

## Walk 2: Grasmere to Rydal

A popular walk passing Wordsworth's Dove Cottage and returning along Rydal and Grasmere .

**Difficulty: Easy to moderate**

**5.6 miles**

**1078 ft altitude gain**

**2-3 hrs**

A fascinating walk in the footsteps of Wordsworth. You will visit several of his old haunts – including two of his houses, and two of the churches in which he worshipped. Views of Grasmere and Rydal are spectacular from both the outward and return journeys.

The terrain is easy to moderate, with

several sections wheelchair-navigable.

There is little elevation, but the surface is sometimes rocky or uneven over tree roots, and there are a couple of inclines.

As well as the tea room at [Rydal Hall](#), there are numerous cafés and pubs in Grasmere. You'll find public toilets in the car park on the way out of Grasmere.



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## The Walk

1. Start from the main Grasmere car park (on the left as you take the Ambleside Road out of Grasmere). Walk along the roadside footpath for a quarter of a mile to the main Keswick to Ambleside Road (A591). Walk straight across, to Townend and take the lane directly opposite. You will pass [Dove Cottage](#) on your left after 100 yards.

William moved here in 1799 with his sister Dorothy. He married his wife Mary in 1802 and they had three children in the space of four years – so they moved to larger accommodation.

Either as you stand near Wordsworth's old house or as you sit on the next available bench, you may like to do Meditation 1 (see p. 3)



2. Soon after you leave the built-up area of Townend look to your left and you'll see a large rock with a smooth topped surface. This rock was used by people from Ambleside bringing the bodies of dead relatives along this "Coffin Route" (though more accurately it is a Corpse Road) from Ambleside to Grasmere as a convenient place to rest the bier. In fact you will be using the old Corpse Road for the entire outward leg of your journey.

Continue on this lane for  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to arrive at a farm on your right (How Top Farm) just past a small pond on your left. The main tarmacked road proceeds almost due south to White Moss; ignore this and instead take the smaller road to the left signposted "Footpath to Rydal". This path continues direct to Rydal for the next mile traversing the hill at around 250 ft above the lake. There are several strategically placed benches along this route which afford magnificent views over Rydal Water and looking towards Loughrigg.

### **Meditation 1: (At or near Dove Cottage)**

The following extract was written the year before Wordsworth moved into this house, and contains some of his most explicit meditations on the spiritual helpfulness of God's creation:-

*I have felt  
a presence that disturbs me with the joy  
of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime  
of something far more deeply interfused,  
whose dwelling is the light of setting suns  
and the round ocean and the living air,  
and the blue sky and in the mind of man:  
a motion and a spirit that impels  
all thinking things all objects of all thought,  
and rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
a lover of the meadows and the woods  
and mountains; and of all that we behold  
from this green earth... well pleased to recognise  
in nature and the language of the sense,  
the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
the guide, the guardian of my heart,  
and soul of all my moral being.*

(Composed during a tour of the Wye Valley)

You might like to recite this poem thoughtfully, asking yourself whether nature is for you, as it was for Wordsworth, an avenue to God.

Keep your heart and senses open to such thoughts and feelings as you continue this walk.

One of these benches is made of stone and the back of the seat is another and larger "coffin rest". There is a plaque which describes this on the side facing Rydal which can be easily missed.



Another feature that is often missed is the famous Nab Well, which Wordsworth particularly liked to drink from. It is located beside the path not far before reaching Rydal. The well is now sadly neglected, but will hopefully be restored when people become more aware of its importance to the Wordsworths.

3. Soon after this the path comes out at the top of the tiny village of Rydal. Turn right at the road, passing by a fine white house on your right, [Rydal Mount](#), which was the house the Wordsworth family lived in when they were older. They rented from the Le Fleming family who owned [Rydal Hall](#). Walk down 100 yards or so, and take the second left turning into the grounds of Rydal Hall.

For a small donation you may choose to wander through the lovely gardens of Rydal Hall – there is a secluded Peace Garden just below the formal gardens which contains statues influenced by the world-famous sculptor, Josefine de Vasconcellos. And if you continue along the path down by the side of Rydal Beck you come to a Grotto built there in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to provide spectacular views of a little waterfall below the upper bridge. Constable and Turner were among two of several famous artists who visited this place.



