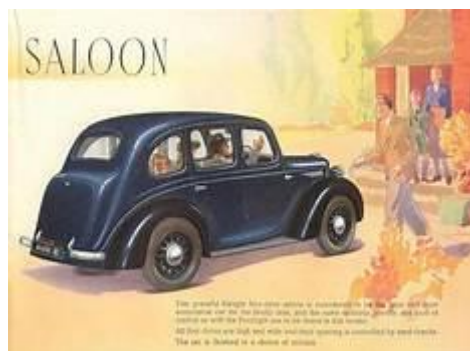


Lancashire Automobile Club (1902) Ltd



Lakeland 25000



The 1939 challenge undertaken by an Austin 8



Introduction

We recently came across a fascinating film recently which sparked an idea.

The film was used to publicise the launch of the Austin 8 in 1939. In those days' manufacturers produced short films to be shown in the intermission at picture houses.

To make the films relevant and interesting they often set the car a challenge to demonstrate its abilities and in particular reliability. In the case of the Austin 8 the challenge was to climb 25,000 feet in a day.

To achieve this feat, they employed a top driver of his day Tommy Wisdom (father of Anne Wisdom the well known lady rally driver from the 1950's) and went to the Lake District to take on the many passes we know today. Tommy Wisdom specialised in endurance events and entered 52 sports car races in 33 years, including 12 Le Mans 24-hour races, 10 Mille Miglias and 4 Targa Florios. After the war he was a class winner in the Mille Miglia in 1949, 1952 and 1957, and at Le Mans in 1950 and 1952. In 1950 he lent his Jaguar XK120 to Stirling Moss for the RAC Tourist Trophy, which brought Moss his first major international race victory.

Now don't think about the roads as they are today relatively smooth and tarmacked. In fact, don't even think of cow tracks; think more in the line of goat tracks strewn with boulders and stream crossings.

If you are interested go on YouTube and look up Austin 8 Introduction.

What is truly fascinating about the film, other than the Austin and the fact it was the first colour film of the Lakes is that you see the Lake District as it was pre-war – wonderful!

The question we asked ourselves is would such a journey be possible today taking in all the passes the Austin trod. Well repeated viewing of the film and listening to the very posh accent eventually gave us the clues we needed. In some places we had to view the film several times to understand which road they chose. For example, after going over the Kirkstone Pass they ran alongside



Ullswater before going over to Troutbeck. There are four possible routes but it would appear that the third of the four best matches the scenes on the film. Also in places new roads and road improvement schemes have altered the layout; in particular, the duelling of the A66 between Troutbeck and Keswick has closed parts of the original route. To keep things simple, we have plotted a route using the new road layout in these areas.

The run starts from Bowness and goes over the Kirkstone Pass to Ullswater. Judging by the film they travelled along the lake shore before striking out over Great Mell Fell to Keswick then south past Derwent Water to cross Honister Pass to Buttermere and over to Braithwaite to tackle Whinlatter Pass.

The route then returns over Whinlatter Pass back to Keswick and onto Thirlmere and Grasmere before tackling Red Bank and Great Langdale. It then goes west along Wyrose Bottom and over the Hardknott Pass before retracing it's steps back over Hardknott and then south through Seathwaite and over Birker Fell. This is quickly followed by Corney Fell to Duddon Bridge and north to Coniston.

Next is the beauty of Tarn How (here due to the new one-way system we loop to approach and leave the Tarn from the opposite directions to the Austin). The end is now literally in sight.

It goes northeast through Ambleside and up the Struggle to the Kirkstone Pass. Here we must finish our route. The Austin went a little further but this lane is no longer passable and is closed to motor vehicles. In any case I'm sure that the Austin and its crew returned to the Kirkstone Pass PH for a swift pint to celebrate their achievement having climbed over 25,000 feet in the day – quite something for any car on the tracks we see on the film.

Please find maps of the route in the following pages.

Section 1 starts from the car park in Bowness and goes over Whinlatter Pass following the blue line and arrows on pages 4 -8.

