Windermere Circuit drive

A drive of contrasts around England’s largest lake, Windermere. The route visits some of the most popular attractions in Lakeland and also some relatively remote and peaceful parts on the western shore. The scenery is fabulous throughout.
Summary of main attractions on route (click on name for detail)

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<td>4.3 miles</td>
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The Drive

**Distance: 0 miles**
**Location:** Waterhead car park, Ambleside
**Coordinates:** N 54.42116, W 2.96284

Slightly south of Ambleside town, Waterhead has a lovely lakeside setting with plenty of attractions. *Windermere lake cruises* call at the jetty here and it is well worth taking a trip down the lake to Bowness or even Lakeside at the opposite end of the lake. The *Wateredge Inn* has a beer garden overlooking the lake and beyond this is Borrans Park which provides a scenic open grassy area with good lake shore access. Beyond this again is the *Galava Roman Fort* (free entry) and although there are limited remains to be seen, it is a pleasant and interesting area to explore. The car park is 'pay on exit' with toilet facilities. There are a few small gift shops, stalls and cafes in the Waterhead area.

**Travelling:**
Leave the car park and turn left on the A5075 towards Windermere town. This immediately joins the A591 at the traffic lights where you continue along the picturesque lake shore road. As you leave Waterhead, the peaceful and attractive *Stagshaw Gardens* are on the left and approx 0.6 miles beyond is the *Low Wood Hotel* which is well known for water sports in a spectacular setting. Continue on for approx 0.8 miles to Brockhole visitor centre on the right.
Brockhole is an impressive lakeside visitor centre owned by the National Park Authority and has many attractions for all the family including exhibitions of the local area, playgrounds for children, shop, cafe, gardens, lake shore walks and boat trips. A popular treetop adventure is also available for which a charge applies. Entrance to the visitor centre is free and includes toilet facilities but the car park is ‘pay on exit’. Attractions open daily all year.

**Travelling:**
From Brockhole, continue south on the A591 towards Windermere town. After approx 1 mile, pass through Troutbeck Bridge village where there is a petrol station & shop. Continue past Troutbeck Bridge for approx 0.5 miles to the mini-roundabout and turn right on the A592 towards Bowness. Shortly, Hammarbank pay and display car park is on the right with good views over the lake. Continue beyond this, down the steep hill and around a couple of bends to Rayrigg Meadow car park on the right.

**Distance: 4.3 miles**  
**Location: Rayrigg Meadow picnic site**  
**Coordinates: N 54.37897, W 2.91924**

A pleasant lakeside area with some good facilities and lakeshore walks. The wooded lakeshore has attractive views across the lake and some pebble/gravel beaches. There are several picnic tables and a childrens playground located in an open grassy area slightly away from the lake. Queen Adelaide’s hill is immediately behind the car park and the easily achieved summit provides great views over the lake and beyond. The car park is pay and display and has seasonal toilet facilities.

**Travelling:**
Turn right out of the car park and continue on the A592 towards Bowness. After approx 0.6 miles pass the new Windermere Jetty boat museum and enter the outskirts of Bowness. Shortly on the right is Rayrigg Road car park which is ideally placed to visit the town.

**Distance: 5.3 miles**  
**Location: Bowness-on-Windermere, Rayrigg Road car park**  
**Coordinates: N 54.36591, W 2.91993**

Bowness-on-Windermere is probably the busiest town in the Lake District and at times the crowds can be oppressive but it is an interesting place in a great lakeside setting with plenty of attractions. The World of Beatrix Potter attraction is one of the more popular and is opposite the car park. The town centre itself has numerous shops, cafes and pubs where you can easily spend some time exploring before wondering down past St Martin’s Church to the nearby lakeside area.
The picturesque lakeside area is slightly separate to the town centre but often just as busy. There are a number of jetties where you can catch one of the many Windermere lake cruises. Beyond the jetties is Glebe Road which forms a popular loop along the lake shore. Within this loop is a large open recreational area known as The Glebe. The grassy area provides lovely views up the lake and there are various activities available such as mini golf and tennis. Beyond The Glebe is Cockshott Point which also has some good open grassy areas and a footpath along the attractive lakeshore. There are a number of shops, kiosks, cafes and pubs around the lakeside area. Rayrigg Road car park is pay and display with toilet facilities.

Travelling:
From the car park, continue on the A592 towards the centre of Bowness town. Very shortly come to a mini-roundabout and turn right towards the lake, still the A592. Drop down the hill to enter the lakeside area. After a short distance the main road turns away from the lake but you can take the right turn here and follow the Glebe Road loop which gives some good views of the lake as you pass various shops and cafes. Additional parking is available here.

The road soon brings you back to the A592 where you turn right and continue southwards towards Newby Bridge. Shortly, take the left turn which is the B5284 towards Kendal. Continue up the steep hill to a T junction where you turn right on the A5074. The road then passes some exclusive properties and impressive hotels, well hidden from the road but with great views over the lake. After approx 0.6 miles, take the B5360 on the right towards Newby Bridge. In a short distance the first entrance on the right is Blackwell House.

