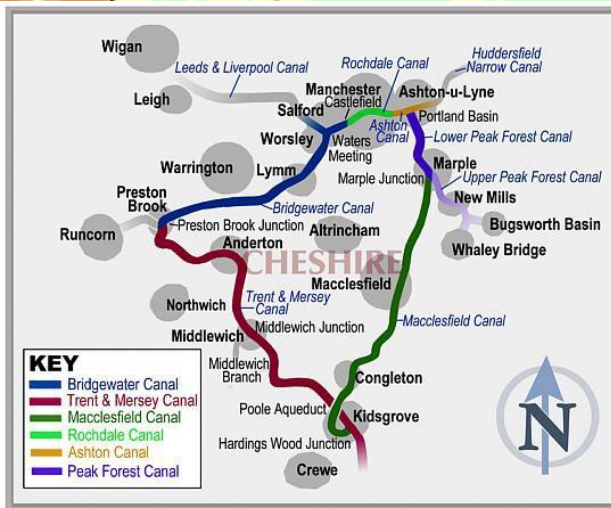
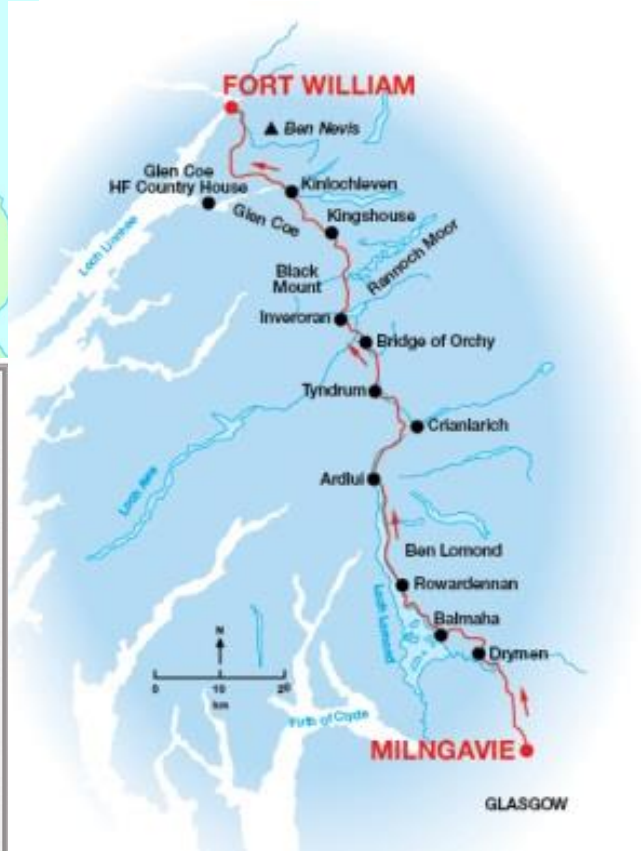


Long-distance walks



Walking has always been a rewarding activity to me. As a boy in Rushden I walked to school, to visit relatives, to Boys Brigade meetings and to the Methodist Church. You walked or cycled. In Cambridge it was often easier to walk than cycle. When I was at home during vacations with Anne living in Irchester, 3 miles away, I often walked back late at night cursing an early last bus. When our boys were young we went to the nearby National Trust properties at Styal or Lyme Park to play and walk. One standout memory is coming down from the Bowstones at Lyme Park with Richard, aged 2, showing signs of hypothermia. And my interest in fungi started during these walks as the boys were ace at spotting them. We still walk most days for 2 or 3 miles although often with a stop for coffee along the way. We know, and can rate, every coffee shop in the area. So it is no surprise that I have some long-distance walks to write about.

The first, and longest, was the **Pennine Way** done as a single walk over 14 days in 1975. It was the first official long distance route created in the UK. Now they criss-cross the country. You are as likely to see a fingerpost saying something like Hatters Way as simply Public Footpath. My next experience – the northern section of the **Pembrokeshire Coastal Path** – differed in almost every way. On this you are seldom out of sight of the sea, never more than about 400 ft a.s.l. and have steep ups and downs every few miles. Anne and I encountered the path during our first visit to Cnapan in Newport in 1989. We have been back every year since, often with Jan and Dick. With them we have covered the 75 miles from Dogmael to Newgale. Then in 1993 we walked the **Cheshire Ring** with Jan and Dick, a 96 mile triangle of canals between Manchester and Kidsgrove. This we planned as 12 monthly sections. Next came the **West Highland Way** which Robert and I walked in 8 days divided between 1998 and 1999. And in between, in 1981, Simon and I joined Robert and Owen as they were completing **Coast-to-Coast** path.

The Pennine Way July 1st-14th, 1975

The Pennine Way was the first long-distance path approved by Parliament at the culmination of a 30 year campaign by Tom Stephenson and the Ramblers' Association. It runs for 270 miles from Edale to Kirk Yetholm along the main watershed dividing east- and west-flowing streams and rivers. In 1969 an official guidebook was published, written by Tom Stephenson and incorporating 1 inch and 1:25000 scale OS maps - my copy is dated November 1974. About the same time Wainwright published his Pennine Way Companion. My copy bought in September 1973 when the idea for our walk was embryonic was the 20th Impression. His sketches show the path and immediate surrounds and he warns that *"The guide will identify the stile ahead, tell you which field you are in, but if you want to know where the hell you really are in relation to the nearest public house it's the map you need"*. He summarises the reasons for doing it: *"The Pennine Way offers you the experience of a lifetime, which is not to say that it offers you continuous enjoyment. It is a tough, bruising walk and the compensations are few. You do it because you want to prove to yourself that you are man enough to do it. You do it to get it off your conscience. You do it because you can count it a personal achievement. Which it is, precisely."* That embodies his view of the walk as along hills infinitely inferior to his beloved Lake District. Also, perhaps to ease his conscience about making a profit from a book describing a walk done for duty more than pleasure, he arranged that anyone arriving in Kirk Yetholm could go to the Border Hotel, state that they had completed the Pennine Way in a continuous walk, wave a battered copy of his Guide, sign the record book and say "A pint on Wainwright please". Later reduced to a half pint this generosity is thought to have cost Wainwright over £15000 by the time of his death in 1991

Our plans crystallised in the winter of 1974-5. After all, I was to be 40 next August. Robert Maund was my principal conspirator and we recruited Mike Howse, friend and local GP, and Don Burns, like Robert

a senior planner at the Greater Manchester Council. Mike and Robert were younger than me, Don was older. During that winter we planned our walk. It was to be continuous, take 14 days starting in early July with overnight stays in Youth Hostels, pubs, B&Bs, with a friend, and, for one night only, a tent. The breaks were largely dictated by the accommodation giving days of 15 to 25 miles on the route plus any extra bits to the beds. The reason for the tent was to reduce the final day from 29 to 24 miles. Without the tent we needed to carry only a change of gear, wet weather protection, daily food and drink and luxuries like camera, maps and guidebooks and a sheet sleeping bag for the youth hostel bunks. My rucksack came in at around 28 lb. As our plan was being finalised Mike had to withdraw. His wife Stella, several months pregnant, had a car accident and Mike decided he could not be away for 2 weeks during a critical stage of her pregnancy. For several weekends in May and June I went out for an early morning training walk in the hills of nearby Derbyshire, with a final 18 mile walk with a full pack. Robert and Don did little training. So it was on 1st July 1975 that we three set off from Edale with varied degrees of confidence and hope.



