

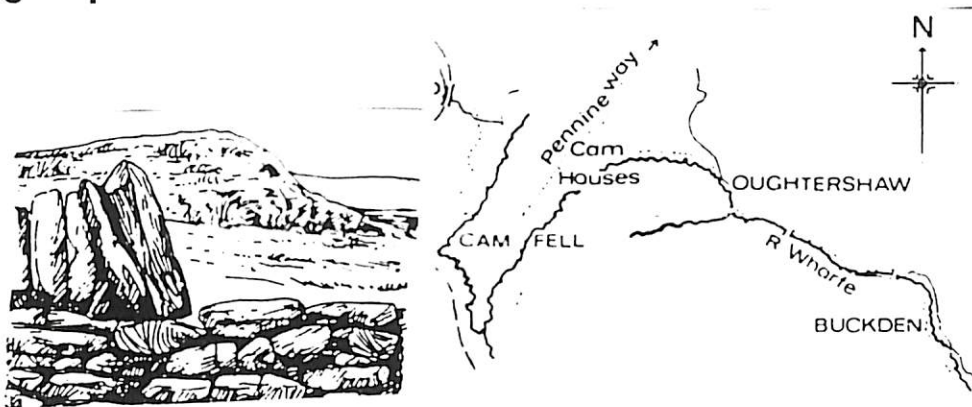
Trevor

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26.5.04.

DOWN IN THE FOREST -

- something stirred; twas only David, Cyril, Trevor, Bill, not forgetting Popsie.



Weather: Dull, chilly, becoming mainly sunny, warm. Light w.breeze. After several weeks of dry weather it was a pleasure to walk in places where normally we might have gone knee deep in mud. Much tut-tutting at the way visiting motor-cyclists have deeply rutted old Dales tracks.

David, duty chauffeur, was two minutes early when collecting Cyril and Trevor. Cyril was rejoicing in the improved vision in one eye following an operation. Trevor told a Spanish story – of how his back pocket was picked, with the temporary loss of 100 Euros. (A loss covered by his holiday insurance).

As we travelled up Ribblesdale we saw the Ribble had almost stopped flowing and the water-splash at Newhouses had ceased to have a stream flowing across it. At High Birkwith farm, Bill opened a gate for the benefit of David's Land Rover and also to re-united a lamb with its bleating parent ewe. David parked off-track between here and Old Ing farm, once the residence of Peter Wood, a farmer with a fund of fascinating yarns about North Ribblesdale. We saw an outbuilding he made many years ago to over-winter young sheep instead of following the old custom of driving them to gentler country.

Our walk began at 9-00 a.m. Popsie was soon into its stick routine. It had a special stick, prepared by David to the dog's precise requirements, and was to have it at the end of the eight-mile long walk. We walked along a dry, hard, unmetalled lane, seeing two tight groups of sycamore, which were in their prime. On our left was Ling Gill, a nature reserve clogged with trees, open spaces containing orchids in their tatty end-of-the-season regalia, also cowslips, tormentil, bilberry and strawberry (in flower). Trevor drew our attention to a large brown bird, which was almost certainly a

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buzzard. A second bird of similar size was briefly seen. Trevor adopted the angler's ruse of holding his arms, palms inwards, at the distance he supposed the bird to be. This was estimated by David to be 24 inches.

Beyond the head of Ling Gill we saw Cam Beck flowing down a stone staircase and under a single-span stone bridge. This bore an inscription dated 1766. That year, the old bridge having been washed away in a great flood, the new bridge was built at the charge of the whole West Riding. A notice on a nearby tree indicated that some repair work to the bridge was to be carried out. The notice was originated by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and concerned the YDNP (the same authority).

We were now on the open moor, in sunshine, with skylarks lifting from the ground like feathered helicopters, spraying the air with their warbling. At the junction of the Pennine Way and the Dales Way, Bill took an official photograph. We plodded on slowly gaining elevation, on a track that the ^{way} ~~passage~~ of wheeled vehicles had turned into an unsightly gully. Where the erosion was especially deep, and the ground was clayey, water had gathered. It was teeming with tadpoles. David said that during a walk not far from this area he and daughter Fiona transferred some of the tadpoles found in puddles to the local beck.