Distance: 7.6 miles
Location: Blackwell House
Coordinates: N 54.34286, W 2.92214

The iconic Blackwell House is a beautiful example of Arts and Crafts architecture. Built in 1900, the ethos was to handcraft as much as possible using local craftsmen and the finished result is certainly impressive. You can explore the large house which is in a wonderful setting high above Windermere lake and there are lovely views across the water to the mountains beyond. The views can also be appreciated from the superb terraced gardens and from the cafe which spills out on to the terrace in good weather. The house is open daily all year with a car park, cafe and toilets. Admission fee applies.

Travelling:
Leave the car park and turn right on the B5360. Continue for approx 1 mile to a T junction with the A592 where you turn left. After approx 0.8 miles, pass the prominent Beech Hill Hotel on the right and just after this is Beech Hill picnic site, also on the right.
**Distance:** 9.5 miles  
**Location:** Beech Hill picnic site  
**Coordinates:** N 54.32014, W 2.94117

A pleasant raised grassy area adjacent to the car park with a few picnic tables and good views over Windermere lake. There is also a footpath with many steps leading down to the wooded lakeshore area. Being a little out of the way, the picnic site is often relatively quiet and is a good place to enjoy the scenery. The car park is pay and display and has seasonal toilet facilities.

**Travelling:**
Continue on the A592 towards Newby Bridge. Although the road is never far from the lake shore, the lake is mostly obscured from view by trees. After approx 3 miles, the road approaches the end of the lake and the view opens up a little. Shortly on the right is Fell Foot park.

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**Distance:** 12.9 miles  
**Location:** Fell Foot park  
**Coordinates:** N 54.27621, W 2.94987

**Fell Foot park** is an attractive National Trust owned garden on Windermere lake shore. This is the point where the lake ends and the River Leven begins and it is ideal for a picnic and a paddle in summer. There are plenty of open grassy spaces with numerous picnic tables from where you can relax and admire the views across the lake. There are also some good footpaths around the mature gardens, a cafe, gift shop, adventure playground and rowing boat hire. In season there is a regular passenger ferry across the lake to Lakeside. Free entry to the park which, along with the cafe, is open daily all year. Shop and ferry are seasonal. National Trust pay and display car park with toilet facilities.

**Travelling:**
Back on the A592, continue towards Newby Bridge and after approx 0.8 miles, turn right at the big roundabout which is the main A590. After a very short distance, take the right turn which passes over the old narrow Newby bridge towards Lakeside. Just over the bridge on the right is the **Swan Hotel** which provides refreshments in a pleasant riverside setting. The minor road from here on becomes quite narrow and windy so take care when driving. After approx 1 mile, reach the village of Lakeside and just before the Lakeside Hotel on the right, turn right to Lakeside car park.
A popular area with some excellent attractions by the lake. The main feature is Lakeside pier which serves as the terminus for the Windermere lake cruises and the The Lakeside & Haverthwaite Railway. You can better appreciate the scenery and history of the area by taking a cruise or train trip. Boats travel up the lake to Bowness or a seasonal service across the lake to Fell Foot park. The railway line is only 3.5 miles long but the steam trains and the scenery make it an enjoyable trip. Trains normally run frequently in season but are limited from November to March. The Lakes Aquarium is situated next to the terminus area and is a great family attraction. The cafe on the pier provides refreshments overlooking the lake as does the adjacent Lakeside Hotel. The car park is pay and display with nearby toilet facilities.

**Travelling:**
Return to the road and turn right towards Hawkshead. In just over 0.5 miles, Stott Park Bobbin Mill is on the left hand side with the choice of two separate car parks.

Still working, Stott Park Bobbin Mill began producing wooden bobbins in 1835 for the Lancashire spinning and weaving industries. Today the mill is well preserved by English Heritage and bobbins are still made for visitors. Admission fee includes guided tours, an exhibition, shop selling gifts and light refreshments, picnic area, car park and toilets. The attraction is open Wednesday to Sunday between Easter and November, daily over the summer school holiday period. Closed during winter.

**Travelling:**
Continue on the minor road which heads northwards towards Hawkshead. The road is close to the western shore of Windermere but the lake is mostly hidden by trees. After approx 2 miles, Graythwaite Hall is on the left and its lovely gardens are open from April - August, often at their best in the spring. Continue through wonderful countryside and woodland for approx 2.7 miles to meet the wooded shores of Esthwaite Water, the visitor centre car park is just beyond on the right.
Distance: 21.0 miles  
Location: Esthwaite Water visitor centre  
Coordinates: N 54.35029, W 2.98460

Esthwaite Water is one of the lesser known Lake District lakes, probably due to it being the only privately owned one with very little public access. However, it is still very attractive and is worth some exploring. This small visitor centre, set in woodland on the lakeshore with lovely views up the lake, offers a number of attractions for visitors and has developed from the original trout fishery. It remains a popular venue for fishing and boats can be hired for this activity. Also on offer is an Osprey Safari where you can self-drive a small electric boat around the lake looking for the Ospreys that are normally in residence between April and September. At any time of year the boat ride gives a great view of the different wildlife on and around the peaceful lake.