Don, Robert and Brian at Edale – about to take the first step of the Way

Day 1: Edale to Crowden YH, A628. 15.5 miles

David Cooper drove us Edale and left us showing a mixture of happiness (Don), apprehension (Robert) and quiet confidence (Brian); Anne seemed happy to see us go. We were overdressed with heavy walking breeches and sweaters but with good socks and boots, now too late to change anything. The



weather was great - sunny and warm with a light breeze. Past the pub, over the bridge and out onto the approach to the moors. Up Jacob's Ladder to the plateau then around the edge past the Kinder Downfall and across the Snake Pass road. 8 miles completed. Then onto the Bleaklow plateau, described by Wainwright as "*the flat and peaty indefinite wilderness*". That day, after a long dry spring, it was firm and bouncy, not its usual misty boot-sucking self. We had no problems finding the route to our destination, Crowden YH by the A628. Our first day was done as we settled into our first youth hostel. Our only concerns were blisters on Robert's back heels and the weight of his camera swinging around his neck. The only other camera with us was my compact Minolta 35mm, bought for the trip, which I clipped onto my rucksack strap for ease of access. I had 4 rolls of film, 36 exposures each.



Day 2: Crowden YH to The White House, A58. 18.5 miles

A hot and humid day, partly under cloud. We climbed out of the valley past Laddow Rocks then onto Black Hill. This can be a desperate place with no landmarks with the broad top a black quagmire surrounding an isolated trig point. This summer was different and we could cross to the trig point without going ankle deep (or worse) into the mud. There was no need to take the bad weather alternative off the top as we could strike out boldly along the main route, going north-west, even



though there was no shelter, accommodation or easy escape for several miles. In this weather it didn't matter. Our main concern was with Robert's feet. We had several stops to try to patch and protect the blisters. The scenery was not spectacular. Moorland scored with deep groughs, a wireless transmission station, another trig point, this time on White Hill and then, most enjoyably, across the M62 on the special Pennine Way footbridge, looking down with mild contempt at the feeble mortals driving beneath us. Finally another couple of miles to the White House, an inn on the A58 where we were met by a colleague of Robert and Don who lived in nearby Littleborough. He took us home with him, fed and housed us for the night and returned us to the dropping off point for the start of day 3. Robert also left his camera with him.



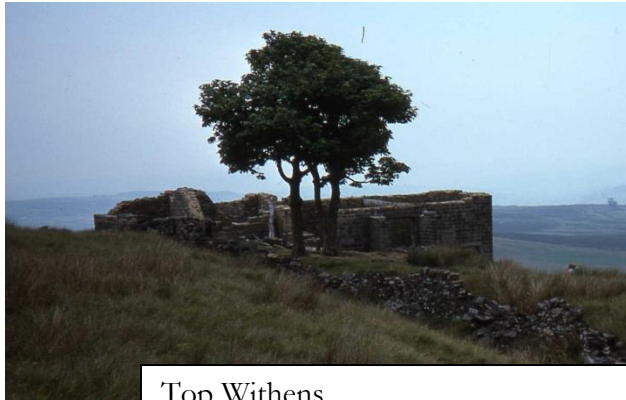
Day 3: The White House to Ponden Hall. 19miles

Another hot and humid day to complain about and the handkerchiefs were out again over the bald patches - no soft suncream for real men. Yorkshire arrived with improved scenery to the first



landmark, Stoodley Pike with its monument tower. The next town was Hebden Bridge, good for replenishing food and drink but with a steep climb out. About 2.30 we espied a distant pub and, fearful it might close at 3 pm I was sent ahead at full speed – that is a little faster than Robert’s blistered feet will allow - to get the pints in. We could relax for a few minutes. The Way goes over Heptonstall Moor to the ruins of Top Withens, the farmhouse some think was the model for Wuthering Heights, although the plaque by the Bronte Society says not so. We walked on to Ponden Hall to spend the night in an upper floor bunk room with 15 beds in it. We three were the only occupants that night. Robert’s blisters had worsened.





Top Withens



Ponden Hall

Day 4: Ponden Hall to Malham. 24 miles

We knew this would be a challenging day - at the planning stage we thought that if we got through this then we would complete the Way. Robert was now seriously affected by his blisters which were very painful when walking resumed after a break. But after a short distance they either became numb or he became inured to the pain so he carried on. He was not going to give in. His technique was to shuffle for the first couple of hundred yards, hardly lifting his feet from the ground, then gradually to lengthen his stride and lift his feet in an almost normal walk. The weather was good with an early mist then some cloud and a light breeze so we made slow, steady progress across



pastures, past remote farmhouses with stacks of peat drying for the winter, through and over stiles, across roads and into some lovely little villages with delightful names. Ickornshaw, Lothersdale, Thornton-in-

Craven and Gargrave. At one of the villages Don, ever a man of good taste and judgment and not fanatical about walking every yard of the



Way, said he would take a bus onto Malham so that he could arrange a meal for us when we eventually arrived. We were not going to reach the Youth Hostel in time. So Don went ahead, booked meals in several different restaurants at hourly intervals and waited for us. Robert and I plodded on. It was enjoyable in its way. The scenery was good with features such as the double arched bridge on the Leeds-Liverpool canal. There were the tea rooms in Gargrave for rest and refreshment towards the end of the afternoon. And as we left and Robert got

into his shuffling mode we were overtaken by an old, bent lady with a stick. Late into the evening we reached Malham, found Don and ate.



Lothersdale

Day 5: Malham to Horton-in-Ribblesdale. 15 miles



Another sunny day took us out from Malham past the dramatic limestone cove and the limestone pavement at the top, over Fountains Fell then to one of the high points of the Way, Penyghent summit at 2273 ft. Robert's feet had hardened a little so we made better progress through great limestone country with lots of walls, narrow stiles and dramatic views. Coming off Penyghent we walked along an ancient Drovers Path into Horton-in-Ribblesdale. It wasn't the end of our day's walking

though as we were booked into a farmhouse B&B, Dub Cote Farm a mile or so out of the village. Greeted by the friendly landlady we thought a bath at last. But no, she was sorry but they were so short of water that only drinking, cooking and washing was possible. Never mind, the Wimbledon mens' final had played out that afternoon and we could catch the highlights after dinner. She wouldn't tell us the result. So that evening we watched with delight as Arthur Ashe outwitted Jimmy Connors.



Day 6: Horton-in-Ribblesdale to Hawes. 14.5 miles

A nice day and a short walk. We left along another ancient walled packhorse path, Harber Scar Lane. Limestone country still with lots of holes in it – Sell Gill Holes, Cowskull Pot, Penyghent Long Churn, Canal Cavern – all before we reached Old Ing. There were stone bridges over streams but the water levels were so long we could have walked across. The Way took us along Cam High Road, apparently an old Roman road, then West Cam Road and into Gayle and Hawes, an old market town famous for its association with Wensleydale cheese. Memories are of Don squeezing through some walled stiles and, on arrival at the Youth H Hostel, cheerily asking the warden for his best en-suite room. We were put in the biggest dormitory.



