

An Aikett Wind

A second collection of writing
inspired by Eycott Hill Nature Reserve

Edited by Geraldine Green & Jody Ferguson



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust

Eycott Hill Nature Reserve

Eycott Hill Nature Reserve is a fantastic place, overlooked by the mighty peaks of Blencathra and the northern fells, and nationally important for both its geology and wetland habitats.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust purchased Eycott Hill in April 2015 and a project to make it even better for wildlife and people began. Flower-rich meadows, hedgerows and areas of woodland have been planted, and work undertaken to block artificial drainage channels and create areas of upland scrub heath. Pollinating insects, birds and mammals will benefit from this intricate mosaic of habitats and a diverse range of species will be able to continue to make the nature reserve their home.

In celebration of the new nature reserve people have been taking part in lots of events and responding in creative ways. This fabulous collection of writing is a result of a writing workshop that took place in April 2018 led by local poet and creative writing tutor Geraldine Green, and work submitted by visitors who have been inspired by the nature reserve.

This is the second collection inspired by Eycott Hill Nature Reserve; the first, the *Raspberry & the Rowan*, is available from Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

We hope you enjoy the anthology and if you feel inspired to visit and write something of your own we'd love to see it.

www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk/eycott-hill



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About Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is the only voluntary organisation devoted solely to the conservation of the wildlife and wild places of Cumbria. The Trust stands up for wildlife, creates wildlife havens, and seeks to raise environmental awareness.

Formed in 1962 and supported by thousands of members and supporters, the Trust cares for over 40 nature reserves (37 are open to visitors), campaigns for the protection of endangered habitats and species such as limestone pavements and red squirrels, and works with adults and children to discover the importance of the natural world.

Eycott Hill

Still now and quiet
in the lee of the hill,
walking through the slow
articulation of stone.

We follow the strata's flow
rippling and eddying
in the ancient streams
of our molten planet.

In this holy, pagan landscape
the layered intrusions of history
seem timeless and more distant
than the ice age they spanned.

As we reach the hill top,
a burning blue dragonfly
settles on a volcanic boulder
in crystallised decoration.

Its enjoyment is momentary
in the late afternoon sun,
driven on, like us,
by urgency and brevity.

A sudden, scouring wind
sweeps from Blencathra,
perfectly describing the simple
realities of fell and stone,

And I am silenced by the eloquence
of this implacable geologic,
locating us inexorably
in the fragile uplands of our lives.

Jeremy Benson
Submitted after a guided walk





Why the cows were red

I saw the cows on the hill

And wondered “why were they red?”

Had they been bit by desperate dandelions missing teeth

Or didn’t like black and white

Or dressed up as lava?

Why were they red?

It was because they were all rain rusty

Four stomachs are a lot of iron

They also had more fur

To protect themselves from the lava.

I found this on the wanderer’s web

As when I asked one,

It just said “Mooooooooooooooooooooo”

Arthur Cartwright-Smith (13)

*Submitted after the Write on the Hill
creative writing event, April 2018*



Photo: Simon Humphries

This Parlish Land

Learn to step lightly on the land, I tell my lad,

For we are but flickering instances on this lava bed.

The flish-flash frisks of white – of tails, of cottons, of arses –

s t i p p l e and d a p p l e

And **twinkle** like stars.

And like the stars, this land is ancient

And far reaching

And formed in a time of ice.

Distant cousins cover the hilltops, and hodden-grey the fells.

The saddle, scored by snow-filled paths. A lazy snail through blittert grass.

We labber, syzle, peltle, blush –

We unlock language with a hovering laverock's wing.

We leave our fospel-hole where others once have trod

And feel the pull of time around us.

We will return, as all return,

Circle our remains to rejoin ash.

We are star remnants – a grimmin on the ground,

Fallen angels.

And yet we walk among volcanoes, under glacier tracks;

We are all time in a timeless land.

Dots and speckles under cirrus-spackled skies.

We are now in an always moving then.

And we step and stotter lightly in this parlish land,

Knowing it is ours.

Susan Cartwright-Smith

Submitted after the Write on the Hill creative writing event, April 2018

(Eycott is of course comprised of volcanic rock, so the floor is lava, and the Lake District is formed from glaciation. Hodden-grey is cloth made from natural black and white wool, maybe Herdwick? The saddle is of course Blencathra. Blittert is wind-ravaged. Labber is splashing or dabbling in mud/water/muddy water, Syzle is sauntering, Peltle is “to occupy time with trifles” [and there is nothing so important in the world as trifles], blush is splash. A laverock is a lark, and there are plenty of them on Eycott. A fospel-hole is the print of footstep on soft ground, a grimmin is a sprinkling of snow, stotter is to walk clumsily [as one is wont to do on marsh land]. Parlish means remarkable. Which sums up the Lake District. It is the same but ever changing. It is made and remade for the grimmins who grace it. It is made up of marks, and yet is remarkable. And I have made my remarks about it here).



Photo: John Bridges

Eycott jottings

6th April 2018

Car shared from Mungrisdale Village Hall
to Eycott Hill, a red squirrel hopped
across the road as we drove from Hall to Hill

where, once there, saw shrew trails
through sphagnum and blond grass, saw
Luing cattle, curlews, wheatears, larks.

