

Title:

English Lake District Traditions

Word Count:

669

Summary:

The English Lake District has many local traditions, including Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling, ferret racing and fell running, to name a few. But did you know that the Lake District hosts the World Gurning Championships and the World's Biggest Liar contest?

Keywords:

Lake District traditions, cumbria accommodation, cumbria information, lakeland, windermere, ambleside, conistone, hawkshead, ullswater, scafell, helvellyn, kendal, bowness on windermere, lakeland traditions

Article Body:

There is little doubt that those who have visited the regions of the English Lake District and Cumbria will recall and recount with pleasure the images of the lakes, mountains and tarns which together are the fundamental components of this beautiful area.

There may also be some damp memories of a place with an above average rainfall. A phlegmatic Australian work colleague when caught in a particularly heavy shower during a visit some years ago concluded that it was "wet as an otters pocket". This definition is certainly a strong contender for inclusion in all Lake District and Cumbria tourist information publications.

A well known feature of the region is one where rapidly changing weather conditions can transform a rainy day to one of clearing skies and sunshine within a short space of time, or vice-versa. This is especially so on the higher ground, and it is easy to visualize the difficulties experienced by the hill farmers and those workers, who, in earlier times, toiled all year round to collect the stone scattered on the fell-sides to use for building the dry stone walls which wind up and over seemingly impossibly steep gradients.

Areas of these fell-sides are the proving grounds in the traditional tests of skill and endurance by the men and women fell racers, and the dogs in the hound trailing contests.

Born in 1808, Will Ritson, a shepherd, wrestler, and latterly, landlord of the

Wasdale Head Inn, was renowned as a highly entertaining raconteur of colourful tales. It is reported that even William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey on occasions, were to be found among an appreciative crowd of listeners.

He told of owning a dog, a cross between a trail hound and a golden eagle, capable of soaring over the dry stone walls and any other obstacle in its path. Credulous visitors from out of County were enthralled by his account of locally grown giant turnips, which, he said, were of such massive proportions, that villagers would spend weeks carving out edible portions before surrendering the remaining outer skins as shelters for the Herdwick sheep.

The end result of the popularity of Will's yarns has been the creation of the annual "Biggest Liar in the World" competition. The contest is held each year at the Bridge Inn, Santon, before an enthusiastic audience well nourished on a menu of "tatie pie" consisting of local mutton, black pudding, potatoes and red cabbage, washed down by some of the very fine and potent locally brewed ale. Be careful that tiger beef has not been an added ingredient!

There is no record of Will entering the "World Gurning Championship" held during the annual Egremont Crab Fair each September. Contestants stand on a stage with a horse collar placed over their head and shoulders. This unlikely adornment frames the attempts to contort their faces into distorted expressions. Winners of the most bizarre and grotesque faces are decided by the level of audience applause. It is believed that the Lake District in Cumbria is the only place in the world where such a contest is held. Visitors to our region may well hear a recalcitrant local child being reprimanded in terms of "stop yer gurning."

Tradition is important to the town and village communities and many hours are spent in preparation for the village shows of the summer months featuring sheep-dog trials, sheep-shearing demonstrations, ferret racing (yes, ferret racing), livestock displays, side stalls, home-baked produce, and of course, Cumberland Wrestling.

Two very popular events are the Cumbria Steam Gathering of early traction engines, vintage/veteran buses, fire-engines, cars, motor-cycles and machinery, and the Westmorland County Show with emphasis on livestock, plus side-stalls offering a wide selection of wares including local products. Children are always well-catered for at all venues with an assortment of amusements both for the toddler and the older child.

This diverse blend of local events will add something extra to your visit and you will sense the local pride and be able to observe customs and timeless traditions which combine to make the Lake District and Cumbria so unique.

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