Day 7: Hawes to Keld. 13.5 miles

Unbelievably it was another warm and sunny day and only a short walk but a decent climb on the way to Great Shunner Fell, 2340 ft. We passed close to England's highest waterfall, Hardrow Force, but didn't divert. Years later when staying in Thwaite with Robert and Judith we paid it (literally) a visit. It wouldn't have had



much water going over it in 1975; the picture of the Force is from 2009. It was a day of nice walking over soft turf and down into the picturesque village of Thwaite. The Kearnton Guest House is here. I had stayed there



one weekend with all the family after giving a schools' lecture at Kendal Grammar School on the Friday afternoon. Memories of cold weather and nylon sheets. Then it was just a short walk along the hillside path in Swaledale to Keld and its Youth Hostel. This is where Wainwright's Coast-to-coast path crosses the Way – but in 1975 the west coast to east coast path was very new and was not as heavily populated as the Pennine Way. A photo taken that day shows Robert's blister beginning to heal – still raw but dry. But a leg muscle was beginning to

trouble him. We had completed 7 days and 120 miles. Half the planned time though not quite half the distance.



Day 8: Keld to Wythes Hill Farm. 18.5 miles

This was the first day of the second, tougher week. We had to average 21 miles a day from then on. The weather had changed to cloudy and

dull with a strong wind in the morning. At first it was a steady ascent through fields then a steeper climb to the moor. At 11 am, after only 4 miles we reached Tan Hill Inn, an isolated inn at the intersection of old trade routes. At 1732 ft it is the highest in England - and that demanded a celebratory pint. In bad weather the next section across Sleighthome Moor might be tricky but again we had no visibility problems. We passed Trough Heads where Wainwright warns “*..a fateful decision must be made - whether it is better to push on over the moors in the hope of reaching accommodation before nightfall, and in the event of failure to do so, possibly perish honourably on the main Wayor to go down through lush pastures to Greta*”. We stuck with the main Way; we did not perish. Over God’s Bridge onto more moors - Bowes Moor, Cotherstone Moor, Mickleton Moor into Lunedale. Then lots of small fields and pasture with stile after stile after stile until we reached the B6276 and our evening halt, Wythes Hill Farm at 6pm. Another good resting place. No photos that day.

Day: 9 Wythes Hall Farm to Knock. 25.5 miles



Low Force

This was, just, the longest distance to cover in one day. We knew it had great scenery but it turned out better than I had ever expected. The weather was mixed. We set off early, 8.45, in steady rain and wearing our waterproofs for the first time. We kept them on for the next 6 hours. The Way runs up Teesdale alongside the River Tees and the first scenic delight was Low Force, a beautiful rocky cascade. Shortly after that came High Force which



claims to be the biggest waterfall in the country. Across the river from the falls is the High Force Hotel and Don



Cauldron Snout

decided he could get transport from there, travel a few miles north and rejoin us before the trudge across to the western side of the Pennines. So he left for coffee, whiskey (?), taxi and shops as, when he rejoined us 3 miles further on, he had a walking stick to help with Robert's limp. The Way still followed the river passing on rough and rocky ground beneath the escarpment of Falcon Clints and climbing steeply beside the very impressive cascade of Cauldron Snout. The disappointment was to find that at the top not the original streams feeding this cataract off the

moorland but a dam and reservoir. Cow Green reservoir had been recently built, covering a site of scientific interest, to give a guaranteed supply to the steel and petrochemical industries of the NE. Unfortunately these industries declined, not grew, and the supply was never needed. How difficult it is to plan. Here the weather improved so waterproofs came off and sweaty clothes underneath began to dry. No breathable garments in 1975. We now were crossing the watershed between east and west Pennines. Five miles of peaty moorland to plod across, enjoyable then as the sun came out and we



High Cup Nick

became warm and dry. We passed the MoD warning signs to streams flowing west rather than east. Then, to my surprise, we were at the head of a long U-shaped valley with steep, near vertical sides created in

the last ice age. It was High Cup Nick, cut directly from the moor and realised only at the last moment of approach. Wainwright says “*This is a great moment on the journey*”. I agree. Years later Anne and I travelled through the South Dakota Badlands which also come dramatically out of a flat landscape. Then there was a gradual descent to the pretty village of Dufton. 7 pm and two more miles to the Knock Youth Hostel so we stopped for a pint in the pub and phoned the hostel to ask for our supper to be kept. Then it rained again. Thinking we were close we didn't bother with full waterproofs. That was a mistake and we arrived bedraggled at Knock. The warden was great – fed us, found us a drying room, played classical music. We were elated and restored.

Day 10: Knock to Alston. 19 miles

We had an unhurried start, from the Youth Hostel (an old RAF station, closed in 1978 when the posh new YH in Dufton was opened) walking up the access road to the National Air Traffic Service station at the top of Great Dun Fell. Wainwright is scathing about the state of the summit describing it as “*a monstrous miscellany of paraphernalia most conspicuous for four tall masts.*” There were also some scruffy huts for the staff and equipment. What would he say now there is a radome on top? But there was a road, buildings, water and electricity and frequent cloud. So 12 years later I would find myself back there along with the Principal of UMIST, Prof Hankins, and the head of the Met Office, Sir John Mason, plus members of the Atmospheric Physics research group from UMIST for whom it was an ideal place to work. But on that dull and sometimes wet day in 1975 I had no premonition of this. So we quickly passed on to the main summit – Cross Fell – the highest point on the Pennine Way at 2930 feet. We couldn't see much so pressed on past the waste from lead mines along the old corpse road past Long Man Hill and down to Garrigill. Then it was alongside the valley of the River South Tyne into Alston, the highest market town in England where we were booked into the Angel Inn. The day would have been more interesting if we could

have seen more from the tops and there might have been some photographs.

Day 11: Alston to Once Brewed. 24.5 miles

Another long day both in distance and time. We left at 9.15 am and reached the Youth Hostel at 9.30 pm. Robert had a tough day and he often swung his leg around rocks rather than lifting it over. But interesting country and reasonable weather. The first few miles were in the South Tyne valley shared by the Way, the river, a road and a railway



line. Around midday we had a brief break in Slaggyford then through fields and minor hills to make contact with Hadrian's Wall at Thirlwall Castle. It was now 5 pm and we had covered 17 miles. The highlight so far had been watching

sheep being sheared but now we had the up and down of the Wall as it followed the escarpments of the Whin Sill towards Wallsend in the east. We sat and aired our feet, reviewed the situation and ate into our reserves whilst some hens pecked away at us.



We had to reach the Youth Hostel by 10. We had to eat before then. So off we went, probably not as fast as the Romans did, but it was stimulating countryside and we were grateful for the long daylight hours. We found a farmhouse and got a quick meal and got back to the Wall (backs to the wall?). We reached the hostel 30 minutes before official

closing time, checked in then went to the next door pub for a drink. We

were hardly back by our beds when the warden threw the master switch and put the lights out. Somehow we got into our bunks and slept although by now, despite exhaustion, it took me time to drop off due to the ache from my feet.

Day 12: Once Brewed to Bellingham. 17.5 miles

We set off along 3 more miles by the wall, Peel Craggs first then above Crag Lough. The Way leaves the Wall heading north at Rapinshaw Gap but only a short distance further on are the well preserved remnants of Housesteads with its granary and toilets. Well worth the visit and the extra mile. Then it was into Wark Forest, a big coniferous plantation. Very little to see as we walked through apart from an occasional farm house. Another youth hostel awaited us but at least we were in a town.