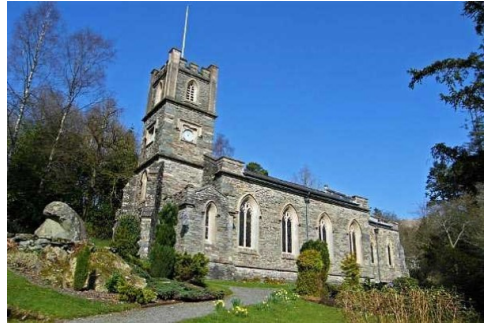
### **Meditation 2: In the Grotto**

As you look at the waterfall reflect on how the water is always flowing, yet always the same. How much of your life is like that – constant change and yet at a deeper level, very little change? Is there need for a more radical change in your life?

Go through the door and look at the scene facing you. There are benches on either side of the room. Sit down and do Meditation 2.

4. **Refreshments:** If you wish to pause (at this roughly midway point), there is an excellent small café at the back of the main house. It is staffed by members of the Rydal Hall Christian Community, and there is a toilet nearby. The bread pudding or date and almond slice are specially recommended!

5. Before you leave the village of Rydal completely there is one other building which was also dear to William Wordsworth – [the parish Church of St Mary's](#). Wordsworth helped to choose the site for the church and served as Churchwarden there from 1833 – 34. It is a simple Victorian church. The interior has a permanently subdued light caused by the many stained glass windows.



6. When you have finished in the church, return to the side road and walk down to the A591. If weary ones want to opt for a bus journey back to Grasmere, cross the road to find a [Bus Stop](#) near the road junction.

But for those who want to complete the walk on foot, turn right onto the main road, noting Dora's field on your right – a field bought by Wordsworth and planted with daffodils in memory of his favourite daughter, Dora. After about 100 yards cross over to the far side of the road and you'll see a narrow path descend to a footbridge over the Rothay. Take this path over the bridge, and at the far side veer right towards the lake following a set of yellow arrows. This brings you to a turnstile at the entrance to a small area of woodland. Walk through this to a gate at the far end, and you will see Rydal Water spread out before you.

7. Take the path that runs along the lakeside. In summer time this is a popular place to swim as it's warmer and shallower than many of the other lakes, so by all means take time for a dip if you are so inclined. Otherwise proceed in a westerly direction along the south shore of the lake.

After half a mile the path rises and veers away from the lake. Continue along the path till you come to a derelict barn just behind the wall on your right.

8. The road rises more steeply for 150 yards, and you come to a junction of paths on the crest of the ridge. Keeping the stone wall on your right, descend a narrow footpath towards Grasmere lake.

Ignore a footpath to your right over a footbridge, and instead veer left to the shore at the south end of the lake. Continue on a well-marked lakeside footpath for almost a mile, which then makes a sharp left-hand turn to meet the road. *(50 minutes from Rydal to here.)*



9. When you get to the road turn right and continue along it to the village of Grasmere. Make for [St Oswald's Church](#), which is a fine upstanding white building visible as soon as you enter the village. But before going into the church, visit the churchyard. Here you will find the graves of William Wordsworth and many of his family – quite a magnet for many Wordsworth-lovers.

10. Finally, come back and enter the church itself. This has many interesting features, such as The Lepers' Door through which lepers would be given communion (and perhaps food) in such a way as not to infect the rest of the congregation. The southern side of the church is called The Langdale Aisle as folk from Langdale would come over for services and bring their dead to this part of the church for funerals in the days when Langdale did not have a fully licensed Vicar.



**Quest!** Can you find “the hand of St Oswald”? Somewhere in this building if you look carefully, you will find the hand of St Oswald, famous because St Aidan prophesied it would never die. When you find it, complete Meditation 3.

### **Meditation 3: In St Oswald's Church**

The story surrounding the hand of St Oswald (Saxon warrior King of Northumbria in the 7th century) was that he was sitting at a table with Bishop Aidan one day after becoming a Christian and his servant reported that there was a great crowd of people begging alms outside. Oswald immediately took a silver platter from the table loaded with food and had it distributed and the platter broken up and given also. Aidan was so moved by this act that he exclaimed, "May this hand never perish!" (In fact, the historian Bede reports that Oswald's hand and arm were preserved in Bamburgh Castle after being cut off in battle).

Think about this act of generosity. How different would the world be if this sort of action was more widespread? How might you live more generously in the week ahead?