

(Off-Grid) SITE of the MONTH (January)

Please note, my views are not to be taken as a site guide. They are just a personal reflection on a site based on many years, any resemblance to a site guide is wholly coincidental.

CAUTLEY/YARLSIDE N 54.356590 W 2.451270 (* Site registered to CSC from 2019, but not developed/maintained)

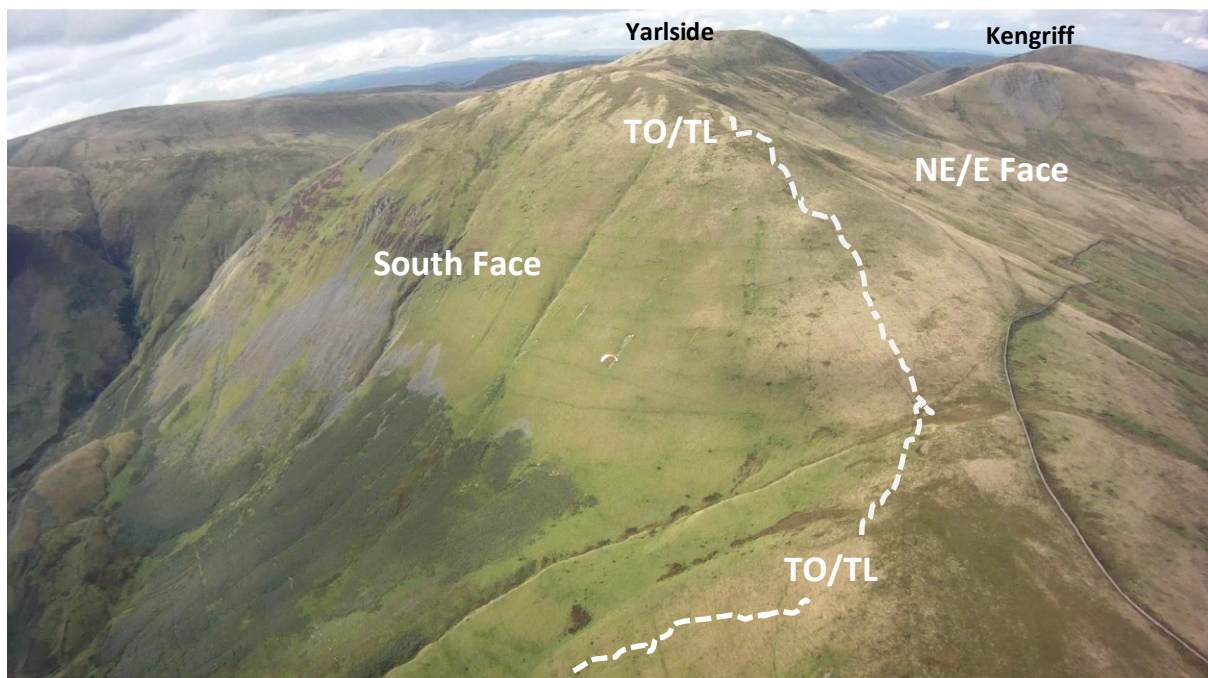
Wind: SSE to SSW 1350 top to bottom (at best). References to E and NE options.

Pilot rating: CP (with a briefing) to AP

Cautley is one of my favourite sites, but it's not to everyone's taste. It's big, topping out at over 2000' on Yarlside. It has two main faces, but the most often flown is the true southerly which slides steeply down to a more modest grassy bump (the knoll) of 1300' at the east end. This is the preferred take off as it saves a stiff walk higher. For many years the lower slopes were a popular Sunsoar/Northern training slope, but since they moved their operations abroad it's become quieter. They offered sovereignty to the DHPC/*CSC but no moves have been made moves to follow up on that. Personally, I think it's best left as it is, a quiet place to discover, unrestricted, unencumbered by being 'officialised'. If something is working smoothly, then interfere at your peril!

Cautley Spout cleaves into the east side of the Howgills, a long narrowing, glaciated valley that once was home to a small iron age settlement. The valley is overlooked by the aptly named Great Dummocks to the left (S), and the huge steep face of Yarlside on the right(N). Ahead are the cliffs of Cautley flanked by the 500' waterfalls, once described as amongst the top ten waterfalls in Britain when in spate. In my youth of hard winters it was an ice climb on every climbers tick list - long, with many steep sections of often brittle water-ice and a steep snowy descent that could catch out the unwary. Those winters sadly seem to have long gone.

