

The Smelly Helly Swale Way Walk Story

Part 1 - 13th July 2019

After a resounding triumph over the turbulent Tees, the Smelly warriors turned their attention to the sparkling Swale.

Now most rivers start at a tiny spring and eventually disgorge into the sea, not so the Swale.

So our mixture of age and experience supported by even greater age and experience started our first day, high on the Pennines on a bright morning at the confluence of Birkdale beck and Great Sleddale beck to witness the birth of our river and collect the sample of its lifeblood.



We were greeted by splendid weather and the delightful smell of new mown hay as we progressed through the upper dale fields towards the ancient hamlet of Keld and the footbridge which marks the junction of the Pennine way and the Coast to Coast walks above the mighty Kisson Falls. This seemed like a good spot for a cuppa so we took advantage of the

opportunity to rest our legs.

Processing on to the ruins of Crackpot Hall and inspecting the carcase of a grey Fergy en route we pondered what life must have been like for the lead Miners who lived and worked around here in times past.

Incidentally, they benefitted from what must rank as the best views in the country looking south east down the valley, with Muker in the distance.

Next came Holme Bridge which we avoided, keeping north of the river and onto the tiny community of Ivelet and Lord Peel's shooting Lodge and so, through lovely the dales meadows, with their iconic stone barns to the old mining hub of Gunnerside, which was the original end point of the first day, but we'd made such good time that the Elders concluded that this was a bit too soon to go to the Red Lion and so we reluctantly continued down the dale to Isles Bridge and paddled our feet in the



cool waters before returning to the pub in Gunnerside for a well earned pint after a truly grand day out.

Part 2 - 12th June 2021

So our merry men find themselves back at Isles Bridge on a bright sunny morning. The forecast is for a warm day and the general feeling is positive. The Swale continues its eastward path oblivious of its watchful followers on the southern bank.



After a brief stretch of tarmac, we join one of the many walled narrow dales farm roads to Low Whita where we pick up more tarmac, then field paths generally following the river floodplain until we're in sight of the pub in Grinton.

At this point our leader indicates a sharp climb away from the river

(and the pub) up a grassy field leading to Grinton YHA.

It's now pretty hot and our leader announces a Tea Break in order to quell the mutinous undertones.

With déjà vu, it could be argued that there was a case here for the trades description act as the Swale Way will now not to approach the river for many miles.

We soon turned east again and followed a good path until we reached Elerton Scar which had several ways up, but none of them easy in the midday sun to Ellerton Scar Clump, a curious walled, circular plantation which we investigated to no avail.

Our next rest was taken in Downholme, within staggering distance of yet another pub (unvisited despite soaring temperatures).

From here we followed a high-level path through meadows and woodland until we reached the notorious Hudswell Steps, which we carefully avoided and dropped into Richmond via a



cheery couple's front garden with a magnificent view of the castle ruins.

Dropping down a steep road, you'll never guess what we found, yes the river Swale, still running freely under the road bridge.

The subsequent climb up to the marketplace was only made possible by the thought of a pint at the top, but alas all the pubs were full.

Aagh what to do.....

The day was saved by Keith who led us to a splendid pub with an even better view of the North side of the castle and a well deserved pint.

What a good day we'd had.

Part 3 - 25th September 2021



The third part of our river journey started with the usual convivial bus trip ending in Richmond Market Place.

Studiously avoiding the epicurean delights of Taylor's famous Pie shop we made our way over the river and onto the grounds of the old station. Opened in 1846 as part of the York and Newcastle line, it was

eventually condemned to close in 1963 under the Beeching cuts. In its time it was vital to the working and supply of men and materials to the nearby Catterick Garrison.

Such was the uproar at closure, that it remained open till 1969, when it joined many other lines on the basis of cost saving. Another Tory cut to nationalised industries I hear you say, but you'd be wrong. It was good old socialist Harold Wilson who signed it off!

But I digress.

