

2 Castlerigg Stone Circle

It is thought Castlerigg Stone Circle was built by local farming communities in the Neolithic period more than 5000 years ago making it one of the earliest stone circles in Europe. The exact origins and purpose of the stones are still under debate with some suggesting that alignments within this circle and links to other stone circles throughout the country are important and others who say any relationship is purely coincidental. During solstices it's not unusual to see druids and New Agers here.

Castlerigg Stone Circle occupies an elevated position with mountains all around, it's therefore possible to photograph from almost any angle with an interesting background. Here are some suggestions however.

What To Shoot and Viewpoints

Composition 1

As you approach up the hill you have the stones in the foreground and behind is the Naddle Valley with the Helvellyn range on the left and Castlerigg Fell on the right. Autumn sunset casts a beautiful light on the bracken covered Riggs with the stones dramatically lit from the side. On autumn and winter mornings there is often a mist in the Thirlmere and Naddle Valleys before the sun has risen too high and burnt it off. This is great for separating the stones from the background. The sun at this time of year rises late above the Helvellyn ridge.

Composition 2

Try using a standard zoom or telephoto lens from this same viewpoint with just a few stones as a foreground with Helvellyn and Great How behind. Longer lenses allow you to be selective on your viewpoint and compress the perspective, magnifying far off objects and making them appear closer to the foreground.

Composition 3

From the south west side you get a good view of the stones with a backdrop of Blencathra. This works well especially in winter when the low sun at any time of day and a snow-capped Blencathra combine. A dramatic sky helps complete the image.

Composition 4

Get low (lie on the ground) on the east side of the circle to capture the stones as silhouettes against a setting sun with Crag Hill and Grisedale Pike as the skyline. Refer to

the sunset compass to see where the sun will set at any given time of year. How about breaking the rule of thirds and raise your camera to have the stone silhouettes right at the bottom of the frame with a big dramatic sky above.

100m down the road beyond the Stone Circle going east there is a footpath off to the right of the road. When there is mist in the Naddle valley the views down into the vale from just a short way along this path are worth investigating.

Autumn sunrise looking towards the Helvellyn Mountain range



Below: After the rain. Canon 5D MkIII, 24-105mm at 60mm, ISO 100, 1/400 sec at f/11



Above: February silhouetted stones reflected in a puddle looking west at sunset.

Canon 5D MkIII, 14mm, ISO 250, 1/50 sec at f/9, hand held

Below: Evening 4 shot stitched panorama looking towards Helvellyn. Canon Rebel, 24-85mm at 55mm, ISO 100, 1/60 sec at f/5.6



How To Get Here

Castlerigg Stone Circle is accessed from a minor road between the A66 and the A591 about a mile from Keswick. Follow the A5271, called Penrith Road towards Penrith and Ambleside. 100m after the road starts to go up a hill turn left on a bend, signposted 'Penrith, Carlisle and Castlerigg Stone Circle.' Almost immediately take the first right on to Eleven Trees Road past houses, up the hill and at 0.8 miles park in the lay-by below Castlerigg Stone Circle.

Parking grid ref: OS NY 291 236

Parking postcode: CA12 4RN (Goosewell Farm)

Map: OS Explorer Map OL4 (1:25 000)
The English Lakes north-west area.

Accessibility

The circle is 50m from the road in a field. The stones are not fenced off allowing you free access. The ground is generally firm so may be accessible by wheelchair with a push. It can get wet and soft after rain.

Best Time of Year/Day

The golden hours of morning and evening including pre-dawn and post-sunset are the best times to be here. Typically you will only see a few hardy photographers out at these times. This site can be very popular with large groups of people during the day. At sunset and sunrise during the winter and summer solstice expect to see New Agers, pagans and druids who come here to worship the sun.

The ancients certainly had a good eye for siting their monuments; this open and elevated site gives good all round views which means it's a great place to view celestial events like meteor showers such as the Perseids in August or the Geminids in December. The proximity of Keswick does mean there is some light pollution but point your wide angle lens north or south to minimise the effect.

Useful Techniques

Composition: page 276
Exposure and Histograms: page 284
Sunrise and Sunsets: page 296