On the photo below I've indicated the main Yarlside faces – the main and most often flown part is the south face. But there's so much more I'll return to near the end.



The prevailing wind onto the Howgills is a SW, whether that's the dominant meteo wind or the SB which easily whistles its way through the Tebay gap from Morecambe Bay - along with the occasionally jet jockey beating up the valley. As a consequence, Far Whitestones (SW) is a very popular site with both north and south Cumbrians (easy M6 access). If you're there, and it's flyable you won't be alone. Meanwhile, just over the back, a half thermal away, Cautley is often deserted. However, any hint of south in the wind (even SW will do) and the wind funnels around to the east side, curling past Sedbergh, and finds its way north onto Yarlside. Consequently it's not unusual to find both sides of the Howgills being flown at the same time - which can seem a bit weird. It takes at least an hour for the SB to struggle round to Yarlside and it loses some of its potency. But ... in part it's the answer to going xc from Yarlside. Essentially, it acts as the trigger for things to get going.



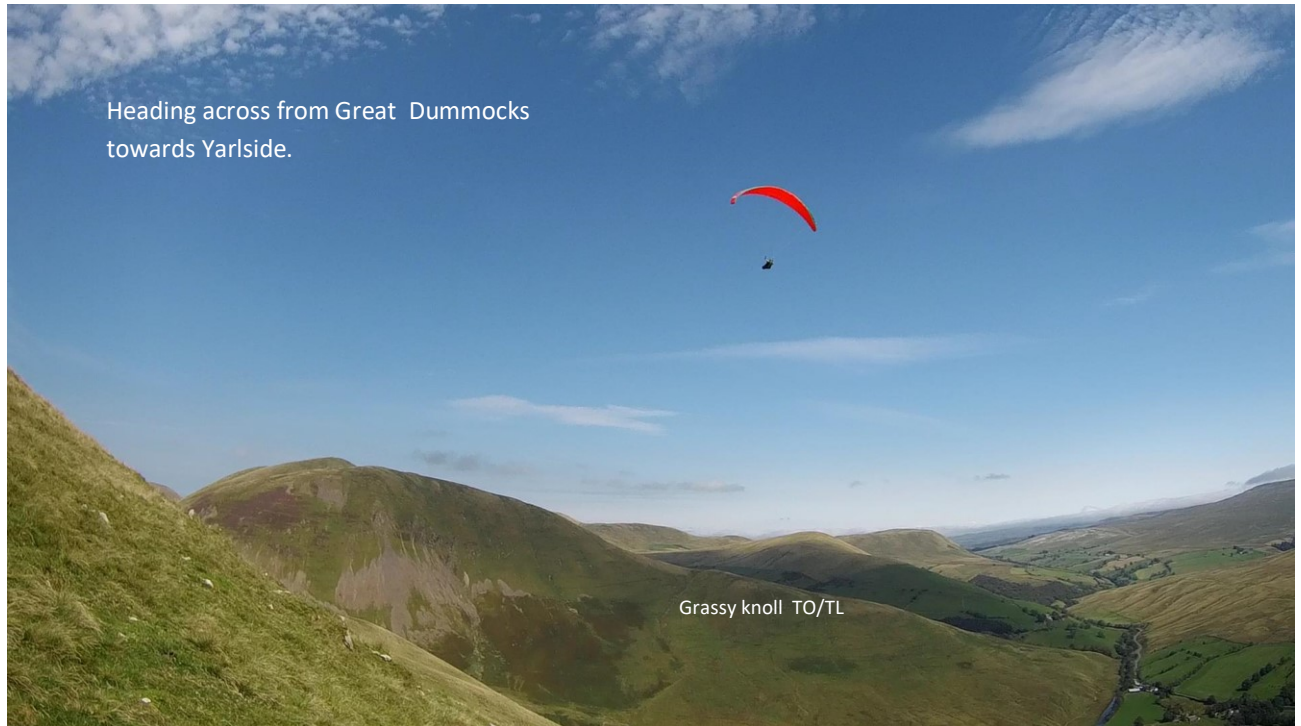
Bottom landing beneath the big S face. Easy training and take off slopes to the right leading up to the grassy knoll.

