

Teesdale Walk (Part 2) 16th July 2016 Report
By
Bob How



Surprised early morning dog walkers greeted our heroes as they strolled around the lovely village of Gainford prior to setting off on what would become known as Tees Walk (part two).

Armed only with the traditional flasks & sarnies our, almost exclusively pensioner, eleven boarded the Arriva bus brandishing bus passes for the first stage of our adventure.

Muffled cries of "How Much" came from Lenny who'd ignored his own entreaties and forgotten his pass - couldn't help chuckling Len - sorry!

Pausing only for a visit to McFarlanes butchers in Barnard Castle to reinforce our food supplies we jumped on the Scarlet Band bus (more expense Len) and arrived in due course at our first objective - Middleton in Teesdale in coolish weather to start our trek.

Within minutes we encountered our first problem. To cross or not to cross, the bridge that is, we'd managed the road.

Bridges were to prove problematical all day as we were to discover.

Maps, course notes and GPS's were interrogated and a decision was arrived at.

I think it was to follow the Teesdale Way waymarkers, but I could be wrong, but anyway we set off downstream, which seemed right.

The track temperature and prevailing forecast dictated that we would follow a 'Two Stop Strategy' (Lunch & Afternoon Tea), but this could change due to showers or possible Safety Car intervention and there would obviously be several inevitable "Splash & Dash" stops in the interim. It's an age thing I'm told.

Now I may be wrong, but I seem to recall someone saying that it's a riverside walk so that's all reasonably flat and generally downhill, well after the third set of steps and some serious climbs I was beginning to doubt this advice.

The weather however had warmed up and was perfect with a good following breeze.

The Durham Dales really are the Land of the Prince Bishops or God's Country.

Glorious scenery and our only company apart from cows, sheep and a very friendly sheep dog were a few like minded folk on a similar, but reverse, mission.



Approaching lunchtime we hit our second problem - a choice of three routes. A path, a stile or a gate, all of which looked well used.

Again the navigators huddled and the stile was eventually chosen and led to a cracking lunch stop with spectacular views of the distant Cotherstone and sunlit moors stretching as far as the eye could see.

It occurs to me now that Cotherstone is on the river, so why was it so distant.

In a flash, or so it seemed, lunch stop was over (McLaren could learn things from Len) and we were off again, cleverly avoiding a flanking maneuver by a herd of cows and following the designated Teesdale Way route towards Eggleston.

I say following, but we did happily avoid a big climb by invoking the spirit of Ray Stevenson and take a more direct route to the village.

We failed unfortunately to take advantage of the advertised tea room above the bridge and continued along the valley bottom for a while past a redundant cricket pavilion in ever improving weather towards Barnard Castle which we eventually reached after lots more steps and a Ray Mears style battle through giant wild Rhubarb.

Barney' was now mobbed and after a brief stop to replenish our water supplies we reached the local Rugby Field where we narrowly avoided a potentially violent exchange of words with the groundsman thanks to Ian discovering an alternative route.

The weather still held good, but the going slowly deteriorated and saw our brave lads battling their way through shoulder high nettles and thistles. Being tall is definitely a bonus here.

A good tip is to position yourself towards the rear of the group and follow the inevitable Elephant Track.

I seem to take this position naturally as I struggle to keep pace with the sprinters - 'twas ever thus!

Our next objective was the old Chain Toll Bridge at Whorlton which we duly attained, only to be told that we shouldn't be there, but half way back up the hill.

A mutiny was narrowly avoided by the promise of an imminent afternoon tea stop.

This proved to be no idle promise and as we sat enjoying tea and sarnies with our feet cooling in the river the thought came to me that life doesn't get much better than this.

Battling on again through more crap paths we eventually encountered the old railway bridge which crossed both the river and what looked like our path.

Fortunately the navigators amongst us had sussed this out and after a slight detour along the disused railway and road over final objective, Gainford, came into view.

We had a brief 'Did Yer Know' moment when we discovered that Stan Laurel of Laurel & Hardy silent movie fame was educated at Gainford.

It seems a big step from a quiet Durham Dales village to Hollywood fame, but one he made.

Our steps where thankfully over for the day, so with promises of Part three next year and aching limbs we concluded another Epic Smelly day.

Thanks to Lenny and Steve for their organisation and for the weather gods for smiling on us.

The end of another truly Grand Day Out with great weather, fantastic views and the company of good friends.

Cheers Bob