

Lofthouse Walk Report, by Bob Howe - Thursday 3rd August 2017

09.30 found 12 Smelly's assembled in the rain outside the Memorial hall in Nidderdale.

Eleven of us were in Lofthouse, Ged had found another. After some phoned instructions he duly joined us and the dozen hardy souls were soon marching purposefully out of the bonny village in heavy rain for our first target, the How Stean Gorge.

The lovely Carol Kirkwood had promised "Heavy showers with bright intervals" and this proved to be the case as we wandered through the hamlet of Middlesmoor and onto the old drovers road over the moor top towards Scar House Reservoir, with repeated showers ushered through by a strong westerly. They say that "The Sun Shines on the Righteous" and this proved to be the case an hour or so later as we sat in warm sun eating our sandwiches and supping tea in a sheltered spot just above the Dam - it could have almost been Summer!

After crossing the Dam and marveling at its quality and scale, and admiring the obvious skills of our grandfather's generation, we climbed up the north side of the dale, through the remnants of the quarrying works involved in the mammoth build, with the wind at our backs.

After descending through a new plantation we followed the track demarking the division between the good land of the valley bottom and the more marginal land above until we descended again and crossed the dry bed of the Nidd at Imley Farm. In a few hundred meters we were "rock hopping" across the now flowing waters of the now visible infant Nidd towards Thorpe Farm - such are the vagaries of waterways Limestone country. Fine weather now escorted us back into Lofthouse and into the Crown for a pint. Mine host's comment that "Coffee was available at the café" and a sign discouraging children in the bar indicated that the 21st century has not necessarily penetrated this remote part of Yorkshire yet. Despite the weather it was, as they say in these parts, "A Grand Day Out". Taking a short diversion from the Masham road on our return home, a few of us visited the "Leeds Pals Memorial" on Breary Moor in Closterdale, slightly puzzled why it was so far from Leeds. This, well looked after, short stone tower is located, as we discovered, at the training camp in which the volunteers recruited in Leeds were housed and trained prior to going the Front. Ironically the camp was originally a construction village for the never completed "Closterdale Reservoir" similar the Scar House village location we'd passed earlier.

As you may know The Pals Battalions were an initiative to encourage volunteers in WW1 by promising that they would be fighting alongside their friends. A cynic would also say that the MOD knew that peer pressure is a great motivator. Kitchener also failed to foresee, or omitted to mention that the majority of the young men would also die alongside their Pals too as did some 750 of the 900 Leeds Pals involved the Somme. How communities, from which the lads came, coped with the subsequent loss of a whole generation of young men defies understanding. Their website quotes a soldier involved saying "Closterdale was the best of time of their lives", but it occurs to me that it was also possibly their last memory of the grandeur and beauty of this wonderful part of the country, Bob.