Day 13. Bellingham to Chew Green. 21 miles

The last civilised stop after Bellingham is at Byrness, just 16 miles on, leaving almost 30 miles for the final leg. We hadn't fancied that. We had looked at the map and found there was possible break point at Chew Green, 5 miles further on. So we organised for Mike Howse to drive up (in Don's car) with tent and better sleeping bags. The four of us would carry these from Byrness to Chew Green, camp the night, send Mike back with as much as he could carry and then he would drive to the finish at Kirk Yetholm and we drive home the next day. That was the

plan. So we plodded along in unmemorable countryside, eventually having several miles of the Kielder forest with periodic drizzle and only a few million flies for company. By 4 pm we were in Byrness and waiting for Mike. When he joined us we revised our plan. We had seen a side road come forest track heading towards Chew Green. It probably served the forestry workers and the army but was worth a try so three of us walked on along the Way whilst Don drove the car along the track. We had Chew Green to ourselves and planned an early night, a good sleep



and an early start for a long final day. Mike had offered to get us to sleep with whisky and a sleeping tablet and we duly partook of the whisky but not the tablets as we sat in the observation shed for the

army firing range. The two stalwarts of the Way, Robert and me, were given the car to sleep in with Mike and Don in the tent. They had decided that Don would drive round next day giving Mike at least one full day walking on the Pennine Way. We settled down and failed to sleep. Typical GP? So we lay in discomfort in the car listening to Mike and Don chattering for hours in the tent.

Day 14: Chew Green to Kirk Yetholm. 24 miles



Here we were ready to start our final day. Do this and we would have triumphed. So we were up early - easy as we hadn't slept much - for a good breakfast at the breakfast bar, lightened our rucksacks a little and left Don with the car. We were in

Scotland now as we set off past the army warning signs.

It was misty, but the views we had were good. We were on quite high ground, between 1500 and 2300 ft. Just after Brownhart Law the path runs alongside the border fence with



five strands of wire between the posts. It runs for miles. The Way gradually climbs passing Beefstand Hill, Mozie Law, Foul Step to reach Russell's Cairn at Windy Gyle. Four more miles to Cairn Hill where there is a diversion to the Cheviot, a high point at 2676 ft but not directly on the route. At this stage we decided not to take the diversion, especially as a storm was brewing. Heading along the border fence we were thankful to find an old railway waggon - at least it seemed to be - across the fence and open for shelter. We sat there as the storm came over the Cheviot, shrouded the Schill and two other walkers we had seen there and saw a blue flash along the wire of the border fence in front of our hut. Lightning had struck. It was a brief but spectacular storm and we were relieved to see the two distant walkers emerging from the cloud and moving down towards the valley. We



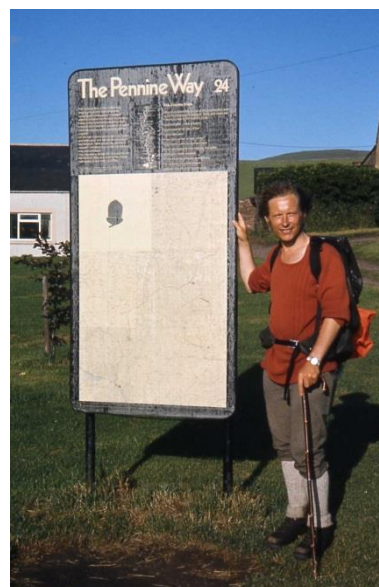
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continued in better and better spirits for the last few easy miles to Kirk Yetholm, to the final Pennine Way board, to the Border Hotel and to Wainwright's pint. Great feeling of satisfaction and of gratitude to Anne and Judith who had stayed at home with the children, with only infrequent phone calls but with trust we would return, better men. What else did it do for us? I was fitter than I had ever been with really hardened feet. Each of us demonstrated some of our basic characteristics - Robert's fierce determination; Don's happy relaxed approach; Mike's inextinguishable interest in every topic; my pleasure from constructing and carrying out a detailed plan. Also friendships cemented which were continued from then on.

And final words from Wainwright, written at the end of the "LOG OF THE JOURNEY" section he provides in his book: "*A VERY SPECIAL NOTE: Arrangements have been made with the Border Hotel in Kirk Yetholm for bona fide Pennine Wayfarers who have completed the walk in a single journey to be supplied with a congratulatory pint (of beer or lemonade, NOT whiskey – and one only, mind you!) at the author's expense. Just say charge it to Wainwright. Cheers!. (P.S. You'd better have some money of your own, in case his credit has run out)*"

His credit was good: Robert and I enjoyed our pint and raised our glasses to Wainwright and the Pennine Way.





Pembrokeshire coastal path

This path runs from St Dogmaels near Cardigan to Amroth, near the Pendine Sands and covers the complete coastline of Pembrokeshire. It is officially recognised as a national trail, runs for 181 miles and was inaugurated in May 1970. The official guide book, published in 1990, was written by Dr Brian John, a Newport local who, like us, frequents the restaurant at Cnapan and whose wife runs a nearby candle factory that we often visit. I have a signed copy of his book, dedicated to Dr Brian John Tyler. I am easily amused.

We didn't plan to walk this path but when Anne and I first stayed



Cnapan, Newport

in Newport in 1989 we walked along bits of the coast, found out about the coastal path, got some leaflets to show us the best bits and liked the coast and, very much indeed, liked the Newport hotel we were at – Cnapan. Then it was run by Eluned and John Lloyd

with their daughter Judi and son-in-law Mike Cooper. Now it is run by Judi, Mike and their chemistry trained son, Oliver. It is really a restaurant with rooms – just five rooms of which our favourite became room 4. We have been back year after year and were quickly



Jan, Anne, Brian & Dick

joined by Jan and Dick. As a foursome with two cars we could do linear walks and over the years, in segments and not in any particular order, we covered every section from the northern end at St Dogmaels to the beginning of the long stony beach at Newgale, some 75 miles. Several sections were favourites and were walked many times. The loop around

Dinas Head is still an annual walk although just for me and Dick now Jan has metal knees and Anne has confirmed her dislike of steep climbs.

We always went to Cnapan for a mixture of reasons. They include seeing Judi and Mike and their family; the comfortable accommodation and the excellent food; enjoying the countryside both coastal and inland; visiting the art galleries and workshops that abound; looking out for interesting birds – the red kites, little egret; the loyal swan at the bridge; perhaps a chough as well as all sorts of sea birds; the seals or dolphins; the flowers in Spring; the historical sites from the church at Nevern to

Breaking waves and twisted strata at Ceibwr Bay on the Coastal Path



the burial chamber at Pentre Ifan; the villages and towns, both coastal such as Solva and inland such as Newport itself and St David's with its cathedral sunk into a valley below the city. As well as the coast there are inland walks, the best for us being the Golden Road running across the top of the Preseli Hills – the source of the Stonehenge bluestone. My list could be much longer. And I must not omit the coastal path flowers and the sunsets from the Metal Bridge at Newport - just a short after-dinner walk. There are books written about the flowers. The range and colours are a delight – bluebells, yellow and mauve iris, primrose and ox-eye

daisies, buttercups of course, broom and gorse, sometimes a spotted orchid and, most strikingly, the masses of pink thrift covering the earth walls that run alongside much of the path. A naturalist would have a much longer list but for the amateur these give great pleasure.

