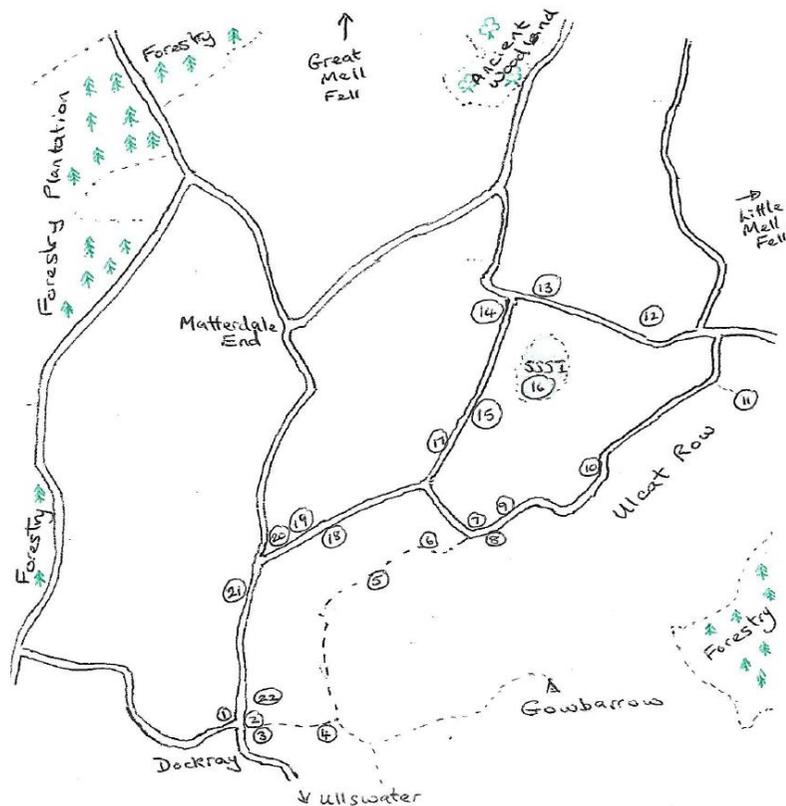


## A Short History of Ulcat Row and the environment

The first mention of Ulcat Row was around 1250 A.D. as Ulcotewra. The origins of the name are uncertain – possibly from Ulf, an ancestor of the Barons of Greystoke; possibly from Uglia Cot Wra the Owl Cottage in a secluded place. The spelling has also varied over the ages. Most dwellings lie roughly along the 300m contour near the spring line and above the wet valley bottom. This is a typical Norse pattern of settlement. There are signs of humans from 2500-1500 BC in the bowl barrows on both Great and Little Mell Fell; from the Iron age and Roman Britain in the fields to the east and south of the Old Vicarage; and in the built environment which will be seen along the route from the sixteenth century onwards. Many of the existing houses will be on sights of old timber houses and most show signs of continual changes and additions over the ages. As well as changes in the built environment there have been big changes in the natural environment. The original tree cover has been eroded over the centuries for building; for fuel; for building ships particularly from 1500; for pit props and for charcoal for industry. Timber from Gowbarrow was taken during WWII. You will see the fellside colonized with Bracken now and while this provides a good habitat for nesting birds, mammals, fritillary butterflies and moths, it rapidly dominates and outcompetes other plants - another important reason for restoring ancient woodlands. The area will have been used for hunting by the aristocracy and the settlements would have had a number of subsistence farmers growing potatoes, oats etc with a variety of stock grazed on the common land. More recently the focus has been on sheep farming, grazing the rough pastures. Another feature you will glimpse far to the west is the forestry plantations mainly of sitka spruce which were planted in the 1960s.

On your walk look out for Hares, Roe Deer, Kestrels, Ravens, Buzzards, Foxes and other smaller animals and birds.

The walk starts with a section of rough track this can be avoided by taking the reverse direction from Dockray to Matterdale Church then along the road to the right towards Ulcat Row. Join the route at the Old Chapel (8).



## ULCAT ROW HISTORY & ENVIRONMENT TRAIL

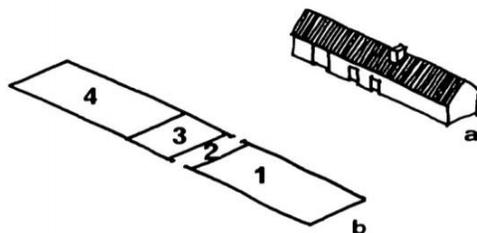
Ulcat Row – housing along 300m contour to North of Gowbarrow