Yarlside (Cautley as it's generally referred to) is a great option in lighter winds from SSW to SE. It isn't the place to go in fresh winds. For most DHPC pilots Stags would probably be first choice as it thermals well from quite early, is protected from the sea breeze ... at least until mid, late afternoon. Cautley's advantage is its size, the huge south face, and on a light wind day it offers a better chance of flight. It's also another level of dramatic scenery, but I guess for many also another 30 minutes of driving. For lower airtime pilots, on the right day it's a safer option than Stags, with a cleaner more open, grassy aspect. But, do make sure you get a briefing ... it's not always as benign as it looks.

A typical Cautley day goes something like this

It's often high pressure, settled, sunny and warm with light southerlies (lenient around that direction). The parking area (just past the Temperance Inn and farm entrance) is rather limited and there are occasionally walkers setting out from there. It takes about 8 - 10 cars and a few more crammed across the road against the side. It always seems to work out, even when some clever soul had decided to park sideways blocking off three spaces.

Follow the narrow track down to the stream, cross the bridge and along a good level path for 100 yards before heading vaguely up the hillside. It's at this point you question the wisdom of your site choice. For the first half of the day the wind always seems to be blowing out of the valley from the

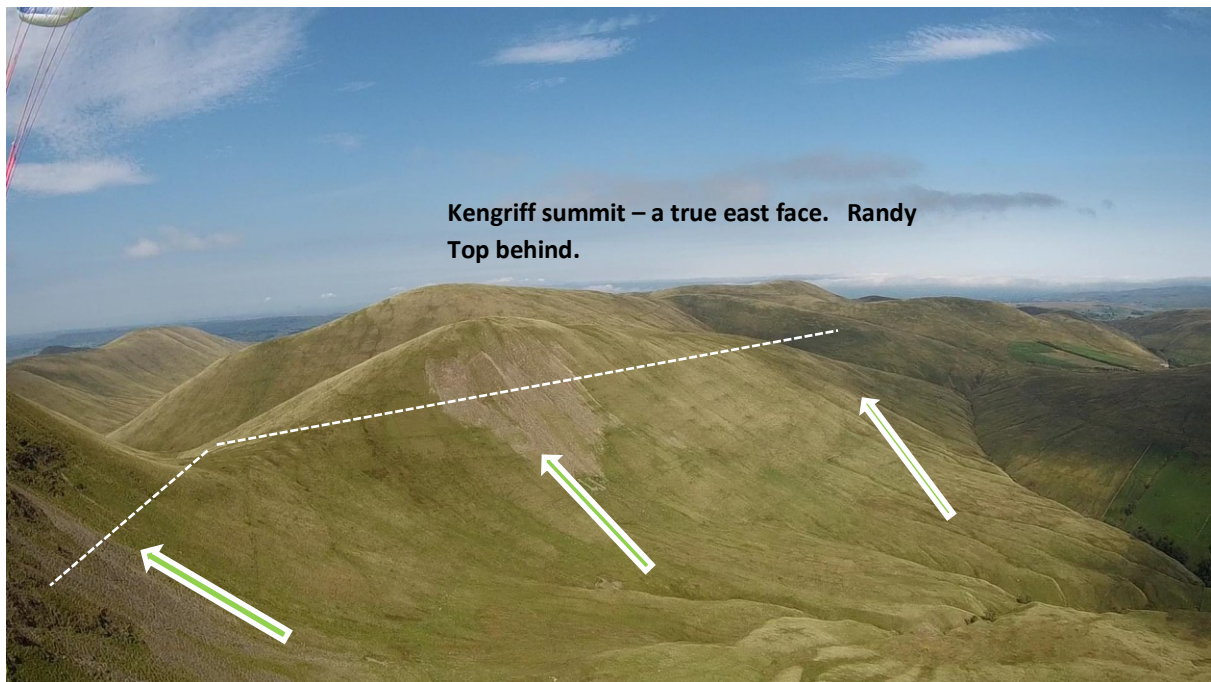


Spout. Put another way – it's across the hill from the wrong side ... the west. The effect can be nullified by a meteo SE – but generally it's always out of the valley towards the road. The higher you go, the less the effect. Once at the 'grassy knoll' it's generally all good again. Most of the time you can take off here and head across to the main face with the confidence it will work – even when light the main face soars OK ... but you climb slowly. The main face is steep and craggy ... not really slope-landable, unless you head back to the knoll. If you're not convinced then it's a walk to the top – 20 minutes, but steep enough to make you grunt.

