

Smelly Helly Thursday Walk - Arkengarthdale - 6th July 2017 - Report



This walk was devised and led by me (Alan Burton), starting and finishing at the Charles Bathurst pub (CB Inn), just north of Langthwaite village in Arkengarthdale. Those 'lucky' enough to accompany me can be seen in the photo above (yes, Ged made it!!).

Our enthusiasm for walking was greatly dampened by the torrential rain and flooded roads we drove through en route from Teesside, however this had reduced to a light drizzle on arrival at our destination so our spirits lifted accordingly, as did the cloud cover on the hills as the walk progressed.

The isolation and stillness of Arkengarthdale is deceptive, for until the beginning of the 20th Century the surrounding hills were mined for lead. The metal was first dug here in prehistoric times, but industrial mining of the great veins of lead really began in the 17th Century. Mining the west side of the valley was much more difficult than on the eastern side. This was an area known in the 19th Century as the 'Hungry Hushes' - the lead being mined here was scarce and hard won. It would need a feat of imagination to visualise the mining activities in its heyday.

The road running through Arkengarthdale runs north-south, and the first half of our walk concentrated on the area to the west of the road, with the second half covering the area to the east.

Not far from the car park we passed a small octagonal building in the middle of a field. This was a powder house and served the Octagon Smelt Mill, traces of which can be found nearby. Lord of the Manor Charles Bathurst held the mining rights in this vicinity for much of the 18th Century, and the CB Inn where we parked is named in his honour.

We climbed steadily up the west valley side (Whaw Edge) until we reached the top of the ridge, then headed in a south-easterly direction along the ridge, threading our way along a desolate track through an eerie landscape of spoil heaps, bell pits, disused shafts, etc, left over from the mining era. From this ridge we should have probably visited 'Great Pinseat', being the highest point in the vicinity (lesson No. 1 for me), however on this occasion we stuck to the planned route.

Eventually we dropped off the ridge and made our way down to the farm at Bouldershaw House, then continued downwards through some rather boggy fields until we reached the pretty village of Langthwaite, being the location for our first stop, and two hours into the walk.

Now as luck would have it, the pub was open!! We thought it would be rude not to, so some sampled the local ale whilst others made do with tea, and it was no surprise the ten-minute rule was broken (smashed).



It was as well we were fully rested, as the second half of our journey commenced with a steep climb up to the hamlet of Booze (where there was no pub). Now just a cluster of farm buildings, this place was once a thriving community with more than forty houses.

Dave and Bob (with Barney) left the main group at this point for a shorter route back, Dave having a prior engagement and Bob recovering from a knee injury and mindful that Barney was starting to tire. On their way back they had an interesting encounter with 'Adrian' Mole, whilst we had a brief sighting of a well camouflaged 'Freddie' the Frog higher up the valley.



After Booze we continued ever upward through fields and along tracks, our destination being Sleil Gill. Along this route we passed the arched entrance to a 'level' (which Keith established was half flooded) and behind it the remains of Tanners Rake Hush. The valley of Sleil Gill is full of tumbled rock, left behind when the dammed stream at the top was allowed to rush down, exposing the lead veins.

Further up the Gill we passed more evidence of other excavations into the valley side, of course requiring further investigation. The upper reaches of the stream with its miniature waterfalls and ample vegetation was very picturesque, and eagle-eyed Steve assured the rest of us that he'd spotted a dipper going about his business.

The top of the Gill eventually gave way to open moorland, which was remarkably dry underfoot considering the recent rainfall. Finding a suitable spot, we had our second stop for lunch.



Our return route was back across the open moor, and although the planned route was generally adhered to, it was here that slight changes were made for the benefit of all, as words of wisdom from the Smelly Elders were imparted regarding 'maintaining elevation' (so that in the unlikely event of me ever being asked to plan a route again I would be mindful of this!!) (lesson No. 2 for me).

Eventually we reached the edge of the ridge, where we could look down into Arkengarthdale again. After a fairly steep descent and then skirting round a small plantation, we found ourselves walking through the beautiful gardens of Scar house, a shooting lodge which was built in 1845 on the site of a Norman manor. It was built by Gilpin Brown Esq., who then owned most of the lead mines in the area. Between 1930 and 1952 it was owned by the Sopwith family (think 'Sopwith Camel', 'America's Cup'), and more recently owned by the Duke of Norfolk. I understand from the Learned Smelly Elders that it is now owned by a Norwegian gentleman.

From Scar House it was a short walk to our cars, then time for a relaxing pint in the garden of the CB Inn, where Bob and Barney were patiently waiting for us.



The distance covered was approx. 10.4 miles, and ascent approx. 2100 feet.

Lessons learnt:-

1. If you're going up, you may as well go to the top !!
2. Maintain elevation wherever possible !!

Note:- More photo's on the Smelly Helly website.

Report by Alan Burton