

Liverpool Catholic Ramblers' NEWSLETTER

February 2004

Seventh Series - Issue 43

Ramblerite

A RAMBLE through a Derbyshire valley beneath limestone cliffs where the River Lathkill gently flows downhill from Monyash would be the normal walk description, but on last week's ramble the river was a spectacular raging torrent after the recent period of heavy rainfall. On this relatively dry but muddy afternoon, some of the riverside paths were flooded and we had to divert to higher ground, through the trees at times, but this didn't deter many other walkers to share this scenic valley with us. All three parties finished at Bakewell where the river was in full flood, and sandbags were evident on some of the riverside properties. As darkness fell, the heavens opened and hardly stopped for several days.

It was decided to cancel the walk to Conway the following week – the original reason was because only a handful of people had booked for the coach, but later in the week the Conway Valley was one of the main areas where roads and properties were badly flooded, so we could have had problems there.

In contrast, over the last few months, many of the walks have been relatively dry, but on a wintry walk on frozen ground in the Bolton Abbey area recently, the rain eventually came and certainly tested our waterproofs out.

Now with the Retreat on February 15th, the next walk will to Pendle Hill on February 22nd, and with daylight hours getting longer, we should have an abundant number of members out by then.

The outcome of those questionnaires given out to our coach users a few months ago (which didn't really reveal any one thing in common) was that it did prompt a number of members to come out again after hibernating for quite a while. There are some of us who come out walking almost every week but many don't, so the main action plan is to recruit more members to enable us to maintain a healthy rambling programme throughout the year. *Dave Newns*

RECRUITMENT POSTERS

OUR NEW POSTERS: "A dog loves to go for a walk – so do we!" should now be on display in some churches, libraries, etc. If you know of any place where one of our posters could possibly attract new recruits, then you could help the club by getting a poster from either the person in charge of the coach, or from Will Harris or Dave Newns.

Editorial

BECAUSE this newsletter is the first one for several months you will notice that the Seniors' Section have accumulated four ramble reports. Reports of recent General Section's rambles are only included in the Ramblerite of this edition so there's plenty of scope for more ramble reports. A member who joined our club in the 1990's has typed the following witty three-page story and it is well worth reading. Now, hopefully, there will be another edition soon, so don't forget that any one of you is invited to write something however brief. Meanwhile I am still working on abbreviating Albert Downing's marathon adventures: In Search of the Southern Cross. Albert can't get out these days but has an email address where you can have a chat to him at: albertdowning547@www.hotmail.com or you could text him on 07941829030.

Finally, give any articles for the next newsletter to me personally or post them to me at 7 Abbots Way, Billinge, Wigan WN5 7SB. Thanks. *Dave Newns*

NEW MEMBERS

WE WELCOME several new members who have joined us over the last few months. The most recent include Erin Linehan, Pauline Sweeney and Karen Delaney. We hope you all enjoy many happy years with us.

OBITUARIES

KATH BURNS sadly died a few months ago after being ill for some time. We offer our sincere condolences to husband John, relatives and friends. May she rest in peace.

MARY SMITH, best known for her association with the club's Tennis Section many years ago, sadly died recently. We offer our sincere condolences to her relatives and friends. May she rest in peace.

Finally my father (**Tom Newns**) died recently after a short illness. Thanks to everyone for your condolences, messages of sympathy and Mass Cards.

The Wainwrights and wrongs of fell walking



MOST fell walkers will have heard of the late Alfred Wainwright. For those who haven't, he was the man who not only climbed everything in the Lake District, from molehills to Scafell Pike and everything in between, but also wrote volumes about his adventures. I seem to remember he also made several television programmes about his exploits, all, no doubt, intended to entertain, edify, gratify and in my case, mortify! Let me explain: Dear old Alf was the master of understatement, and I made the mistake of trusting him. After all, anyone who is a published author and makes television programmes for heavens sake, must be taken seriously. Don't you believe it! If you have a volume of Wainwright tucked in your day sack and you intend to use it to gauge the suitability of casual days out, think again! Unless you are one of those people who have had their fear glands surgically removed at birth, then regard Mr Wainwright's accounts as fiction. Myself, I admit that not only are my fear glands still firmly in place, but that other people's were probably transplanted into me at birth and I admit that this colours my view of Wainwright's texts, but falling 600 feet down a cliff face will still severely abrade you whether you're scared or not!