We were now in a good position to view the area we were about to explore. We had already enjoyed a panorama of Pennine peaks extending from Penyghent, via Pendle and Ingleborough, to whale-like Wherside. Also in the picture – and in sunlight – had been Ribbleshead viaduct. Now we looked into the head of Langstrothdale, with well-wooded Swarthgill contrasting with the bleak lands round about. At 10-45, we had a coffee break (Cyril officiating) while sitting on grass with our feet in one of the ruts of the lane. A jet aircraft circled the area, part of the time being below the height of the flanking fells.

A signpost, well sited in a stone cairn, indicated "Oughtershaw 3 ¾". We left the main path for one that dipped to the edge of the forested area. The path crossed an area beautified by flowers – tormentil, lady's smock, bugle. The forest is now a sporting area, as indicated by the calls of pheasants and the sight of a cock bird running so briskly it was almost a blur to our sight. For a brief period, we entered the forest, walking on an aisle created by brashing, with more pheasant calls and occasional view of pheasant-feeders. David found a scattering of fresh material that he said came from the top growth of the tree, which had been eaten off by a squirrel, presumably of the grey variety.

Beyond the forest, rough pastureland, tufty with reeds, the almost empty dykes blotched yellow by marsh marigolds. So we came to Cam Houses, which Bill (and

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Freda) first visited 40 or more years ago when they walked from Gearstones, having a chat with the Croziers who then had one of the several farms of this remote, fellside settlement. Now there are but two regular occupants of Cam Houses – a couple who live in part of the bunk-barn. What had been the main farmhouse was now the home of Ian Wallace, who had the sporting rights in the area. (Incidentally, we found quite a lot of shells of what we took to have been pheasant eggs – presumably taken by crows and jettisoned when the contents had been eaten.

We descended to where a man was working a tractor and trailer across some of the better valley land. He turned out to be affable Rodney Beresford, who has the local farming. His home is Newby Head, beside the main road between Ribbleshead and Hawes. He was attending to rushes, using a technique known as weed-wiping. The wiping occurred when solution from a tank was distributed evenly to a long brush which then wiped the rushes and quickly led to their demise.

We now entered the exciting part of the trip. A rickety style led to the side of a stream flowing in a peaty bed and to a gloomy aisle in the forest. The path led gently upwards. In this dry weather, there were just a few soft spots (David's boots found one of the worst) and we wondered what the state of a rambler would be in truly wet conditions. David and Trevor, consulting map and compass, made frequent stops. They reminded Cyril and Bill of what Mr Beresford had said: that we might get lost. "Everybody else does." Trevor was heard to say, when there was doubt about which path to use: "I feel we should keep on with the one we're on at the moment." David poked a finger at the map and said: "We should be somewhere in here."

Eventually, we reached the edge of the forest, at a point where the barbs on a wire fence had been clad in plastic material to avoid trouser-ripping or worse. We found ourselves in an area of peat, heather, cotton grass and bilberry, following tracks left by a wheeled vehicle. Looking northwards we saw the approach road to the (now out of sight) Cam Houses rising straight and steeply up the fellside. A sandwich survey revealed that Bill had bought a "triple pack" from Settle Co-op and, not having the label anymore, was not in a position to give an adequate survey of contents. Popsie did not like the brown bread but gobbled down a piece of chicken. Cyril had salmon and lettuce rolls. Trevor reported: cucumber & humous (chickpeas). David reported he was consuming crisps, also sardines and tomato sauce.

We returned to another stretch of forest, following a path between shakeholes that were now lagged with peat and vegetation. We eventually emerged, blinkingly, on to a wide forest road. A notice relating to the occurrence of a forest fire instructed the visitor to "Dial 999." ^{From} Where? The nearest phone must be five miles away. We now reached a wearisome, 3 ½ mile stretch of forest road, a diversion being provided by

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two Army helicopters at play. In due course we broke free of the forest and walked on what had been a green track and now, following its use by thrill-seeking motor cyclists, was a series of bogs and ruts, bad enough in dry conditions and ~~like to be~~ a morass in wet. A "chipper, chipper" sound from a tract of wet ground was the call of a snipe.

At Old Ing, the sunlit grassland was emerald green, ^bpacked by grey-blue fells. The nearest available "waterhole" was at Helwith Bridge.

Snipe.

