

Trevor

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## THE BIG BLUE HILL

(as the poet Laurence Binyon called Ingleborough)

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*The hill-walkers:* Cyril, David, Terry, Trevor, Bill – and Popsie. )— Total age? 364 years.  
*Weather:* Sunny, dry, sneaky north-west breeze.

Of course, we asked Cyril for a forecast as we travelled, sardine-like, to our starting point near a heap of discarded asphalt, now set hard as iron, in an off-road space not far from the Hill Inn. He said: “You can see what it is. This is it.” David drove us through North Ribblesdale. We marvelled at the form and tones of the big drumlin field at the dalehead. Drumlins? Big, rounded heaps of muck left by a melting glacier. We saw Ingleborough in shadow, like a big black cut-out pasted on the sky.

Trevor was amused by road signs, set vertically on a tall post. The first indicated the gradient near the Hill Inn (1 in 10) and the second was – a duck! Low-flying duck? Duck on the menu? Adjacent duckery? Who knows. We walked on a sheep-cropped turf that stood out bright and green against the big black hill. Popsie was soon up to her stick routine. As we turned to use the broad green way between two limestone pavements (from which sprouted now leafless ash trees) we saw a group of schoolkids ahead.

There were no signs to warn us of beef cattle – nine of them – introduced as part of a return to an old form of husbandry, grazing the rough grasses and, theoretically, leaving fine, short, succulent stuff for sheep. We passed a mini-tarn, fringed by rushes, and the biggest swallow-hole in Yorkshire, now mostly in shadow. (Years ago, a pair of ring ouzels nested in the limestone bit at the bottom of the hole).

We climbed a stile, our feet encountered a flagged way (redundant flags from a Lancashire town) and clumped on a wooden stretch of walkway. More flags, icy – a man-made glacier. We walked at times on the rough grass and boggy stuff beside the path. One large piece of

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flag, in a wet area, moved underfoot – an ebbing and spurting stone. We were told off in a series of croaks from a raven.

As we climbed, the views improved. Westwards, Morecambe Bay, with Arnside Knott and, distantly, Black Combe. North-eastwards, an unidentified big hill which later, as more features came into view, turned out to be Mallerstang Edge. Just before we reached the shadow line, we found the school party resting from their labours. Popsie, after some prompting, gave them a display of how to find a stick. Just before we reached the near vertical climb to the ridge leading to the final gradient to Ingleborough summit, we stopped at a big boulder, a dual purpose job – Cyril's table/Terry's seat. Coffee and cake <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ served.

So to the tough stuff. There was the usual realisation that, though from a distance the hillside seemed vertical, it was rather less than that when viewed from the base. And instead of scree or slippable earth, there was an erratic staircase – a cross between a climb and a crazy paving – rising high above us. Bill found himself thinking of Thora Hird's chair-lift, advertised extensively on telly. He had last seen Thora on her chairlift after her death. She featured in an affectionately devised cartoon in *Private Eye* – sitting on her chair-lift, going up to heaven.

Seven walkers came briskly down. They were Three Peakers, working clockwise, taking Ingleborough first, hoping to end the walk at a pub. (Bill was reminded of the two men he met who had started from a hostelry at Horton, crossed Ingleborough to the Hill Inn, where they intended to imbibe before returning to the hostelry at Horton – a three-pub outing). The view was improved. David chanted out the names of Lakeland hills as though he was reciting a litany – Howgills, Coniston, Wrynose, Pike o'Blisco, Great Gable, Scafell. Whew!

We attained the top of the climb as two middle-aged climbers approached. The lady said: "It's no day for <sup>o</sup> tallying; you can't have an excuse to stop and stare." Sad. We pass through a gate to where another flight of steps is seen – this time composed of stone setts (probably made redundant at a Lancashire town and air-lifted to their place on the side of Ingleborough). Penyghent could be seen in its complete majesty. In view to the right was Fountains Fell. Bill mentioned a link with Italy. Eh? The Fell was named after Fountains Abbey. Sheep from the fell and other highspots were annually taken to the grange at Kilnsey to be shorn. The wool was transported in ox-drawn wains across the moors to the monastery. Some of it was used to make clothes for the monks. The surplus was exported to – wait for it – ITALY.

We now met young people from Park Lane College at Leeds who were walking the Three Peaks for charity – themselves! They were looking for funds for a ski-ing holiday. One lad, ill-clad, hands in pockets, no rucksack, sauntered along as though he was in the Headrow at Leeds. We wondered how far they would get before the onset of darkness. David broke some ice to expose water for Popsie to drink. Popsie preferred to play with the ice. So we attained

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the rocky part of the Ingleborough summit plateau, and an area of frosted grass and frozen puddles. The windbreak and adjacent heap of stone were alive with visitors, notably kids, who turned out to live in Wibsey, Bradford. They were on a course at Ingleborough Hall, Clapham.

We located the dining area beloved of our old friend Roy – a recess in rock, with a superb view over Chapel-le-Dale. Bill carried out the usual census of preferred food. Cyril: Ham Roll with Mustard. Trevor: Belly Pork with Dijon Mustard. Bill: Tuna in Mayonnaise (courtesy of Booths supermarket). Terry: Tuna with Hellmanns Mayonnaise. David: Mackerel fillets (straight from the tin). Popsie: Tuna and a bit of everybody's else's food. Terry distributed Jean's superb Victoria sponge cake (thanks, Jean).

In due course, we set course (into a chilling breeze) for Simon Fell, stopping to examine the fossils in a limestone wall – and so that David might whistle up Popsie, who (presuming we were going to Park Fell) had slipped under a <sup>gate</sup> into the next allotment. Popsie, a dog with a good memory, returned via a stile. We plodded along a glorified sheep track, marvelling at the leonine form of Penyghent and an orange-tinted November landscape. At the summit of Simon Fell, we located three stones – all that remains of Roy's cairn – and for a few moments thought of our late, lamented friend.

Then it was march, march, march to the saddle between Simon Fell and Park Fell, where we commenced our descent to the place where the car had been parked. We had reached 2,372 ft on Ingleborough, 2,150 ft on Simon Fell. We completed 5 miles in 5 ½ hours and deserved our visit to the "watering hole", the Station Inn at Ribblehead. As we parked behind the inn, we looked round but could not find Popsie. David smiled. A doggie of habit, she had already made for the door of the hostelry.