I was a casual Rambler, by this I don't mean that I dressed in slacks and hush puppies and strolled to the end of the street and back, but rather, occasionally walked a reasonable distance over not too difficult ground. But there came a time when I decided to extend my horizons, both metaphorically and geographically; so I joined the Liverpool Catholic Ramblers. After one walk I was hooked. I bought proper walking boots, a bag, trousers and water bottle, everything, including Wainwrights Lakeland walks, which I read and re-read like a novel.

Having the odd day off in the week, I earmarked several walks that I intended to do on my own. One walk in particular caught my eye; a walk from Haweswater around a wooded promontory called the Rigg, up Rough crag, across long style to High Street fell, sounds easy doesn't it? Let me quote some of the phrases Wainwright uses in his books: 'no real difficulties here' or 'if one is circumspect' Phrases he uses a little too often if you ask me. But, I was seduced by his narratives and set off on my first lone walk.

I arrived at the isolated car park at the end of Haweswater, Wainwrights book was open at the appropriate page on the seat beside me. I could see the Rigg to my right including the footpath disappearing around the pines that shrouded it, making it look like a giant hedgehog sipping from the lake. I could see Rough crag and above it High Street, pewter grey clouds scraping the summit. I admit I felt a frisson of fear as I beheld this sight. Joining the two fells was the land bridge of Long Stile, I couldn't see it but I knew it was there.

I'd memorised the walk, a simple loop, Up onto the summit, a short walk along the old Roman road, a bit of chariot dodging then down Gatesgarth pass and back to the car park, kids stuff!

In his report about this walk Wainwright mentions the poignant story of the hamlet of Mardale Green. The ancient valley in which that community existed was to be dammed and then flooded, to create a new reservoir for the people of Manchester. He tells about his last visit to Mardale in the 30s where he found the local pub boarded up and the streets deserted. He paints a picture of the floodwater creeping up the valley, engulfing everything in its path. Two successive years of low rainfall had lowered the water level significantly, so that parts of the submerged hamlet were now re-appearing. I was quite excited at the thought of seeing this English Brigadoon.

I set off towards the Rigg on the way to the top of Rough Crag, passing a spot that was reported to be the best platform for viewing the ghost village. On the way I passed a

middle aged couple clad all in grey casual clothes, she leaning heavily on a walking stick and making very slow progress, unusually, the couple didn't acknowledge me as I passed, but just kept on with their slow, steady pace.

20 minutes later I stood looking out over Haweswater, the water level had indeed dropped dramatically, I could see successive tide marks where it had reduced in increments before levelling out to form a silt beach, it was here that parts of the resurrected village of Mardale Green could be seen.

I hadn't exactly expected to see rusting Austin sevens or bull nosed Morris's parked by the roadside or moss-green cottages with milk bottles still on the step, but I did expect to see more than the 1 or 2 courses of muddy bricks and assorted rubble that were all that was left of the cottages and farm buildings, what a disappointment! Fortunately this wasn't the only reason I'd come to the Lake District, I had Wainwright's walk to finish. I shouldered my bag and took one last look before continuing my way up Rough Crag. A glance down the trail saw the grey couple come into view, still picking their way slowly up the path. I noticed that not only had they not acknowledged me earlier, but they also seemed to be ignoring each other, he being several steps behind her as he'd been when I had first passed them. I got the impression that they were making a pilgrimage of some sort. They were not old enough to have been inhabitants of the village, but maybe their parents or grand parents had lived there. Anyway, they were going to be disappointed after their wasted climb - there was nothing to see.

I arrived at the summit of Rough Crag breathless and nervous, I'd just passed the part of the fell that overlooked the car park below, though not a sheer drop, the incline was such that a slip would have taken me all of the way back to my car, by the most direct route! After a short walk along the summit of Rough Crag I arrived at the start of Long Stile, this is the half mile long land bridge that joins the fells of Rough Crag and High Street. Starting at 2000 ft it drops to 1500 ft then climbs like a ski-jump with the take-off point 2800ft up in the clouds, the steep drops on either side of the path near the top make it a frightening sight, and with his usual flair for understatement Wainwright says this view is of: 'intimidating aspect', intimidating aspect? Do you remember I said earlier that I had felt a frisson of fear when I first saw the summit? Well, that had now turned into mild hysteria! But I'd come this far, so I had to at least try. After a steady half-hour climb I arrived at a point, perhaps, 100ft from the summit. You can't actually see the summit from there, but I knew from the book that there was a short gravel path that takes you the last few feet. Before that, there is a tumble of rocks that must be climbed to get to the path. It is at this point that Long Stile is at its narrowest with the drops into the valleys on both sides being not much more than an arms span apart, the drop into Riggendale being particularly frightening.