Saw gridwork, old peat-cuttings,
saw many round images:
sheepfold, mole hills, cow pats, mouse holes -

all around us the shake-you-alive wind
that had us sheltering on the northern side
of lichened slabs: Eycott Volcanics

where we stopped, looked across, streaks
of snow still on the tops. Now
we were in the company of Blencathra,

of Carrock Fell, its Iron Age Hill fort,
flanks, a twisted mass of juniper and gorse
saw below the valley's peat brown beck,

west to Grizedale, Causey, Maiden Moor,
High Spy, Catbells, south, where Kirkstone Pass
hunkered out of sight. Looked east

to a limestone ridge fringed by Ash,
beyond that to Hartside, Fiend's Fell,
Cross Fell, home to the Helm Wind.

Geraldine Green

Submitted after the Write on the Hill creative writing event, April 2018



Photo: Ben Hall/2020VISION



Eycott Hill

(origin aikett meaning oak)

Scale is a strange master.

Here is me, beside a tree that stands tall,
beside a drystone wall that climbs across the open moor,
while over us all leans the dark body
of Blencathra.

The wind is blowing, not quite a hooley,
more an aikett wind
so loud it drowns out, almost,
the song of the returning curlew,
so loud it drowns out, almost,
the song of the exuberant skylark.

The aikett wind beats a drum about my head
so loud I cannot hear, almost,
the keening of my worries.

Louise Hislop

Submitted after the Write on the Hill creative writing event, April 2018



Skylark



Curlew

Luining fell

Just along the dusty track to Berrier, Cumbria,
Blencathra traverses a boundless duck egg sky.
Keee-eee-eeee calls echo across Luining fell
where raptors circle imaginary trails.
My winding path leads down the moor,
over a slabbed packhorse bridge, past the old oaks.
And a kestrel rides early morning thermals,
then arrows into the blonde grasses.
I watch downy chicks bob and jostle,
anticipating a morsel of mouse, or shrew.
There is no eagerness like theirs.
A flurry of barred black wings swoosh
to expectant beaks, in their tree hollow home.
One day they'll soar over this sessile place,
high over the fairies' knot, beyond these naddled crags.



I'll always be walking towards Luining Fell,
following the eagle of Rome's missing legion.

Perhaps when we die we are given feathers,
so we can rise with the larks,
or visit with wheatears?
I'll be a night owl.
Guarding this place,
while other folk sleep.

Gary Liggett

Waxing moon in Leo, 2018

Submitted after the Write on the Hill creative writing event, April 2018



The Secrets of Aikett Hill

This soggy opening in the ring of wild grasses is a spring-fed bog, but it is really a liquid mouth that keeps all of the secrets of what happened here, whispering in the swarthy language of water about volcanoes, rivers of boiling lava and how Romans followed crooked paths to pay homage to Coventina - their Goddess of springs - who travelled in bas-relief to Hadrian's Wall.

This liquid mouth has been here since the Ice Age and has seen many frogs spawned with its silky, mercurial eyes

beneath these wind-strewn Aikett skies.

Gary Liggett
Last quarter in Sagittarius, 2018



Photos: Gary Liggett, Luke Massey/2020VISION





Landmarks

Leftwise round the circle. Maybe this was an enclosure, for the cattle perhaps? Step on pale grey limestone, step, step on dark grey slate, step on green, almost black volcanic rock. See the feldspar crystals catching in the sunlight. Step, connect with stories that reach back to the beginning of the universe.

She jumps off the last stone and heads for the summit. Wind and skylarks accompany her. She notices rabbit warrens, badger setts, a curlew nest, a tiny hole – for a shrew? She hears a meadow pipit. Her footsteps keep time with the pulse of the earth. She steps over molehills, squelches through marsh, clambers over ancient rocks. She sings her song.

She stands at the summit and looks out. A ridged landscape of lava flows and hollows, erratic rocks, rectangular cuts – peat digging, a glimpse of human activity. A landscape leaving the marks of its journey through time – the weight of sea water, continental shift, volcanic eruptions, an ice age, ice melting, glaciers flowing – her own journey a mere light tread on the surface of this landscape.

A buzzard overhead. She shields her eyes from the glare of the sun and tracks the bird's flight. It soars high on an updraft. Circling. Circling. Spiraling further and further away until it is lost in the shadow of the far-off fells. But she keeps looking. And she sees herself. She's there, on that distant fell. And she's digging. Digging with her hands.

Barbara Renel

Submitted after the Write on the Hill creative writing event, April 2018



Photo: Joy Russell

Playful memories from Eycott Hill

We turned off near Motherby
that bright morning in spring,
waylaying our comforts our cradles
for weeping wildness and a naked hill.

Mother would have told me to
wear wellies and mind the cold,
a day of grassy tussocks
to cuddle the toes.

We absorbed sinkholes and hollows,
we followed painted white poles,
we saw signs of badgers and meddlesome moles,
toiling, avoiding us, airing the soil.

I pretended I was lava and lichen
counted backwards from 500 million,
seventeen eruptions, one or two Luing,
spawnings, seepings through oceans of stone.

We listened for skylarks and curlews,
darting wheatears (their little white arses).
Impressive were the doings of cattle, sculpted reminders
of sandcastles, buckets and spades, our deposits.

Like babies in sphagnum moss nappies,
still weaning, high sitting,
we piled up our readings
releasing happiness into a smile.

Herded back to an empty sheepfold,
we found nesting benches
like spiders in wellies,
no sleeping, the briefest of rests.

Wind buffeting, beefing, coursing, creeping,
unforgettable Eycott
inhabited our bones,
taking us home.

David Simmons

Submitted after the Write on the Hill creative writing event, April 2018