Produced by Matterdale Community Association

The walk starts and ends at the **Royal Hotel, Dockray (1)**. Take the lane opposite the Hotel to the right of **Dockray House (2)** (once the Donaldson's Temperance Hotel, built in 1897). Pass the much older **Riverside House (3) (c1600)** on the right and follow the lane down to **the old Mill (4)**. During the current rebuilding work on the mill a 15kW turbine is being installed which will again use the power of the water to provide the energy for the building, with excess electricity fed back into the grid. Look out for the old mill stone dated 17<sup>th</sup> April 1747 which has been unearthed during the restoration. Just after the gate below the mill turn left towards Ulcat Row with the mass of Gowbarrow on your right. Gowbarrow Park was used for hunting by the aristocracy and would have been much more wooded than it is today. Much of the western side was felled during WWII and those who lived here then remember the timber being dragged out by carthorse. If you walk up Gowbarrow in Spring you will still see primroses and bluebells on the open fellside which are indicative of a former ancient woodland. As you follow the path to Ulcat Row look to your left and you will see reedy areas in the bottom of the valley crossed with drainage ditches. There is some evidence that this area was formerly a shallow lake with an Iron Age settlement on its far shore. As you continue towards Ulcat Row you will enter a short section of path which is walled on both sides. Here, look out on your right for the **rock inscribed HH1850 (5)** which is thought to be related to the disputed land rights arising from the 1832 Enclosures Act. HH is more than likely Henry Howard of Greystoke Castle. You will shortly pass **Home Farm (6)** which is one of five former farms in Ulcat Row of which only one remains as a working farm. These were likely to be subsistence farms and may have suffered from the corn laws and a drop in demand for oats for horses after the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815).

**Layout of a cross-passage Cumbrian Longhouse. The chimney backs onto the cross-passage (2). Typically there were byres the other side of the passage (1).**



**Benchmark to provide builders a fixed level during construction.**

When you reach the road keep slightly right with **Undercrag (7)** on your left. This is a good example of a cross-passage Cumbrian longhouse with the chimney in the middle backing onto a "cross-passage". The date above the door of the former passage is 1761. Like many houses there have been numerous alterations and additions over time. On the right of the road is the former **Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (8)** which was built in 1847 and closed in 1979. It is now a private dwelling. Look for the vague "benchmark" low down below the house name and above the telephone connection. As you continue along the road there is a modern house on your left reminding us of the changing nature of the settlement over time. You will pass a house called **La'al Steans (9)** (Little Stones in Cumbrian dialect). Dwellings would often originally be known by the name of the occupant and many have changed over time. Later, on the left, you reach the only remaining working farm on this stretch of road, Ulcatrow Hall Farm. **Todgill (10)** follows. The origin of the name is uncertain but may refer to the large Grey Fox or Tod which used to frequent the area. This is on the site of an ancient Norse settlement which was demolished in the 1840's and replaced with a Cumbrian longhouse. The original track would have passed below Todgill. Look over to your left as you walk on and you may be rewarded with a view of the splendid twin peaks of Blencathra (Saddleback). At the highest point of the road **Old Park(11)** stands high up to your right. This may originally have been Park House at the northern edge of Gowbarrow Park.

**At the T-junction turn left**, but before you do so look ahead at the line of buildings at a similar elevation running Northwards across the slopes of Little Mell Fell. On the summit of this fell is a bowl barrow from the period 2400-1500 BC. Limited excavation of this monument has revealed a cremation urn and some bronze. As you turn look North to Great Mell Fell. This also has a bowl barrow on the summit. The eastern slopes of this fell host the only designated Ancient Woodland which you will see on the walk. This is said to be where the last wildcat in Cumberland was snared in the C19. Both Great and Little Mell Fells are unique among the fells of the Lake District by being composed of the Mell Fell Conglomerate a sedimentary rock formed from deposits of sand and gravel in river channels in a desert environment, it contains no fossils.

On the way down the hill you can see the ruins of a former dwelling **Greenhead (12)** in the fields to your right. After you cross the stream you rise to more houses on your right. **Bald Howe (13)** has grade 2 listed features). Bald Howe used to be the home of the Matteredale Foxhounds which was a small pack kenneled at **Jenny Hill (14)**. Joe Dawson, the last leader of the pack, was said to rival John Peel in his singing and hunting skills. In 1873 this pack amalgamated with Patterdale Foxhounds to form the Ullswater pack. Soon after Bald Howe turn left. As you rise towards **Moorend Farm (15)** look over to your left and you will see **Blackdike Bog (16)**, a Site of Special Scientific Interest with a mix of scrubland and fenland plants and the target home of increasingly rare birds such as Curlews, Lapwings and Snipe. The road is an example of an "**Enclosure road**" (17) dating back to the early C19 which is a public road through enclosed common land with boundaries of a stipulated width – see the bottom of the page for more information.

Pass the road to Ulcat Row on your left, then the modern barn. The field entrance on your left set back from the road before a double line of trees is the **Recreation Ground (18)**, which is the proposed site of a new Community and Education building. Before you reach the next building on your right is a site which was excavated around the turn of the century to reveal some signs of **Iron Age settlement and Roman presence (19)**. Unfortunately, little is left to see above ground. The **Old Vicarage** became a private dwelling in 2005 as there was no longer a vicar for the parish. **Matteredale Church (20)** was built in 1573. It is only briefly mentioned here as the end of the walk approaches, but it deserves a longer visit. *(A more detailed history is available)*. At the end of the road turn left back to Dockray. Take care when crossing the road to climb the grassy bank to the surfaced footpath beyond. On your right you have **Thornythwaite Farm (21)** which is a smallholding which like many such places has diversified to provide holiday accommodation in order to be sustainable. As you return to Dockray you will see **Hollins Farm (22)** on your left which has a number of listed features.

**"Enclosure Road" to the west of Moor End Farm. Public roads through enclosed common land were made as straight as possible and wide enough to allow easy movement of flocks and herds of animals without excessive churning. In the late C18 this was at least 60 ft, but from the 1790s this was decreased to 40 ft, and later to 30 ft. The width of this road is 30ft.**