In all of the walks that dear old Alf describes, he always manages to mention any fatalities that have occurred - just in case you're not nervous enough already, Long Stile was no exception. Several years before he wrote his account, a schoolboy had fallen to his death, and earlier that century a huntsman had ran over the edge in pursuit of a fox and died from his injuries.

Several times I tried to scale this last section and several times I reached the narrow point, but always turned back, it didn't need a legion of demons to guard this bridge, the one I had in my head was doing an adequate job on his own. I sat amongst the rocks facing the obstacle. A full hour passed while I contemplated my next move. I realised that even if I sat there for a week I would never get passed that point.

Several minutes later I heard a sound behind me, coming up the trail, the way I'd passed more than an hour earlier, more walkers. I sat motionless waiting for them to appear, imagine my surprise when the middle-aged couple came into view, they hadn't been making a pilgrimage to Mardale Green after all. Once again they failed to acknowledge

me, or rather she did. She passed me without even a glance, a mixture of concentration and pain on her face. As the man drew level with me he gave me a half nod, then continued after his companion. I watched as she reached the start of the rock scramble and with the aid of her walking stick slowly started the climb, zig-zagging her way to the top. At one point a whipping wind caught her and made her lose her balance, the man quickly covered the few steps between them, but she recovered and raised her hand to stop him helping her. It was then that I realised what was happening. Probably through failing health she was making her last climb, and he, her husband, was making sure she was safe. At that point I felt a little ashamed of myself, a frail woman had done without hesitation, something that I would probably never be able to do. Minutes later they were gone, I imagined there would be a much tougher journey ahead for her - one that she would have to make on her own.

As I reclined on my rock seat I heard voices coming from above me, surely not someone making the descent on crutches - to heap further humiliation on me, It wasn't, but it wasn't much better. A young woman appeared from the rocks directly above me, it was that period several years ago when lycra cycle shorts were in fashion, and that's just what she was wearing, shocking pink, to match her nylon windcheater and elasticated hair band. A pair of pink and white trainers completed the outfit, the pink laces tied in impossibly large bows. The only concession she had made to the capricious Lakeland weather was to have the zip of her paper-thin jacket pulled three quarters of the way up. She skipped down the treacherous rocks arms out from her side for balance, doing a passable impression of a 1930s Busby Berkley starlet. I thought she might turn round and tap-dance her way back up the stone staircase while singing 42nd street, but she just stopped in front of me and said: Hiya!

Her partner appeared several second later. If she was Barbara Cartlands lovechild then he was a fugitive from the gang show. Dressed all in khaki. Baggy knee length shorts, a drill shirt, knee length socks and sensible shoes. He wasn't wearing a neckerchief or a woggle, but I just knew he would be an expert reef-knotter and sheep-shanker. He peered over the edge into Riggendale. "Wouldn't fancy taking a header down there" he said. "Lets have a look". She *did* tap-dance back up the rocks and stood beside him. Both of them stood bent over, peering into the abyss. "That wouldn't do you any good if you fell down there" she said. If you did fall, I thought, they'd have no trouble finding your body in that outfit! Seconds later Barbara Cartland and Russ Abbot were gone, he gave me a self-conscious smile as he passed, and she gave me a toodle loo wave. I heard them chattering away into the distance, totally unaware of how close they had come to falling to their deaths - no fears glands you see.

The pewter grey clouds turned to charcoal and I felt drops of rain on my face. That was the only excuse I needed to turn back.

Halfway back down Long Stile I found a path off the flank down to Blea water and a short cut back to the velour sanctuary of my car.

I thought that it might be my discomfort with heights that had been my problem with Wainwright, so I tried three or four subsequent walks from the book, but all turned out to be the same - Understated.

I remember seeing a photograph of Wainwright in his later years, sitting on a rock, pipe in hand gazing out over the fells, a benign smile on his face. I realise now that what I mistook for a benign smile was actually a sly grin. I don't believe that he purposely intended to put people in danger, he probably just assumed that, what was easy for him would present no problems to anyone else - or did he?

So if you intend to follow any of the walks in Mr Wainwrights book, take his assessment of their severity with a pinch of salt, ordinary salt that is, not Epsom salts, because when you're a thousand feet up a fell on a goat track that's going nowhere - they're the last thing you'll need!

Scenic Cynic

CHEESE AND WINE NIGHTS

The General Section's Cheese and Wine nights (plus music and quiz) on the first Thursday of each month prove to be the most popular Thursday club nights at the Ship and Mitre in Dale Street. Next one is on March 4th. Make a note in your diary.