The lake has close connections with both William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter, a shoreline walk follows in the footsteps of the latter and storyboards tell you about the different animals in her books. The small visitor centre at Esthwaite Water has a cafe, fishing tackle shop, picnic area and toilets. Open all year, cafe open Easter to November. Pay and display car park.

Travelling:
Leave Esthwaite Water car park and turn left. Very shortly take the left turn to Sawrey. The narrow road follows the wooded shores of Esthwaite Water before climbing a short distance to the village of Near Sawrey. Soon meet a T junction in the village where you turn right and Hill Top car park is immediately on the right.

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Distance: 21.9 miles  
Location: Hill Top, Near Sawrey  
Coordinates: N 54.35247, W 2.97133

Hill Top, in the attractive village of Near Sawrey, was once the home of Beatrix Potter and is now a famous literary shrine to her. It was an old farm purchased by her in 1905 and many of her books are based on features around the property and in the village. The property is now owned by the National Trust and is kept exactly as she left it.

The house is open daily, except Fridays, from February to November and is also open Fridays in the summer. Closed in winter. Admission fee to house which can be very busy and a timed ticket system operates. Outside there are attractive gardens, a small gift shop and toilets which are all free entry and open the same time as the house plus weekends in November and December. The nearby small car park is free for visitors to the property. The Tower Bank Arms next door is a quaint looking pub which also has connections with Beatrix Potter.

Travelling:
From Hill Top car park, turn left on the B5285 towards Hawkshead. The road soon follows the picturesque eastern shore of Esthwaite Water. Just past the lake the road bends to the left and the
village of Hawkshead is ahead. Take the right turn to Hawkshead village, still the B5285. The first left turn brings you to the village car park.

Distance: 24.1 miles  
Location: Hawkshead Village car park  
Coordinates: N 54.37410, W 2.99679

A quaint historic Lakeland village which has plenty of tourist shops, cafes and pubs. The Beatrix Potter Gallery owned by the National Trust is on the main street and you can see some of the original artwork by the famous author. Hawkshead Grammar School is now a museum dedicated to the interesting history of the school which educated some notable pupils including William Wordsworth. St Michael and All Angels church sits on the small hill overlooking the village and has a lovely churchyard where you can find some peace and enjoy the surrounding views. The car park is 'pay on exit' with toilet facilities.

Travelling:
Turn right out of the village car park, then quickly right at the first T junction, left at the second T junction towards Windermere, then first left towards Wray. The pleasant lane passes through the hamlet of Colthouse and gradually climbs before traversing the slopes of Latterbarrow hill on the right with good views ahead and left towards Lakeland mountains. There are a few places to pull in and admire the scenery. Continue for a short distance to the hamlet of High Wray, a right turn here takes you approx 1 mile down a dead end to Red Nab free car park on the wooded shore of Windermere from where there is a good path along the lakeshore. The road continues to descend beyond High Wray and soon enters a small wood where you will find the ornate entrance to Wray Castle on the right.

Distance: 27.1 miles  
Location: Wray Castle  
Coordinates: N 54.39822, W 2.96968

Wray Castle is a striking mock-gothic castle on the shores of Windermere lake. Built in 1840 as a private residence, the house has had an interesting history with many varied occupants. Although owned by the National Trust since 1929 it has only recently opened its doors to the public on a regular basis. There are tours of the castle which doesn’t have much in the way of furniture but the rooms are certainly elaborate with plenty of activities for children.

Outside there are extensive grounds stretching down to the picturesque shores of Windermere lake. There are some fabulous walks along the lake shore which provides a good place for a picnic. Cruises around northern parts of the lake can be taken from the nearby jetty in season. Admission fee applies to the Castle which also has a cafe and toilet facilities. Castle open daily from February to October, weekends only in November. Closed in winter. Grounds are open daily all year. National Trust pay and display car park.

Travelling:
Return to the ornate Castle entrance gate and turn right. The road descends and passes Low Wray campsite. Continue along the winding road for approx 0.7 miles to a T junction and turn right on the
B5286 towards Ambleside. Continue for approx 1.5 miles through attractive countryside and woodland to a narrow bridge over the River Brathay. Just beyond is a T junction where you turn right on the A593 towards Ambleside. Soon cross another tight bridge, this time over the River Rothay. Once over the bridge, the road bears left and becomes one-way. Get in the right lane which soon comes to a T junction. Turn right on the A5075 for approx 0.5 miles and Waterhead car park is on the left.

Distance: 30.8 miles  
Location: Waterhead car park, Ambleside  
Coordinates: N 54.42116, W 2.96284

Return to start point.