We now picked up the pace along the old track bed on the south bank of the Swale with views of the ruins of Easby Abbey across the river, erstwhile home of the Premonstretian "white friars" leaving the old railway just before it crosses another Stevenson family bridge.

Our route then took us through an area of current and disused sand and gravel pits around Catterick Bridge. Many have now been converted to lakes, for leisure activities.

Lunch was calling by now and we took time to explore St Mary's Church in Bolton on Swale with its poignant memorial to Lt. Col. Henry Pulleine, who was 2nd in command of the British force annihilated at Isandlwana in the Zulu wars in

South Africa in 1879. The battle was a prelude to the famous stand, depicted in the film Zulu. At this point we were pushed away from the river by the grounds of Kiplin Hall estate for some time. A long dog-leg followed, which ended in another stop on the green at Great Langton, only to be pleasantly surprised by the appearance of Ray, on his bike, who journeyed out to greet us.



With the river still a distant memory we pushed on again, mostly over tarmac, in warm sunny weather through Thrintoft to our goal for today, Morton on Swale, and a refreshing pint in the Royal George, having completed another section of the Swale Way.

Part 4 - 26th February 2022

After the now familiar coach trip we left Morton on Swale in good spirits and fine weather and followed a good farm road for a while until we eventually reached our target, the River Swale.

At this point it is heavily embanked which pays tribute to its flow in flood, as did the tide mark line of debris barely a foot below the top of what must be a 15 foot dike.

What was apparent was the area surrounding, now protected, which must have suffered significant inundation in the past.

After following the meandering river for a mile, and pausing for a bite in Maunby, we eventually reached the twin villages of Kirkby Wiske and Newsham. Crossing a road we realised our numbers were short and a search was made of the route to find two of our number wandering aimlessly in the wrong direction. No harm done though and we were soon reunited and stood admiring the isolated, impressive ceremonial gates and associated cottage.



These had formed a splendid entrance to the local Manor House, now long since demolished, apart from the old stable block which now is home to the Thornton stud farm. Another few miles of wandering along field paths saw us approaching civilisation, in the

form of the market town of Thirsk.

I seem to recall bashing my head on a tree branch en route, can't remember where, and hence entered the inevitable splendid Little 3 Thirsk pub with a plaster on my head after benefiting from the medical expertise of my splendid companions.

Yet another grand day out.

Final Part - 28th April 2022

Our aged gang convened again on a cool morning in Boroughbridge eagerly awaiting our coach to take us to our starting point in Thirsk.

As our 8-seater coach arrived, our leader suddenly realised we in fact numbered nine!

As a penance for his error Len had to sit on the floor all the way to Thirsk.

Waiting for a latecomer, some of us fell victim to temptation and some splendid Bacon sarnis were devoured.

Not really a hardship.

Our route now started to follow a watercourse, no, not the Swale - the Cod beck. The Swale was to prove to be elusive for most of the day.

After a few miles we stopped in Helperby for a snack taking advantage of the old covered well in the centre of the busy village to rest our weary legs.

Our route now took in a fair bit of tarmac and a couple of manor houses as we pushed south still searching for the elusive Swale.

The most impressive of these estates was Myton Hall, home of the Morrison's family. There's obviously plenty of money in supermarkets, as the splendid house and parkland indicated.

Myton Bridge is also remembered by our group for confronting the Swale, at last and for the eponymous battle with the inevitable Scots in 1319.

The tough, battle hardened jocks, were opposed by a rag bag mix of volunteers and priests from York.

The result was 10 - 0 to the Scots, with a dreadful loss of life on the Yorkies side.

Within a mile or so, we reached the end of our Swale travel when it was joined by and became the Ure.



Journeys end? Well not quite. We now followed the Ure upstream for a few miles to Boroughbridge and a very welcome and incredibly cheap pint of delightful Rudgate Yorvik Blonde Ale in the centre of yet another busy Yorkshire Market town. Our Swale trek all done, it only remains for the Elders (whoever they are.....) to set another task for our weary walkers.