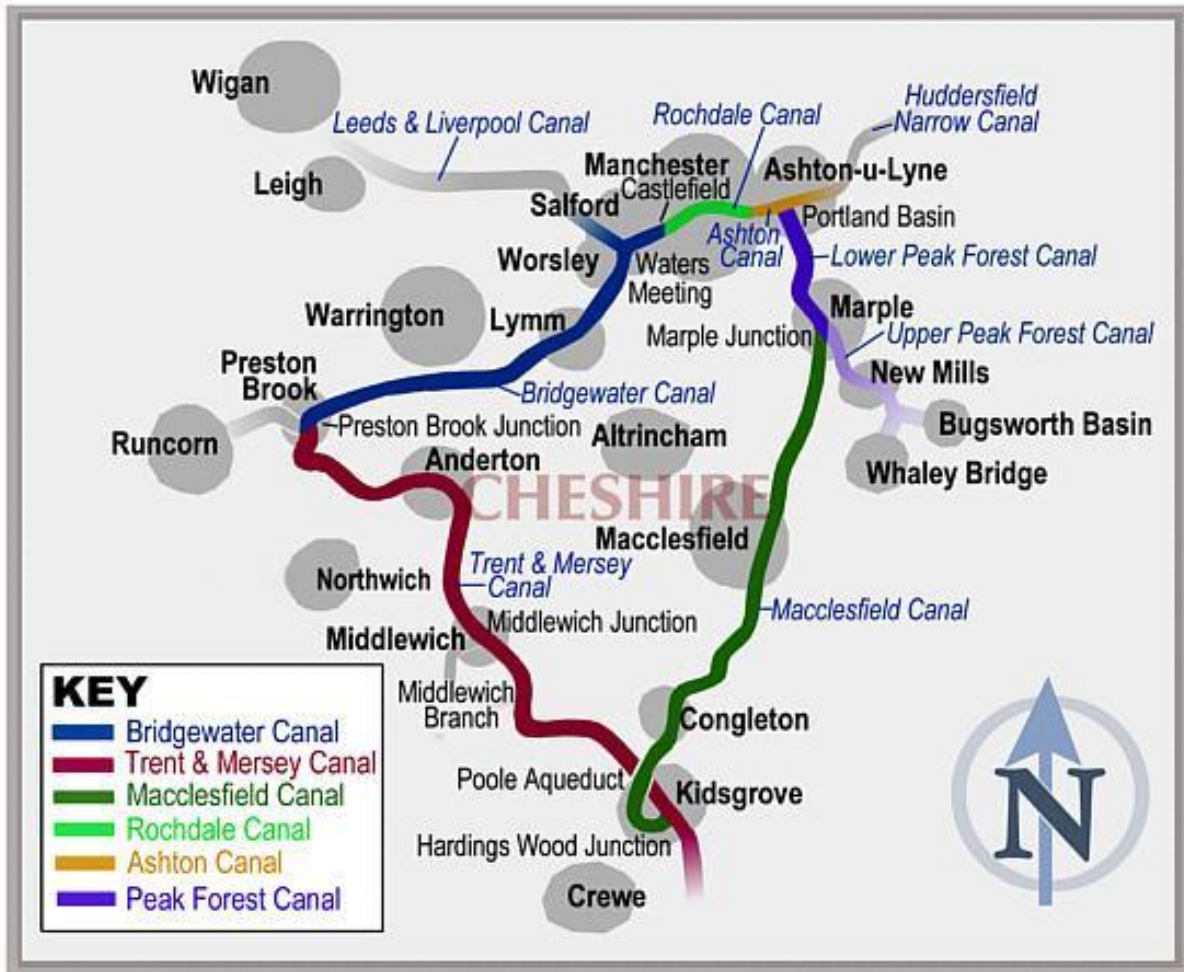


So I am not just writing about walking – it is a piece in praise of Pembrokeshire, its coast and mountains, its people and its history.



The coastal path at Parrog; the estuary and Newport sands

The Cheshire Ring



Our Cheshire Ring walk

Towards the end of 1992 we - Anne, me Jan and Dick – were wondering about walks for the following year. One of us suggested the Cheshire Ring, a triangle of canals that had been built for industrial transport in Cheshire and up to Manchester. Saved from decay in the 1950s they became a popular holiday route for long boats and because they needed a towpath for the horses that pulled the original boats they are good for walking too. Not much up and down of course. Lots of historical features. Varied countryside, town and city. Plenty of access points and pubs. We could do linear walks. Good guide books. So we planned a monthly outing to average 8 miles a time. $12 \times 8 = 96$. Perfect.

In all six canals contribute to the Ring - The Macclesfield, the Peak Forest, the Ashton, the Rochdale, the Bridgewater and the Trent & Mersey. We started our January walk (actually on 14th February but deemed to be January) at Kidsgrove, making a small diversion in the wrong direction to see the entrance to the Harecastle Tunnel where the water is stained orange from the ironstone rocks inside the tunnel. The intersection of the Trent & Mersey, which we were to follow that day,



is two side by side, obviously to increase the traffic flow. Another unusual lock in this section is a paired lock where water from a full lock could flow directly to its empty pair, saving half the water. This used to be important and the canal

with the Macclesfield Canal is interesting – one goes over the other before the locks that pass boats from one to the other. Today's section of the canal had many locks, some double, that



companies took elaborate steps to protect their water. The canal drops towards the Cheshire Plain and in the first 7 miles there were 26 locks. It was known as Heartbreak Hill by the boatmen going in the other direction. No problem for walkers though. We stopped for lunch at The Romping Donkey and finished the day in high spirits.

The second leg was, just, within the designated month – 27th February and took us to Middlewich. Not so many locks but lots of



small and large things to see. There were the mileposts - important to the boatmen and useful to us. There was evidence of the wear due to the ropes from the horses to the boats resulting in deep grooves in the metal bars that protected the brickwork of the locks.



Close by was the evidence of industry. There were flashes in the nearby fields – pools of water that had collected in the subsidence caused by salt extraction and warnings that the canal was very deep in places due to this. Some industries still operated so there were pipes across the canal, noise and smells. At Middlewich the Shropshire Union canal branches off, starting with a 100 yard section built and owned by the Trent & Mersey to ensure they



collected dues from every boat that passed through. Three closely spaced locks including a 90° bend combine to give a fall of 32 feet and continue the canal northwards. The next lock, named the Middlewich Big Lock, was built with enough width to accommodate wide beam boats directly from the Mersey Ports. We had lunch that day in the pub of the same name.



Days 3 and 4, late April and early May, took us to the end of the Trent & Mersey canal at its junction with the Bridgewater. We saw Spring flowers and smelt the garlic. There were more industrial works including the former ICI Winnington site where I had spent my study leave in 1980. Close to



that was the unique Anderton boat lift, built to lift a water-filled caisson carrying a pair of narrow boats from the River Weaver Navigation to the canal, 50 ft above. As we passed by it was still under repair but since has returned to full working order. Wonderful Victorian engineering.