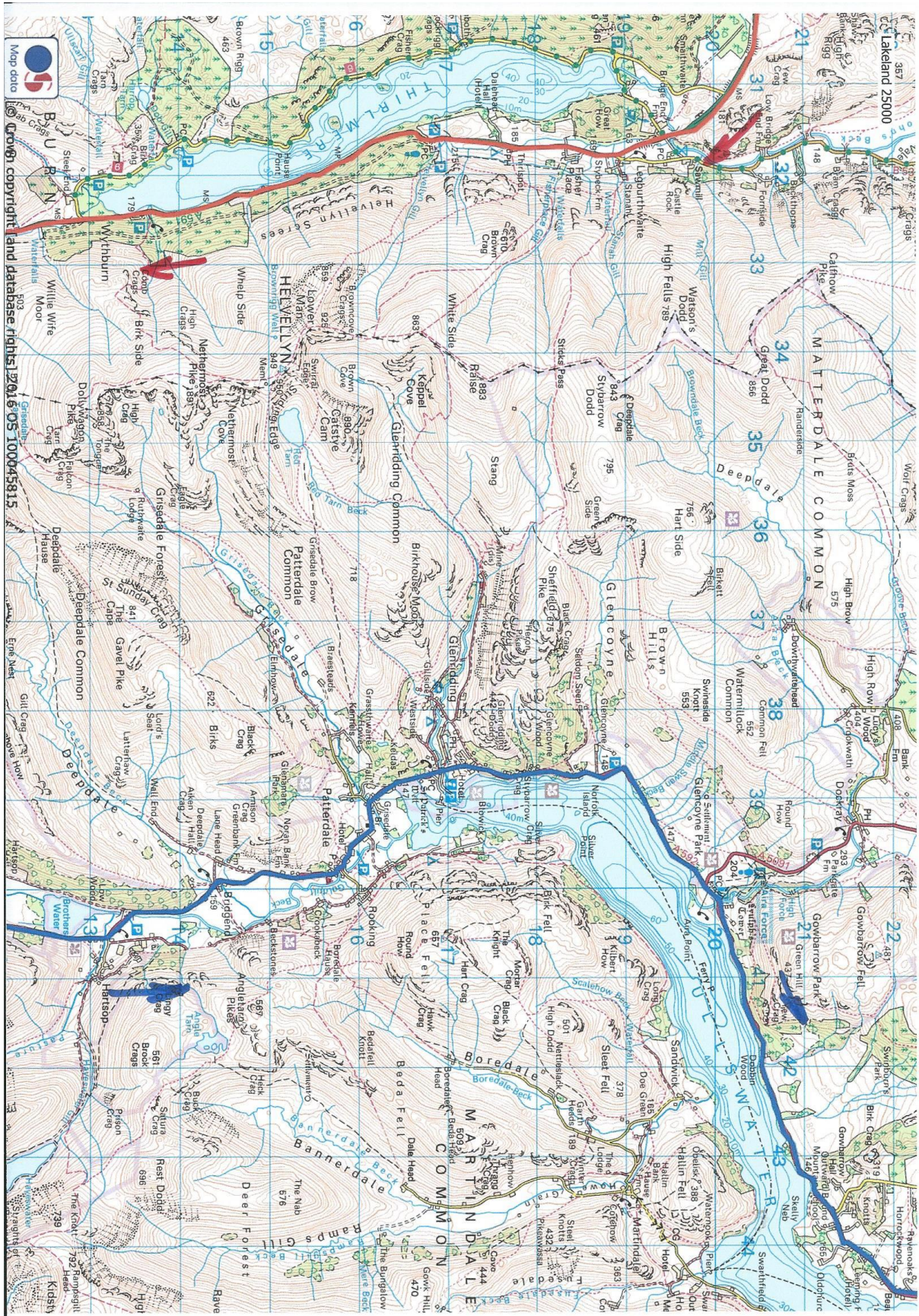
Section 2 starts from the finish of Section 1 to return over Whinlatter Pass and finish after going over Hard Knott at Eskdale Green following the red line and arrows on pages 8, 6, 5, 2 and 10.