At the start I said it wasn't to everyone's taste. Whilst flying here can be smooth, it can also have an unsettling feel ... as if something is lurking and waiting to catch the unwary. Or it could be me getting too easily freaked. It's a big face, it bakes in the sun and thermals just don't seem to get organised and can be a bit snotty. It can also be frustrating. But ... hang in there, because Cautley is a late developer, a good place for mid afternoon and evening flying when it can become buoyant and smooth and often subject to valley release. I've done some good xc flights from here to near the Scottish border and each one shared the same Cautley characteristics. Lift off comes (preceded by gnashing of teeth) late, usually after 2pm, it has always been at the extreme east end of the hill (in line with the valley) ... and the thermal has been big and very smooth. Rushing off has never paid dividends for me hereget as high as possible, hang onto everything until over the A685, the first 10K successfully negotiated and things get a lot easier. It's never easy leaving the Howgills in ANY direction.

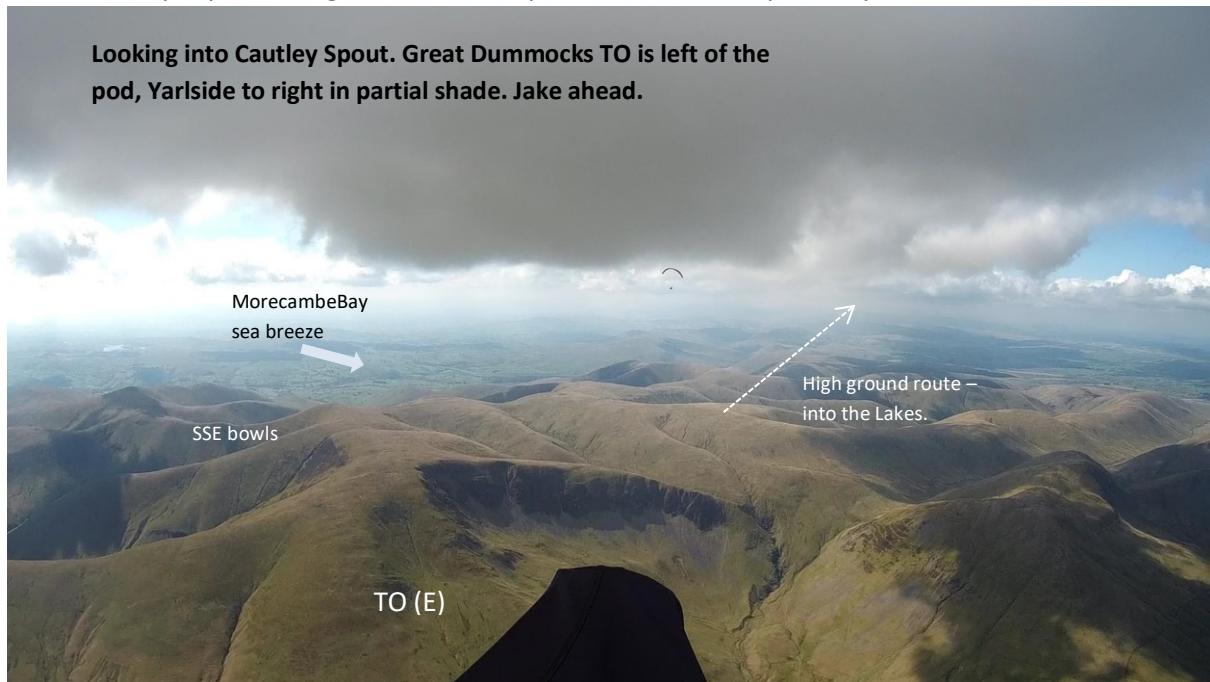


One of the features of Cautley is the many options it provides. Across the valley is the big lump of Great Dummocks. Climbing to the top would be a feat in itself, fortunately at the mid-point is a