Opposite was the marina where, with Robert and Judith, we had hired a canal boat for a week in 1984 and sprinted to the Pontcysyllte aqueduct and back. Then a mile further on was the first tunnel on our walk, the Barton tunnel. Open to boats but closed to walkers, unlike those at Chirk where I have walked through at dusk during a January walk with Angus – so dark inside that I had to rely on the handrail and hope there were no gaps. That day though we had to walk over the hill above the tunnel.



Legs 5 and 6 took us along the Bridgwater Canal past Dunham Massey to reach Altrincham. We had squeezed leg 5 into the Bank Holiday at the end of May and were joined by Claire. However walk 6 was at the end of July - our monthly plan had gone awry. But no more locks and a very wide canal. We saw the van de Graaf tower at the Daresbury Science Labs where a synchrotron radiation source provided X-rays to many different research stations for experimental use by chemists, physicists, and biologists from UK Universities. Recently it has closed and, controversially, its successor has been put at Amersham near Oxford. At Stockton Heath there was a well-attended narrow boat rally. We passed fishermen sitting at numbered spots – the highest was number 999 – and families of ducks. This was mild Cheshire countryside



but soon we would be in the city.

We also saw some signs of modern industry in three huge white storage tanks at Partington. Later, when leading a HAZOP training course at a similar facility near Bristol I found that they were one of the four LNG storage sites in the UK. Each site could hold up to 60 000 tonne of

reserve gas for dealing with winter peak demand or problems with other sources of gas. The methane was held as liquid at around $-165\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ and atmospheric pressure. Security at the Avonmouth site was impressive. But now – well Partington and two other sites have been decommissioned and are being demolished leaving only Avonmouth plus storage at the LNG importing sites. We have now chosen to rely on hand-to-mouth supplies from Algeria and other sensitive places.



Realising we were dropping off schedule we did the next 4 days within a three week period starting on the August Bank Holiday on 30 August. The first two took us from the edge of Altrincham into Manchester and through its centre on the Rochdale canal then out alongside the Ashton canal. A map on the side of the Watch House Cruising Club reminded us what we were doing. Further on we saw the early signs of the redevelopment of Salford Quays with old buildings being demolished and shiny new glass clad offices replacing them. We went under the M60 ring road – not complete as a ring at that date – with its unofficial murals competing with



one on a nearby blank end of one of the new buildings. We passed by the Old Trafford ground, saw the Pomoma Docks which form the Salford end of the Manchester Ship Canal and reached Castlefield Junction with its abundance of eating and drinking places for a late lunch.



We had heard grim stories about boats travelling through the centre of Manchester with advice to travel with locked doors and never leaving the boat unattended so we chose to do this leg on a Sunday morning. The start was great amongst the newly restored sections of Castlefields with its criss-crossing bridges, railway and tram lines then along the city centre towpath parallel to Whitworth St and close to the Main Building at UMIST where the Chemistry Department was housed when I had joined in 1963. At Canal St there is no towpath so we walked along the road before going underneath the Rodwell Tower, an 18 storey office block. We found an interesting poster along the way, not favourable to academics. No problems though and we got safely out to Ashton, passing many locks as the canals started to climb out of Manchester.





The ninth walk was between canal junctions. At the Dukinfield junction the then unnavigable Huddersfield Narrow canal branched off. It was reopened in 2001, is the highest navigable waterway in Britain, has 74 locks and includes the Standedge Tunnel – the longest canal tunnel – and connects with the Huddersfield Broad canal. We continued on the Lower Peak Forest Canal towards Romiley and Marple where the Upper Peak Forest canal went off on a 6 mile dead end to Whaley Bridge. For completeness we walked that another year. This was a great section running through the Tame valley with surviving mills, good scenery and easy access to towns and villages. There were interesting bits of canal operations – a lifting bridge, a turnover bridge where, when the towpath changed sides, the horse could walk round without being unhitched, old bridges with one dated 22.2.12 meaning 22 February 1822, an aqueduct which was 97 feet above the river and the even higher railway viaduct at 137’.





It ended at the impressive set of 16 locks at Marple which lift the canal 209 feet in total and average 13' 1" each. The deepest at 13' 3" gets into the top ten of Britain's deepest

locks. We took lots of photos from that day.

The next leg, Marple to Bollington, had more of the old canal features. We started by the last few locks of the Marple set, passing the old warehouse that had endured from the empire of Samuel Oldknow who in the 18th century was involved in almost every business in the area, then passed under the road using the oval shaped posset bridge, designed for horses, and turned right to head down the Macclesfield



canal to our original starting point. A conveniently placed milestone told how far we had just 26 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles more to go. Perfect for a marathon. In fact Robert and I had tried this in 1982 during my days with him in the Cheshire TallyHo Hare and Hounds but, with no special training, I only managed 16 miles in 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours; Robert got to about 20 before we prevailed on him to come to the pub with us. This stretch of the canal is a very popular with boat owners and for hire boats so we had lots to see with plenty of opportunity for food and drink.



Leg 11 is a mystery as there are no photographs and few memories that are not likely to have been conflated with those from the other times we have walked that stretch. The section covered was from Bollington to south of Macclesfield passing a couple more surviving mills and ending near the new industrial estate. The best part was the way the views open up to the hills in the east – White Nancy, Teggs Nose, Shutlingsloe and Sutton Common. What became clear was that our initial arithmetic was flawed. We needed two more walks to complete the ring: they were fitted in two months later in December. So we just achieved the target of completion within the year.

On 4th December we set off on the penultimate leg. Now it was cold but sunny. We could see Sutton Common with its communication mast on top for most of the way and Bosley Cloud stood out as we moved south. Lots of old canal structures including two derelict swing bridges and one working - at Oakgrove where it carries the Gawsworth road off from the A523. We also found many fine old houses nearby, some typical of black and white timbered buildings of Cheshire. We passed the 12 locks of the Bosley set and



crossed the River Dane on the canal aqueduct giving us a good view of the railway viaduct to the west and finished the day with a rainbow showing the crock of gold that awaited us when we completed – or was it over the Fool’s Nook Inn back by the Oakgrove swing bridge? The pub name by the way is attributed to the last jester at Gawsworth Hall, Samuel “Maggoty” Johnson who regularly drank his ale in a corner of the 17th century inn.



We did the final leg, now number 13, on December 21st, notable only as my sister’s birthday and as the shortest day each year, but at least getting us home before the year end. The hills and fields were transformed by a sprinkle of snow with Bosley Cloud now white instead of the black outline of the previous walk. There were more bridges, old stone posts and sets of planks to slot into grooves in case of a breach of the canal wall, distant viaducts and old farms along the way. There was another folly in view, the castellated top of Mow Cop. The single lock was at Hall Green, unusual in having only one gate at the exit and a drop of only one foot. It marked the end of the Macclesfield Canal and the return to the Trent & Mersey. Its purpose was to guard the water supply of the Macclesfield Canal. Now we were home, job well done, satisfaction set in and enjoyment in the memories. Time for the final pub lunch.





West Highland Way

Robert persuaded me that I should familiarise myself with some Scottish countryside by accompanying him along the length of the West Highland Way. Nothing too high and no compulsory Munros, some historic sections of old military road and splendid views alongside Loch Lomond and on the approach to Glencoe. We planned a gentlemanly walk. If we took 8 days the average would be around 12 miles. Anne and Judith didn't want to walk the whole way but were prepared to do bits with us and, crucially, Judith would take us to the start of each section, collect us at the end and drive us to our chosen accommodation for the night. Each day we only had to carry food, maps, camera and waterproofs. We did four sections in 1998 and the rest in 1999, choosing June in the hope of missing the midges.