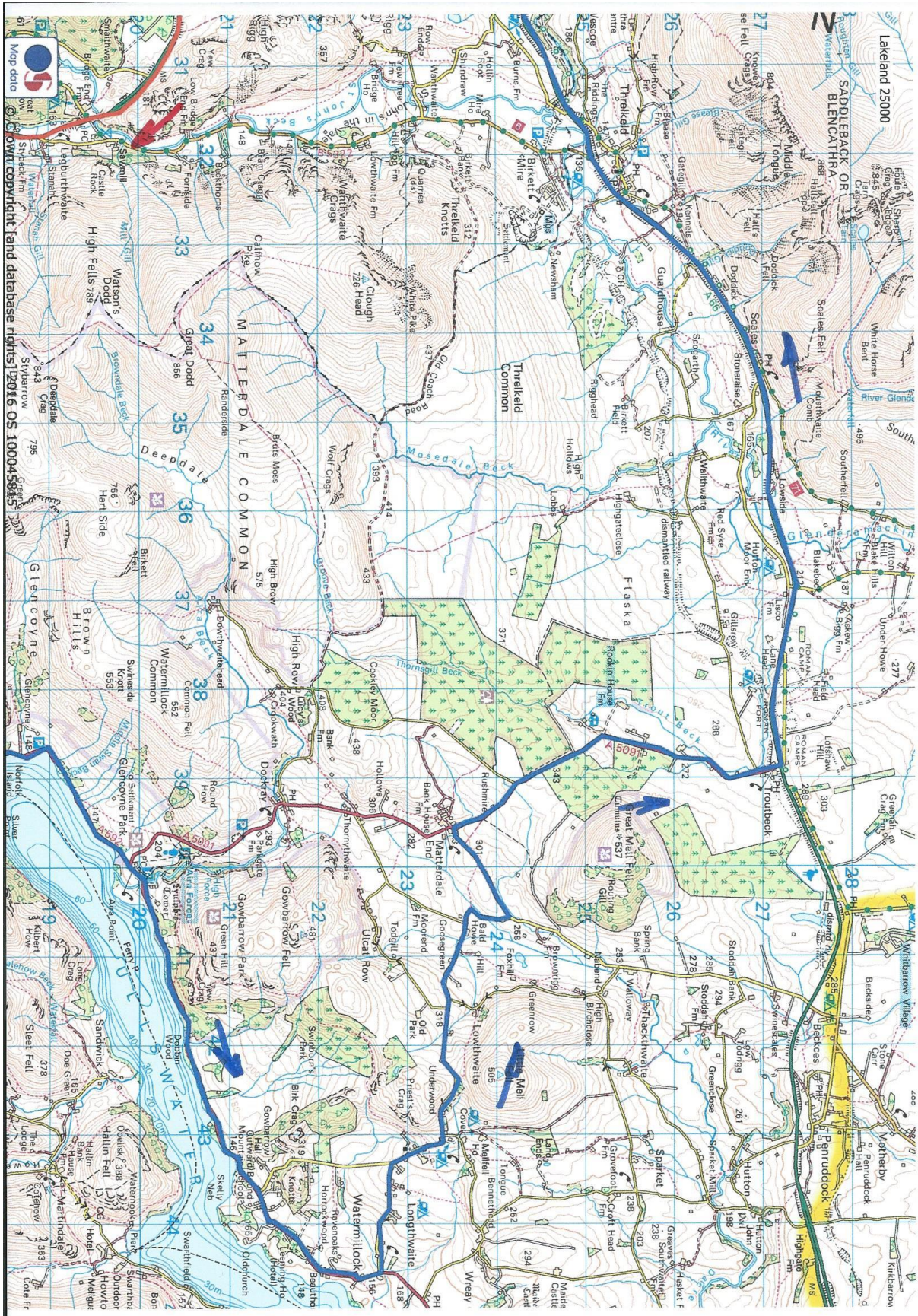
Section 3 starts from Eskdale Green to return over Hard Knott and finish at Tarn How following the blue line and arrows on pages 10, 11, 10, 11 and 12.

