

CROSS FELL.

BY E. W. STEEPLE.

It is probable that out of the thousands who annually roam over the Lakeland fells not more than a dozen or so turn aside to explore the long line of grassy hills which, rising to a quite considerable height on the far side of the Eden valley, seems to form an eastern barrier to the Lake District proper. Cross Fell, which is, of course, the culminating point of this range, is quite a respectable hill (2,930ft.), only a few feet less in height than Great Gable and Bow Fell. Northwards the ridges sink gently, over Melmerby Fell and Fiends Fell, to 1,900ft. at Hartside Cross, on the main Penrith—Alston road. In the opposite direction the line swings gradually south-east for ten miles to Mickle Fell.

Lying at the foot of the western slope—between the fells and the vale of Eden—are a number of quaint little old-world villages, of which Melmerby in the north and Hilton in the south are perhaps the prettiest. From the door of the inn at Hilton one looks across the river valley to the familiar fells of the Lake Country, and from the hillside above Melmerby the view is still more extensive.

From the little hamlet of Kirkland, reached from the inn at Skirwith in half an hour, a track of sorts may be found leading up to the north end of the summit plateau of Cross Fell, or one may extend the walk by approaching it from Knock or Dufton, climbing up beside one or other of the little conical pikes which terminate each of the western ridges.

But these excursions will not satisfy a strong walker, who will no doubt wish to traverse the whole range of fells in a single day. If we start our journey at Melmerby we may perhaps induce an obliging 'bus or car to take us to the top of the Alston road at Hartside Cross, from which a walk of six miles will lead us to the summit of Cross Fell, using a mountain track for the first mile or so.

The view from the summit on a clear day is good. The eye, as the guidebooks say—as though one were a

Cyclops—roams over the whole of the Lake District fells on the one side, and, on the other, over a great stretch of rolling country from the Border fells to Ingleborough and Penyghent.

Dropping down the southern slope we pass, a little to our left, the springs from which issues the infant Tees, to become for a few miles the boundary between Cumberland and Westmorland. Crossing the dip we rise a few hundred feet to Little Dun Fell. This peak (2,761ft.) and its twin brother Great Dun Fell (2,780ft.), three-quarters of a mile away, are the most shapely summits in the range, but our next point, Knock Fell, is a tableland like Cross Fell itself.

And here we must decide on our next move. If we are content with a short day we may descend gently, past Rundale Tarn, to High Cup Nick, and so to Dufton. But our strong walker (and incidentally the collector of "Twenty-fives") will turn eastward towards Dufton Fell, three long miles away. The highest point of this fell is named Meldon Hill on the 6-inch Ordnance map, with a height of 2,513ft. (there is a survey mark on the base of the cairn). For some unexplained reason the height is not shown on the 1-inch map, and the hill has not until recently been included in the list of "Twenty-fives." A hundred yards north-west of the cairn is a small hummock which has the appearance of being an ancient burial mound. Five hundred yards down the south-east slope are the scanty ruins of Meldon Hall—so-called. They look more like the ruins of a sheep-pen, but there is a lintel stone amongst the *débris* with the date 1679.

Looking rather east of south we now see Mickle Fell, some four miles away as the crow flies. The mere wingless mortal, however, must descend to the Maize Beck, and face the 900ft. ascent on the farther side. Mickle Fell is the highest point in Yorkshire, but only just, as the Westmorland boundary crosses the shoulder. It is a curious fact, concerning the highest points in these northern counties, that whilst everyone knows that the highest in Cumberland is Scafell Pike, and most of us know that the highest in Lancashire is Conistone Old Man, many of us would be hard put to it to name the highest summit wholly in Westmorland. Bowfell and Helvellyn are both on the county

boundary. Catstye Cam is the highest *point*, and the highest separate fell is Fairfield, the next in height being the Great Dun Fell above-mentioned.

From Mickle Fell it is easy going to Little Fell and down to Hilton, either by way of the lead mines or, preferably, by Christy Bank and down the side valley under Roman Fell. Or one may go southward to Brough. From Little Fell it looks a long way, but I think that a descent by Dogber Tarn and Hillbeck would not necessarily involve a night out.

The distance from Melmerby by Hartside Cross to Brough over all the fells is 30 miles, or 28 to Hilton, with a total rise of 5,000 feet. If the Alston 'bus does not materialise it is better to leave the road at the first elbow and strike straight up the hillside towards Melmerby Fell, making for a prominent gap in the limestone scar where, skilfully avoiding a bed of nettles, we clamber over a wall and emerge with dramatic suddenness on the open fell.

It will have been gathered that Cross Fell is of no use to the rock-climber. There is, however, a low line of vertical rock at High Cup Nick on which a number of stiff little climbs of 40/50 feet might be found. These rocks are no doubt well known locally. I heard them referred to as a climbing-ground as long ago as 1906.

I do not wish to claim that this district is comparable, either for beauty or interest, to the central parts of Lakeland. But anyone who considers the latter too noisy or overcrowded in the summer season will find a few days spent in the quiet peace of these little hamlets very refreshing, and the calls on his purse reduced to a minimum.