The Way was the first official long-distance path in Scotland, opening in 1980. It starts in the lowlands just north of Glasgow at Milngarvie (say mull guy), passes the full length of the eastern shores of Loch Lomond with no accompanying road for half its length, then continues up the glen now with road and rail nearby. It crosses the inhospitable Rannoch Moor and approaches Glencoe, but diverts north over the Devil's Staircase to Loch Leven and finally to Fort William. A splendid mix.



Our first day, covering 12 miles, was from the prosperous Glasgow suburb of Milngarvie to the lovely little village of Drymen. Thomas was with us in 1998 and with Anne and Judith set out with us, soon leaving the city edge for the countryside. The trail took us through woods, past several small lochs, within a stones' throw of the Glencoyne distillery and through fields to the road to Drymen. At Carbeth Loch we passed by the Carbeth Hutters community, a collection of both old hand-built and newer ready-huts, which has been on the site since the

first three huts were built in 1920. Now it is a community of around 200 huts which at one time also had its own Lido. Recently the landowners, the Carbeth Guthrie Estate, set out to remove the huts, an attempt described in one Scottish paper as the Carbeth Clearances. The hutters opposed this and in 2013 an agreement was reached for the community to buy the 90 acres they occupy for £M1.75. Their future seems assured provided there are enough occupants for huts which have no piped water, chemical latrines and no electricity.

We had booked into a B&B in Drymen for the first two nights, run by the Balzico family. It had been recommended by a planner colleague of Robert's who lived in Drymen and whose wife had her pottery nearby. Despite there being a nice looking hotel overlooking the picturesque village green this, they had heard, was the place used by most WHW walkers. The B&B was an extended council house. The bedrooms were small; the en-suites were miniature, best suited as a training ground for contortionists. It was worse for Robert and Judith as Thomas was sharing their room. There were other walkers sleeping in the converted garage and in an outside shed/bedroom. We ate out in the evenings, once in a pub and once in the delightful house of Robert's friends. Anne declined the cooked breakfast after catching a glimpse of Mr Balzico turning the bacon using his fingers. Regretably no photos, only memories.

On the second day we walked the other way. Again it was around 12 miles. We drove north to Dubh Lochan, found a suitable car park and all set off walking south. When our three companions had done enough they returned to the car and Robert and I continued south alongside Loch Lomond to Balmaha and then over the aptly named Conic Hill back to Drymen and our unusual B&B. This was a very scenic section with great views over the loch and a nice climb of 500 ft to the summit of Conic Hill where we saw young adders warming themselves on a rock. Robert, an active member of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP), later its chairman and now a



Hon. Vice President, ensured we paid homage to the markers that commemorate the establishment of this first park. Since 2002 it has been incorporated into the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, one of two in Scotland – the other being the Cairngorms National Park. The

SCNP has set out a cogent case for more. Their website (www.scnp.org.uk) includes a link to its National Parks Strategy document and presents the case that at least three more parks should be created by 2015. The view of the Cobbler on the western side of the loch, photographed during our walk in 1998, shows the beauty of the area.



The Cobbler



Sculpture by Loch Lomond

The rest of the walk was done moving north. On the next day we resumed from Dubh Lochan up the east side of Loch Lomond to Inversnaid, about 10 miles. The footpath lay alongside the Loch, mostly in woods, but with plenty of gaps to see across the water. At Rowardennan we passed the footpath leading to Ben Lomond and resisted the diversion. After all, we had done it once before and Robert has done it several times since as a challenge to family and friends and, most recently, to himself to demonstrate his recovery from a 20' fall from a tree, six weeks of complete immobility on his back in Glasgow Southern Hospital and 3 months in a full upper-body brace. And when

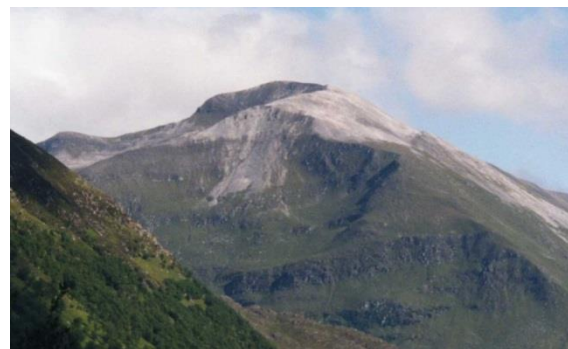
he was lying immobile on his back in hospital I was able to give him good advice – to tell enquirers after his health that he was looking up. After walking an early part of the day with us our transport group drove back through Drymen and up the west side to Tarbet and waited for us to cross the Loch by ferry. Then we drove a short way to the Ardlui Hotel – which describes itself as a small country house hotel wonderfully situated on the 'Bonnie Banks' of Loch Lomond with a superb view over this most famous of Scottish lochs. Whatever, it was bliss after our Drymen B&B.



Brian, Thomas, Anne, Judith & Robert

Next morning it was back to Tarbet and across the Loch to resume up the east side. The path hugged the shore, sometimes open, sometimes wooded but nearly always on rough ground either uneven stones or tree roots. It was the longest day of the first half of the Way, some 13 miles. After 5 miles the path left the side of Loch Lomond and went through Glen Falloch, alongside the river and past wigwam style bothies for hardier walkers than us and then by a series of waterfalls. We met up with the car party for lunch that day near the north end of the Loch. The road and railway also run through the Glen and eventually we crossed both to join the old military road on the west side of the valley. As we approached Crianlarich at the end of the day we even saw our transport moving to our rendezvous. We had tea at the station tearoom and moaned about the state of the public toilets. Our overnight stop was in Fort William as we planned to climb Ben Nevis next so we had the drive past Tyndrum, famous for the Green Welly shop, then the view point where it seems a piper always plays and finally, for the first time for Anne and me, through Glen Coe. Magnificent.

In Fort William we stayed at the Alexandra Hotel, centrally situated and very close to the railway station. It was memorable in a number of ways. Our room looked out onto a courtyard and there were noisy bins and ventilation fans out there. Worse was the incredibly loud snorer who kept us awake in the night. I even walked up and down the corridor to try to locate the room. No success. On the next day Robert, Judith, Thomas and I climbed Ben Nevis, whilst Anne stayed behind in Fort William. She complained about the room and the snorer. Reception checked the occupation of neighbouring rooms – there was nobody nearby us. It had to be a phantom. But Anne got us moved to a much better room for our second night. The other main memory was of the entertainment on our final night by a singer named Paula McCaskill. She was good enough that Anne and I got up and danced and I bought one of her CDs. We were celebrating getting to the top of Britain's highest mountain, Ben Nevis, – 4409' above sea level which is more or less where we started. Disappointingly we saw nothing from the top as trudging through the last bit of snow we ended up in the mist and rain. Of course it cleared on the way down and if we had been at the summit two hours later we would have had wonderful views. Then back to Kilbirnie until next year.



We resumed on June 29th, 1999, this time using just one hotel, the Alt-nan-Rhos at Onich. Our first day resumed from Crianlarich and we covered about 13 miles, passing through Tyndrum, to Bridge of Orchy. We then drove through Glen Coe to the hotel. It was easy walking,

sometimes on the cobbled surface of the 18th century military road. The Way shared the valley with the river, the road and the railway and now we began to see the mountains. Near the end the railway looped up a side valley in order to cross at a narrow place by a simple but impressive steel girder bridge on seven stone pillars.

