodge and we felt instantly at home. From tea and freshly baked cakes to boot racks and a drying room for all your wet gear, absolutely everything has been thought of. You can undertake most of your walks straight from the lodge too, so it really is the perfect place for walkers to relax and unwind.

SWITCHING OFF

There is no TV or phone reception, but the fact we were going to be off grid for a few days was really a blessing. The shortage of modern amenities meant we were forced to switch off from the world and properly relax.

After settling into our lovely, lake-facing room, we went downstairs to meet our group leader and fellow walking companions. I was apprehensive because I was concerned I wouldn't fit the age demographic. As expected, the majority of our fellow walkers were

in their fifties, but after a glass of wine and a natter you would never have noticed an age gap. Ramblers holidays attract lots of interesting people from all walks of life and we were chattering away like teenagers within minutes.

Tess, our qualified walk leader for the weekend, was a lovely lady from Yorkshire who instantly put us all at ease; after half an hour in her company I would have followed her up any mountain in the world.

Following a few house rules, we settled down to a delicious three-course meal cooked by Brian. The dining room consists of several intimate tables, so you get to swap places and make new friends at every mealtime, which added to the camaraderie of the weekend. Complete with fresh bread and desserts to die for, the dinner was unsurpassed and I'd recommend visiting for the food alone.

A SLIGHTLY RUDE AWAKENING

The following morning we awoke refreshed and ready to walk, but I soon realised I'd been lulled into a false sense of security. As dreamy and idyllic as Hassness Country House is, when the Ramblers start walking, they mean business.

On the first day, although our plans were scuppered by bad weather,





There's plenty of climbing involved, but you'll be glad you made the effort



'STARTING FROM THE SHORES OF THE LAKE, THE WALK INCLUDED BOTH FLEETWITH PIKE AND HAYSTACKS, AND COVERED TEN MILES AND 4,000 FEET OF ASCENT'

we still did several hours round the lower peaks of the lake and every single member of our group showed true grit and determination, and left me puffing at the back, proving that age means absolutely nothing when it comes to hiking up mountains. However, the group catered to all levels and we maintained a steady pace with regular photo stops and a picnic lunch provided by the lodge.

WAINWRIGHT'S FOOTSTEPS

On our final day, the rain clouds cleared and we made it to the spot where the ashes of famous fell walker Alfred Wainwright were scattered. Starting from the shores of the lake, this walk included both Fleetwith Pike and Haystacks, and covered ten miles and 4,000 feet of ascent. The terrain was fairly rugged on the way up but the effort paid off. Once we made it to the summit of Haystacks, with its panoramic view of the azure blue valley below,

encased by rugged mountainsides, high summits and open ridges, I could see why Wainwright treasured the area. Buttermere is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been fortunate enough to visit.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of our fellow walkers were return visitors. Many of them enjoyed Ramblers holidays the world over, but always returned to their beloved Hassness Country House. After three nights, I understood why. With its friendly and laidback hosts, delicious food and simply stunning surroundings, Hassness Country House is a little slice of paradise and I'd recommend it to everyone. [www](#)

More information:

The Best of the Lake District – Walking in the Footsteps of the Great Alfred Wainwright, from Ramblers Countrywide Holidays. Three nights from £179 (October) www.ramblerscountrywide.co.uk