

Trevor

W. R. MITCHELL, MBE
18 YEALAND AVENUE
GIGGLESWICK
SETTLE, NORTH YORKS.
BD24 0AY
Tel. (01729) 822371

RAVENS OVER WANSFELL

20 July, 2005



Expedition members: David, Cyril, Terry, Trevor, Bill.

Not forgetting Popsie and Sprout.

Weather: Gradely. Sunshine and shadows (not showers).

Cool westerly breeze.

With a full complement of five, plus rucksacks, anoraks and boots, and with two dogs in the back, there was a severe test of the suspension. David (duty chauffeur) began to collect members shortly before 9-00 and phase one of the excursion ended with a prolonged ringing of the bell on Trevor's door. (Watches had been synchronised, but Trevor believed he had to be ready at 9-10). We collected Terry at Langcliffe and made our way to the straddling village of Troutbeck via Ings, a narrow but high-lying road offering those not driving the vehicle a prolonged look west to the blue remembered hills of Lakeland.

David squeezed his vehicle between a wall and a lorry delivering booze to the Mortal Man. A handy parking place was found in a "no charge" zone, handy for the aforementioned pub, which we classified as Watering Hole of the Day. Bill was entranced by a weather vane featuring a seated man with pipe and pint and another man, his left arm raised. From one angle it looked as though he was drawing the seated man's attention to a television aerial. The dogs, which had been patient during the hour-long journey, explored their surroundings and left their scents.

We set off down the village, one side of the road having some ancient, inbuilt wells and a profusion of flowers – the stately spires of rosebay willow herb (also known as "fireweed") and lots of foxgloves, their flowering season almost over, so that they stood with largely vacant stems, looking like spent fireworks.

Nanny Lane gave us a quick, steep access to the fells. Bill photographed a mass of sheep in a farmyard, with a grey-slatted building and some more blue remembered hills beyond. (Wanting to know the identity of the sheep, which were big, with ^{white}grey faces and legs, he was told to make a choice from herdwick, Swaledale, Texel and Leicester, each breed having emissaries in the valley).

Page Two

More flowers – thyme, harebells galore, a few tufts of bell heather. A Toledo RAF trainer offered us a fly-past. Bill recalled that at chapel recently a hymn had been sung to the Dambusters' theme. Up, up, up we went. Then the lane levelled out. A sign on a stile indicated the main path (to Ambleside). We stayed on the lane, which now was truly a green lane, the ground being composed of grass or rushes. David said a green path was now a rarity in the Lake District. Near the junction – and pointing up the green stretch – was a sign on the ground composed of pebbles placed side by side. They spelt out the word DOOM and a large pebbly arrow directed attention to it.

We looked back on the narrows and south basin of Windermere. David claimed to have seen the wash from the ferry boat. A step stile gave us access to the approach to the Wansfell ridge. David, helping Sprout to surmount the steps, placed his hands on the dog's rump, which was somewhat moist. He would have to wash his hands before eating his sandwiches. When we mustered on the other side of the stile, Sprout was chewing Popsie's stick. We delicately negotiated a narrow watercourse that was virtually obscured by tall vegetation. Sprout moved at speed down the watercourse. A minute later, he/she was rolling in a bog. Ugh.

We walked through an area of rock outcrops, of coarse grasses and rushes, where drystone walls formed a futuristic pattern on the landscape and, at one steep slope, we ^{saw spade} ~~by~~ an unmistakable track where an ATV (All Terrain vehicle) had wiped its feet. One or two Swaledale sheep with well-grown lambs at foot were sent scuttering away. Eventually, after scrambling at a wallside and puffingly climbing a rocky slope, we attained the Wansfell Ridge – and saw virtually all the fells of central Lakeland, with some of the Coniston Group and the unmistakable dome of Great Gable protruding above a ridge on the horizon. There was some dispute about the identification of Rydal Water.

The sight of Red Screes reminded Bill of his first excursion with Bob Swallow, founder of the Blunderers, nearly a quarter of a century ago. Bill was incinerating cigarettes by the yard. The screes were red and he had a red haze in his eyes before he reached the top and was then treated to the “delights” of Fairfield Horseshoe.

As we walked on the ridge, we stopped now and again to admire a view to south and east that took in Ingleborough and stretched to Morecambe Bay and the Kent estuary. A skylark soared and sang. We cheated the breeze by buttying in the lee of the ridge's imposing wall at a place where there were some handy flat stones on which to sit.

Sandwich census: Bill – bacon, tomato, lettuce (from t'Co-op). Terry – Corned beef with Branston pickles. Trevor – Peppered beef. David – pilchards and crisps (with Zest for the dogs). Cyril – ham rolls. Terry, a stickler for tradition, distributed slices of Victoria sponge cake that had been freshly made by his wife Jean. Thanks, Jean.

Page Three

There followed an air display. First – a RAF jet, flying dead straight, with a whine and a whoosh. Then at least two ravens, circling and soaring, using the updraft rather than beating wings. They were also uttering deep croaks. One of the ravens, possibly a young of the year, alighted on a walltop some 35 feet away from where we sat. Later, it seemed to like our company, circling, rising, descending and again alighting on a wall, one resting place being no more than 25 yards away. Joke of the Day: “That raven must be ravenous.” Can’t remember who said it.

We decided to descend on what appeared to be a stony path but which turned out to be what remained of an old wall. We found a more traditional type of path and moved haltingly over uneven stones to where we reached the greensward leading to a lane which would provide us with our return to Troutbeck village. Sprout put up a cock wheatear. Down at the lane, we walked through a succession of entrancing views of the high fells, including Crinkle Crag and the Langdale Pikes. We beheld Windermere, with its many inlets (and absence of fast motor boats). And we saw farmland, with a white-washed farmhouse, several barns with stepped gables, sheep, a chestnut horse (Arab) and three black fell ponies, with a black foal.

And so to Troutbeck, once austere, now bedecked with window boxes, hanging baskets of flowers, techni-coloured gardens and, doubtless, a few garden gnomes. Having invested in liquid assets, we adjourned outdoors. The dogs slept. Popsie had rested its head against one of the table supports.