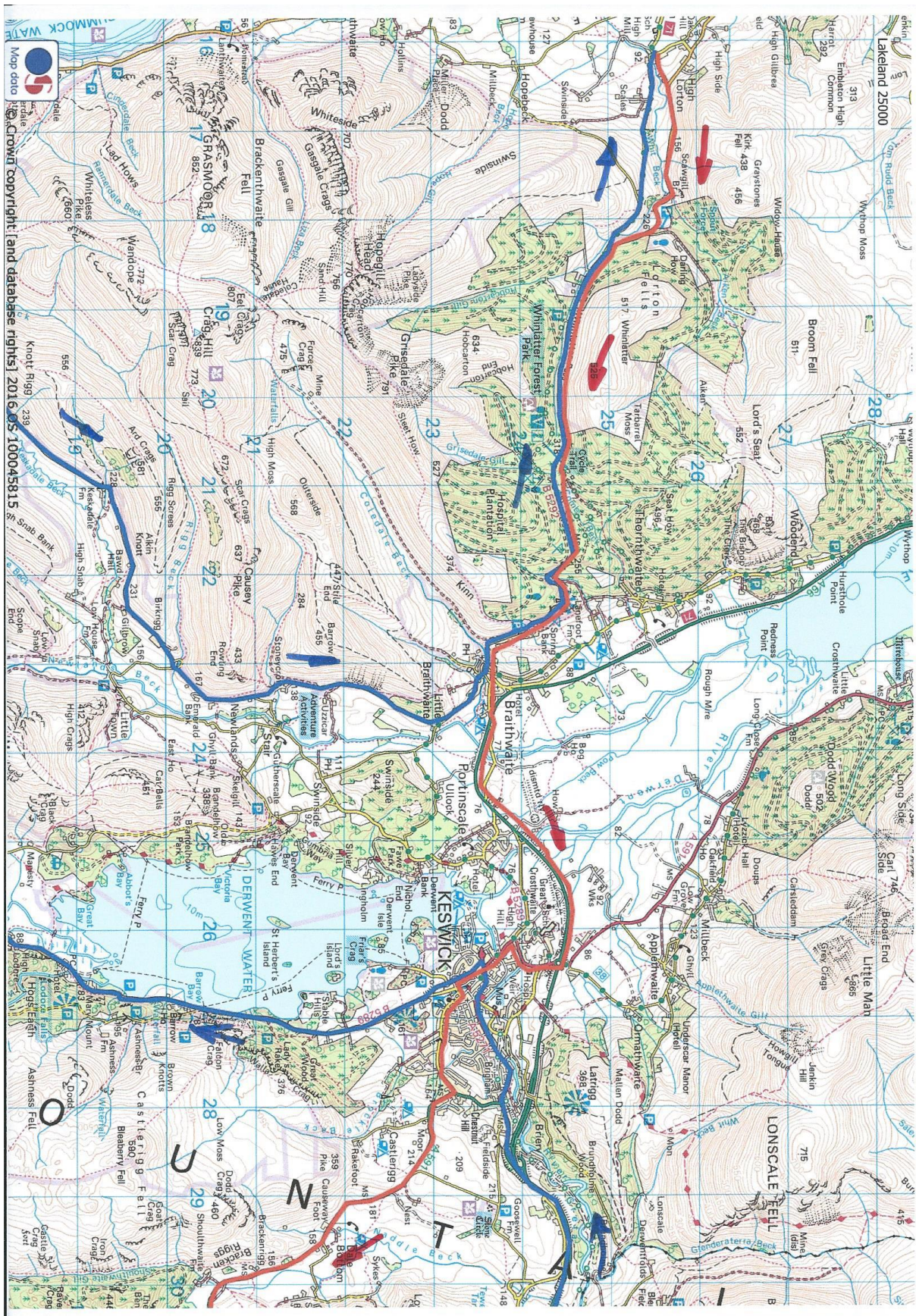
Section 4 starts from Tarn How and finishes back at the Kirkstone Pass following the red line and arrows on pages 12 (or 4) and 5 (through Ambleside).