KESWICK WEEKEND AT LAKESIDE HOUSE

The end of April – 23rd to 25th (a fortnight after Easter) is the date for the next club weekend away. Lakeside House is a large guesthouse on the corner of Lake Road in Keswick that specialises in accommodating walking groups. There is a huge drying room in the basement and bed, breakfast and evening meals have been booked for the weekend. Cost is £59.50 for the accommodation. Transport up there will be by cars, so if you haven't got a car, ensure that you can get a lift up there before booking.

Four Seniors' Section reports

HARROCK HILL – 16/11/2003

WE COULDN'T have asked for a better day for rambling and nine of us were of that opinion. We parked near to the entrance to the Fairy Glen and set off in high spirits. The low sun filtering through the trees, which was characteristic of the walk all day, provided that little touch of magic.

Having had such an uplifting experience we had to come down to earth and satisfy various bodily needs in a pub in Appley Bridge. Our way now took us along the canal bank that might conjure up some horrible images but in reality the surroundings were delightful. Leaving the canal at Bridge 42 we now had perforce to start ascending! However there were no complaints even though Peter's lunchtime had officially passed. In fact we soon stopped to eat close to a stream and far from the madding crowd.

The route from here is a gradual ascent to High Moor Lane and then through pheasant country and

eventually to Harrock Hill. The views were super, visibility for November being quite remarkable.

The leader at this point took an amazing gamble and told Lilian and anyone else in earshot that it was downhill all the way now and all experienced ramblers treat such remarks with cynicism. However, George was more or less right, something that doesn't often occur and we made a lovely descent, the setting sun lighting our way and casting those long shadows which are such a joy.

Soon Gerry was pointing out a notice on a byre door that tickled his fancy: BULLS KEEP OUT! Must be difficult to teach bulls to read!

Suddenly the footpath disgorged us at our parking lot and preparations were quickly made for our evening meal. No, not culinary preparations – directional ones.

Thanks to all who made it such a pleasant day.

GEFA

SENIORS' SECTION THREE-NIGHT BREAK AT DERWENT BANK, KESWICK

WE ARRIVED in a blaze of colour and departed in a blaze of colour – the days between were dawn to dusk sunshine.

Derwent Bank nestles in its own grounds – as its name implies, on the banks of Derwentwater, and it is a big myriad of stairs and passageways.

At first, and even later, one would encounter guests searching anxiously for their room – although all, I noted, soon found the most direct route from room dining room! The meals were excellent, and more than plentiful, be it breakfast, carry-out (even one upon leaving) or dinner, which every evening was a themed meal – Italian, Thai, etc, with the staff serving the food in the national costume of the evening, and the dining room decorated accordingly, all adding spice to the meal.

Holiday Fellowship had provided no less than four leaders, which meant that the walks were classed as low, medium, high/medium and high. The LCR was well represented on all walks except, if I'm not mistaken or misaligning anyone, the high, with the velocity required to achieve the height and

distance in the light and time available at this time of the year, our ageing limbs could not provide!

The nature of the walks varied considerably from the low – 8 1/2 miles: Rosthwaite, Stonethwaite, Seatoller and back to Rosthwaite; the medium – 1,500ft (7 miles): Lanthwaite (Crummockwater) Gasdale Fell, Coledale Hawse, Braithwaite, Dewent Bank: medium/high – 2,500ft (8 miles): Seatoller, Seathwaite, Sourmilk Ghyll, Green Gable, Windy Gap, Brandreth, Grey Knotts, Honister Pass by old toll road and back to Seatoller – all of which set us up for our evening meal.

The evenings offered us a choice of country dancing, quizzes, treasure hunt, and on the last night (Friday) a Limerick competition. These were written and placed upon a table, an offering to be placed on the one of your choice, the sum of which was to go to the Footpath Fund. This totalled over £53 and the LCR took second and third places. If the above walks had taken their toll, then one could just sit and relax in the lounge or conservatory.

It was a great break – the sunshine, the colours, but most of all, the company.

ANON.

MYERSCOUGH

THE MORE observant of you will be wondering how Norden, Rochdale, became Myerscough, Preston – this was not because of some cataclysmic tectonic shift, nor because of our esteemed Deputy Prime Minister's espoused version of Regional Assemblies – no, it came about because our Harry took a very painful blow to his left leg, which has left his perambulations somewhat restricted for a while. I understand that now the injured member is of such technicolor brilliance that no amount of digital photography could enhance the visual impact! Hope you are soon back with us on the walks, Harry.