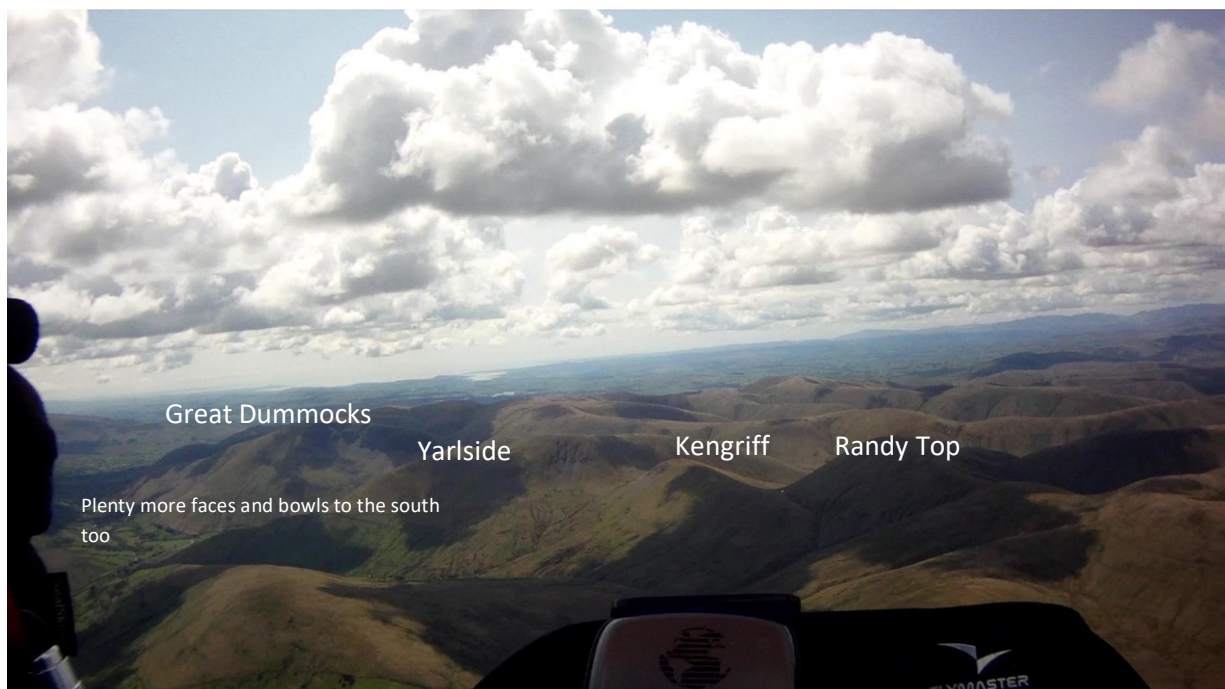


broad shelf and with any wind taking off a little higher is a simple matter. It's so big you just know it will work. The main face is east, but with SE options leading down towards Sedbergh, including two delightful, linked SSE bowls - and NE options towards the back of Yarlside. On a good day everything is going up these faces and it really opens up the whole of the east side of the Howgills. Many rarely give a thought to the back of Yarlside (NE) ... but all the way to Kengriff (E) is impressive soaring. Maybe not great xc potential, but for connecting with the sea breeze front you could find worse places – and that can lead all the way into the Lakes and Keswick.

Just a few words on things that could catch you out. Top landing is possible most places, but I'd avoid the very top in strong wind. The compression could easily catch you out and there is limited



ridge width and no easy plan B due to a mega rotor into the NE face. More often than not it's on the light side so you end up scratching. For some reason, maybe the comforting grassy slopes, I've seen a number of people unexpectedly contact the ground. I've done it myself and disguised it as a deliberate slope landing. A last point on soaring, don't go too deep into the Spout I see people do it with no ill effects, it just looks a bit like a few washing machine zones I've seen over the years. The bottom landing is huge! That said there are adequate places, good places and the best places. Personally, I prefer the east end of the hill. The wind at the end of the day is sliding along it, there are some nice lawn-like grass strips and it's close to the car.



That's Cautley, it's always been kind to me. It's a friendly, easy going sort of site and when combined with the adjacent hills it provides for winds from NE veering thro' to SSW. Whether you're low airtime and just want some hours in a lovely setting, or you're after a good xc it can deliver. I've only flown it in semi winter conditions a few times ... but as it holds the snow and cornices on that side it's worth a trip and very spectacular.



A sociable bottom landing. But the Temperance Inn ...obviously isn't a beer stop, unless you just want tea and cake.