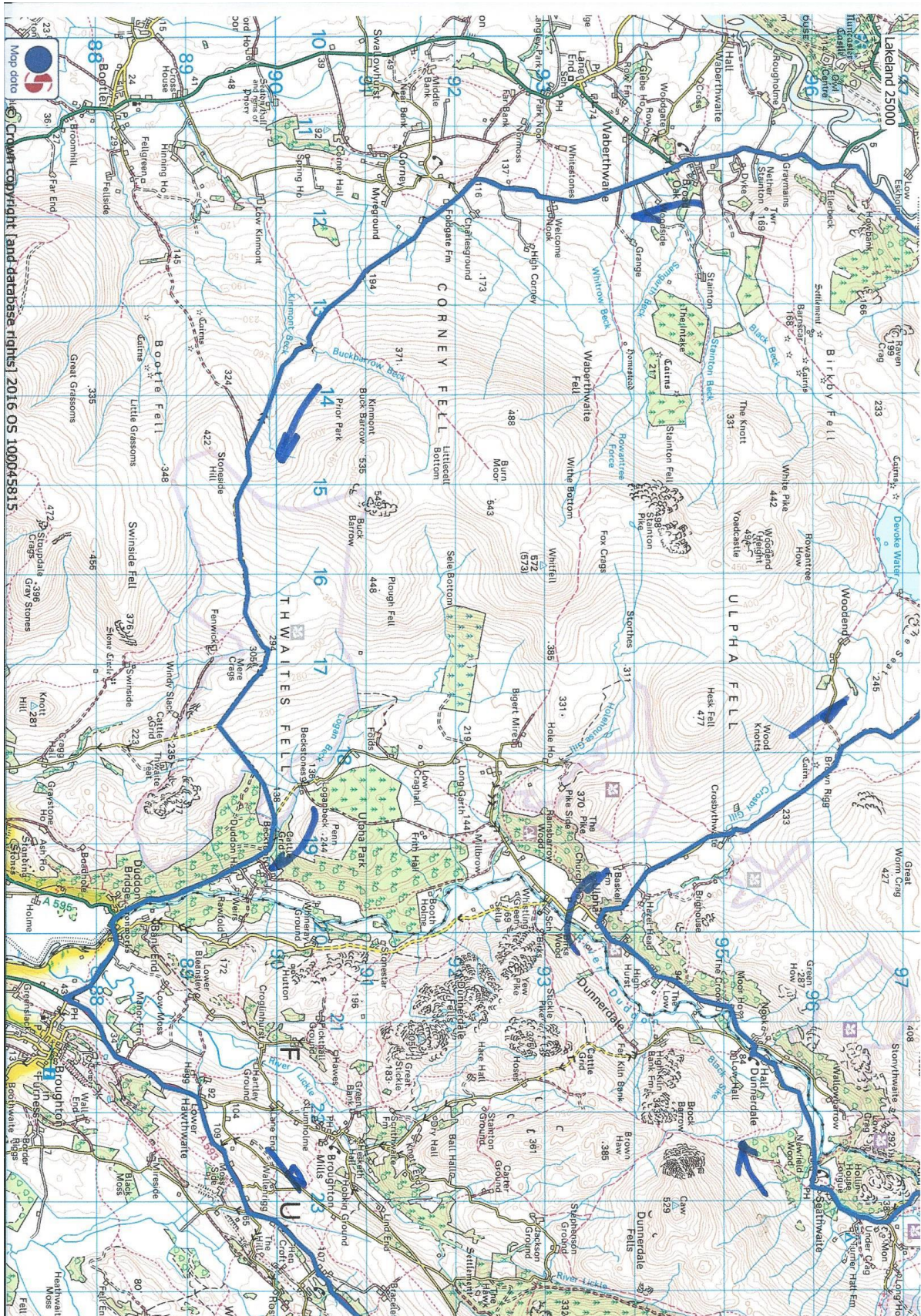


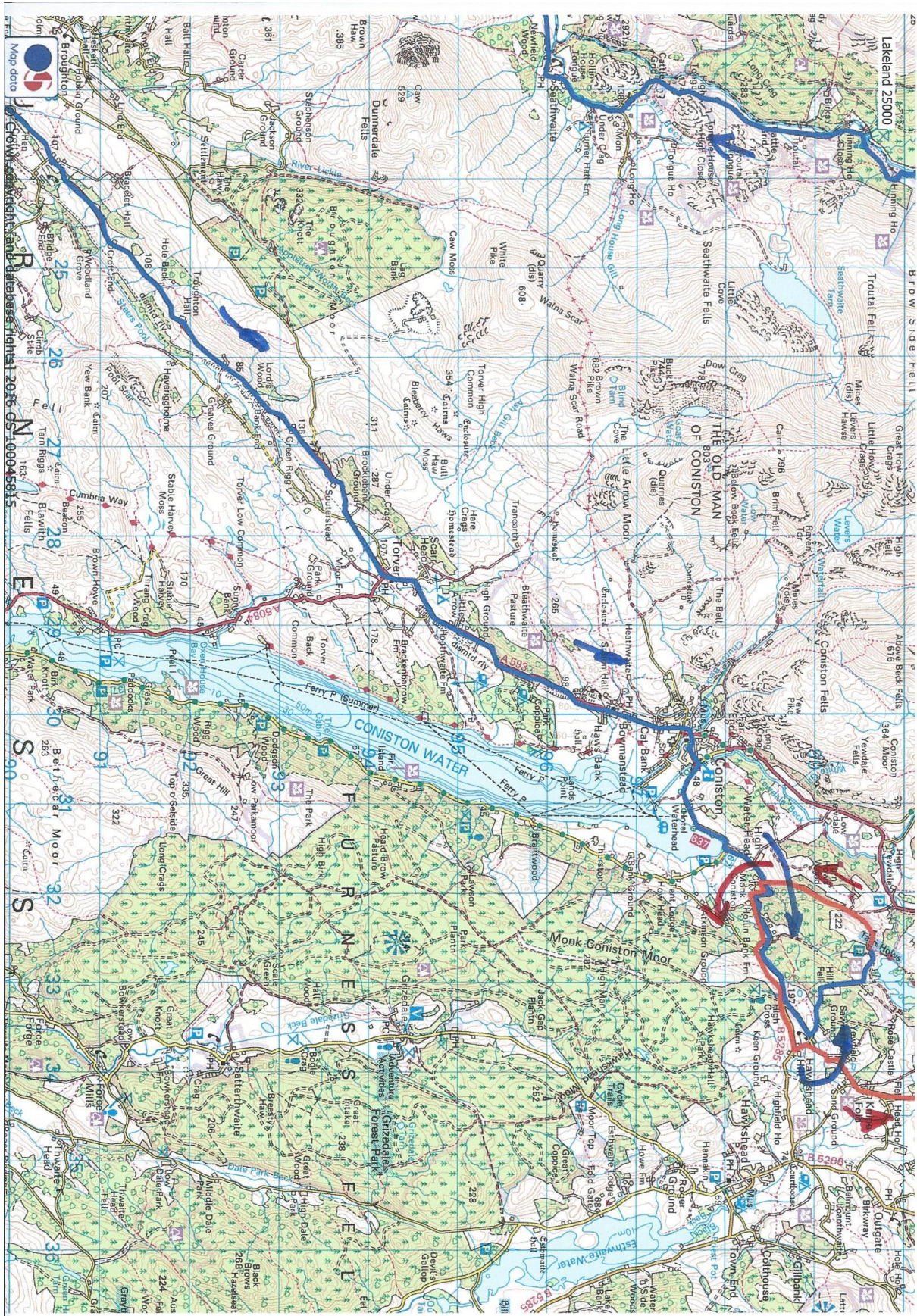












The history of the Austin 8

By the late 1930s, sales of Austin's big seller, the Austin 7, were declining and the 1938 addition to the range of the 900 cc "Big 7" did little to fill the demand for in spite of its larger engine its suspension and handling were still rooted in its early 1920s origins.

A restyled and re-engineered range of cars had started to appear in 1937 with the Cambridge 10 with its much more streamlined look and with the shake up following the arrival of Leonard Lord development of a proper 8hp car was accelerated.

The Austin 8 was launched in 1939 just prior to World War 2. And it was for this launch that the film of the car tackling the 25000 feet challenge in the Lake District was made. Initially it was available with both two and four door saloon bodies as well as two and four seat tourers.

The new car, which was displayed to dealers in February 1939, kept the 900 cc, four cylinder, side valve engine from the Big 7, now with a higher 6.5:1 compression ratio, but had a completely new chassis. This was halfway to full unitary construction in that the main member was a pressed steel floor pan with a box section welded down each side of the car with three others going across the floor. The body was then bolted to this structure. Suspension was by semi elliptic leaf springs with hydraulic dampers.

A relatively small number were delivered prior to the outbreak of hostilities although some 20,000 were made. Production then switch to models produced for military produced into the war (at least until 1942), about 9,000 of the wartime Austin 8 models were two-seater tourers produced for the military and government, and the rest were saloons.

After World War II, the model was made from 1945 to 1947 but there were no more tourers or two door saloons.



An competitor on the Lancashire Automobile Club Morecambe Rally turns off Kirkstone Pass onto the top of the Struggle in the early 1950's