Next morning we returned and resumed, again on the old military road, with a modest climb then briefly along a minor road before heading almost due north with Munros on each side across the mossy regions at the edge of Rannoch Moor. We were up to 1600' that day before descending to the main road and crossing to our rendezvous at the Kinghouse Hotel. It was a damp day crossing wild country with no shelter or easy escapes. The outstanding memory – German walkers cutting slices from a large sausage for their lunch.

Our third day was the shortest, the 9 miles from Kinghouse to Kinlochleven. The first 2 miles were close by the A82 road through Glen Coe then the Way turns north for the steep, zig-zag climb of the Devil's Staircase, a height gain of 850'. Sadly it was wet and we were in cloud most of the time so both visibility and enjoyment were low. Near the top is the Blackmoor reservoir, built to supply water via very visible overground pipelines to the hydroelectric plant at Kinlochleven. Originally built to power an aluminium smelter, now closed, it continues to generate for the national grid. The village is at the head of Loch Leven, a long finger connecting to the sea via Loch Linnhe. We were overjoyed that day to see Anne and Judith and be taken the 12 miles back to the comfort of the hotel and also to hear of their adventure. After dropping us at Kinghouse they saw a disconsolate young man wondering how to get back to his car several miles away. Jump in said Judith and so with a complete stranger in the back seat – a very nice German physiotherapist – they disappeared into the mist. They were not murdered.

Our last day was also the longest at 14 miles. It was easy, pleasant walking through forests and open moor, sometimes on the military road.

There was no great gain in height but there were mountains all around us. We arranged to meet Judith with the car at the main park at the foot of Ben Nevis where she had had another little adventure. The car park was full of big 4x4s and fit young men in running gear. It was the weekend of the 3 peaks event – that is Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowden in 24 hours. A strong walker would allow 5 hours for each peak and a fast but legal driver needs 10 hours. Arithmetic says something has to change there. Judith found she had driven into a blind alley in the car park and was fearful of reversing out and trying to get a space. Another man offered aid. Taking the keys he jumped into the driving seat and, with Anne still beside him, zoomed backwards and swung into the last space. Judith obviously spots gentlemen. As we sat over dinner a few hours later we saw the procession of 4x4s, no doubt packed with resting runners, rush past on their way to the Lake District and to the next, early morning, ascent. Rather than we thought.

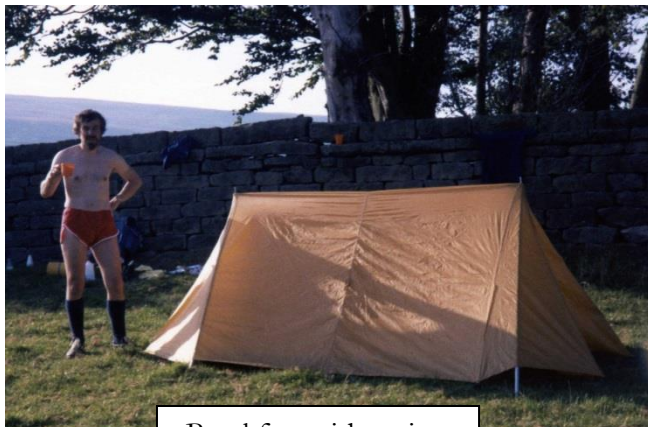
The next day was our reward. We had booked on the Jacobite steam train from Fort William to Mallaig and back, 84 miles in total. Splendid nostalgia and beautiful views. We had smoke and soot, tunnels to emerge from in a cloud of steam, windows we could stick our heads out of, views of Ben Nevis and other mountains, rivers and lochs, the famous Glenfinnan Viaduct and the Jacobite Monument. Worth all the walking.



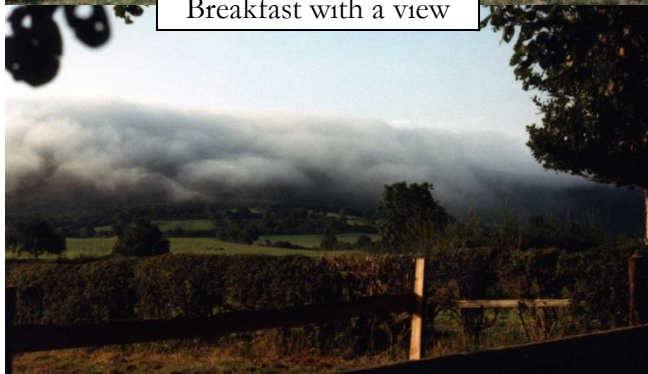


The coast to coast walk

It is cheating for me to include this. In 1981 Robert was completing the walk with his eldest son Owen and Simon and I joined them for the last two days. For us it was a short excursion with the bonus of providing them with transport at the end of the walk. Simon and I drove to Whitby and left the car there. We went out on the Esk Valley Railway to Battersby then walked south. In late afternoon we found an empty field on the edge of the North Yorks Moors and put up our (borrowed) tent by a wall, under a tree. We were amateurs. Next morning was sunny with great early mist in the valley. The plan was to meet Robert and Owen at Cringle End near Hasty Bank in mid-



Breakfast with a view



morning. No problems and just 40 miles to go for them. They had just done a 24 mile day in roasting heat, at times on melting roads – not fully enjoyed by Owen. Now we crossed to Cold Moor and then over Urra Moor and Blosworth, crossing to Farndale Moor. On one section there was on the old route of a railway giving a good level path, suitable in Wainwright's view for fast walking – but not by me with the load I carried. We paused at the Lion Inn at Blakey then headed on to the B&B booked for Robert and Owen. Simon and I put up our tent again in their garden and we all ate there that night.

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Meeting up



The next day was to see the end of the walk. Initially the path ran through the Esk valley, including a splendid 17th century footbridge, Beggar's Bridge. The railway also used the valley and at Grosmont I took a train back to Whitby to collect the car, taking Owen's rucksack as well as my own to cheer him up. From Whitby I drove to Robin Hood's Bay to meet them at the finish. By early afternoon I was there, looking for them by the slipway at the little harbour. No signs of them, so I set off to walk back along the route, out of the village heading north along the low cliffs above the North Sea. After 3 miles, nearing the end of the cliff path, they appeared and we all headed back to a triumphal finish. Robert's memory of that final section is caravan parks and such a bad neck that he had to brace his head as I drove us home. Owen's is probably of the long hard days in the middle of the walk but perhaps a sense of achievement from completing it. For Simon and me it was a fun outing, with our first camp together and great weather in a fine setting.



Robert and Brian on the way...



...Brian Owen and Simon at the end.

A final thought

How far have I walked in my lifetime? This is sort of question I ponder when unable to sleep. My estimate is 75 000 miles or 3 times around the equator. Other questions are distances for cycling, driving and so on. A less certain estimate for cycling is 50 000 miles. No figure for flying except it is more than I have walked. I must have driven at least 500 000 miles in the 60+ years we have had use of a car. The final mode is running. I have notes from the 20 years in which I regularly ran. They add up to 4600 miles. Just hope I don't have to update this for wheelchair miles.