Now, upon receiving this news, our rambling secretary was left with a problem to solve – no leader for the scheduled walk – until her eyes settled upon yours truly. With all due modesty I opined that there are more able leaders than I, but it was at this juncture that “she who must be obeyed” became “she who WILL be obeyed.” Hence you were cast upon my mercy.

Eight of us accordingly assembled at Myerscough Arms, all suitably clad for a fine warm sunny day – all, that is, except for one who arrived with his wife's boots in the boot, instead of his own! On a previous walk the same member arrived with boots, but without socks – I do wonder how he will fare in bare feet!

Enough of this preambulatory, let's start rambling. At a leisurely pace fields were crossed and streams forded until Mercyfield Wood was reached. Formerly this was an unspoilt, pretty wood, where a steepish path led down to a pebbly beck and ascended the other side, but now there are stair treads and a footbridge. Upon leaving the wood and entering a large meadow, we found an ideal spot for lunch, after which there was a prickly path leading to the banks of the River Ribble.

This was England at its best – cloudless skies, warm sunshine sparkling on the water, anglers casting flies, and swans and gulls bobbing on the placid Ribble. The broader canvas was spectacular, with the graceful curve of the river, green fields sweeping up to the broad shoulder of Longridge Fell, and ahead the bulk of Pendle Hill – a scene which neither Gainsborough nor Constable could possibly enhance.

Now we were at the furthest point from the start of the walk, and we sadly had to leave this idyllic area and find our way through a farmyard onto an ascending road which terminated in a Riding Centre, where a gymkhana was in progress – the countryside at play, from little girls on Thelwell ponies scooting over mini obstacles, to large ladies on huge horses moving sedately, like stately galleons.

Then it was homeward bound – until mid-afternoon break, which turned into a close encounter of the bovine kind – a mixture of bullocks and heifers, just curious at the invasion of their pasture. With a gentle wave of Amie's stout walking stick, they soon retired to a safer distance.

After a few more fields, paths, dips and hollows, the circuit was complete. A meal awaited us, leisurely taken, although unfortunately Pete couldn't stay – grandparently duties called.

Many thanks to those who came and made a most enjoyable group and day – especially as “she who was obeyed” enjoyed it as well – I hope!

G

DELAMERE FOREST

I SUPPOSE as forests go, Delamere is a minnow, even by British standards. In football parlance it wouldn't make the Third Division Liverpool Business Houses League – if that league still exists. Big or small, however, all forests have one thing in common (besides trees!) and that is the power to confuse and reduce man, for there are no focal points, no horizons, no church steeples, no electricity pylons – just trees and a vista of maybe a hundred yards. Even the sound is dampened and paths can veer imperceptibly until one becomes aware that the forest has moved the sun into a completely different place from the point of travel, so a back-track is required to restore it to the position ordained by the Creator. Hans Christian knew a thing or two about forests, but happily we did not have to resort to crumbs and pebbles to make our way.

This day, Delamere was anything but mysterious or capricious. After a miserable morning the rain had stopped before the start of the walk – the forest wore a fawn skirt, a green bodice and, with the sun breaking through the clouds, a tiara of pure gold. Unfortunately the sun had not reached her footwear. There is an old favourite square dance of our youth called ‘Dip and Dive,’ which was brought to mind as we slid and slipped our way to lunchtime. With Lilian's encouragement, a clearing provided a sunlit shelter from the sharpish wind. After our usual repast, Christmas cheer was enhanced by Tony Gilmore's home-made mince pies – and truly delicious they were, too. A man of hidden talents is our Tony.

With the flavour of the mince pies being savoured, the walk resumed, and on crossing the railway bridge a vague path on our left guided us to open heathland on the edge of the forest. Once in the open, the fields rose to the summit of Eldisbury Hill, the largest and most complete of Cheshire's Iron Age built forts – the only one to be re-occupied during the Dark Ages. It was re-fortified by King Alfred's daughter Aethelfleda in 914.

After a short stroll, Delamere's Visitors' Centre was reached and a short break was called, whereupon the ladies disappeared into a shop that turned the ‘short break’ into a long one! With the intent of a terrier entering a rabbit burrow the leader flushed them out, most reluctant, one even contritely, to resume the walk.

Re-crossing the railway, the intended path became impassable due to flooding, so a more populated one had to be taken which brought us to the edge of Blakemere and then across a road into the Forestry Commission's car park, which had been converted into a huge Christmas tree supermarket. Dads scratched their heads as big trees refused to go into small cars, which they argued earlier with sceptic mums would fit! The final phase of the walk was trodden as dusk vied with daylight for supremacy, as we left the forest to return to our cars.

G