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THREE MEN – AND TWO DOGS

On the Penyghent-Plover Hill-Foxup Road circuit
Eight and a-half miles and six and a-half hours.

18.204.



The Ramblers – Cyril (who chose the route) David (duty chauffeur) and Bill (scribe and camcorderist).

The Dogs – Popsie, collie, seven years old in April; Jasmine, commonly known as Jas, black retriever. Left behind was Sprout, a young chocolate labrador, had been named so because it was a glutton for the familiar vegetable.

Weather – Blaze of hard northern sunlight; light northerly breeze, a nose-ender; clouding up; dry.

The pick-up of personnel began at 8-55 am precisely. We elected to start from Brackenbottom, using a field gate rather than a stile. As Whympers would have said, “because it’s there.” With Penyghent in shadow – a magnificent silhouette – and the lower slopes sunlit, we had a pleasant climb, negotiating stiles, at mini-cliffs of limestone, electing for Sudden Death (a frontal assault) rather than taking the easy way on the flanks. None of us reported calf-wobble, a condition referred to on the previous day when Liz, a PR daughter of Jean and Terry, had quizzed us on the equipment we favoured – part of a research for a commercial firm.

And, of course, we stopped now and again to admire the view – and rest our feet, though none of us reported the let our lungs catch up with our feet. In view was a sweep of fells composed of Ingleborough, Simon Fell and Whernside, the atmosphere being so clear that it appears to be attached to them rather than separated by Chapel-le-Dale. Eventually, we reached the base of Penyghent proper, with an upward sweep of limestone followed by a ditto of millstone grit.

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The lower path had been tidied up, presumably by the National Park, and was now tacky, the surface having softened in the mild conditions, leaving a lower level frozen. The ascent included man-made steps, ledges on a limestone face and more steps, before we arrived – flopping like landed fish – at the skyline, which the two dogs had reached a considerable time before. (Popsie, indeed, after looking down on us from above, came back down to make sure we were all right).

On the way from the gritstone rim to the summit of the fell, we saw the first grape of the year – dropped by a careless walker. The summit was reached at 11-55 am. We did not linger in the chilling breeze and, making a rapid exit (there are two stiles, side by side) we determined to have our first snack on the lee side of a wall. Our direction was as indicated by a signpost – Foxup Road – and we walked on soggy ground, having noticed a single small patch of snow.

Bill brought his camera into action. The “lads” and dogs went on. Bill heard the clear double-piping call of a golden plover but did not see the bird. David and Cyril saw the bird depart, on slim angled wings, for the appropriately named Plover Hill. (Golden plover of the southern race nest on these moors; they winter by the sea and the first birds are back in their nesting areas in February). David came across the gruesome remains of a hill fox. It was hanging by its neck from a wire set beside a drystone wall.

Elevenes were enjoyed at 11-25. We heard grouse chuckling and chatting on the heathered area of Plover Hill. We approached the summit on boggy ground. The dogs, seeing a large puddle, used their noses and tongues to break the ice and then lapped down some of the chilled water. The weather began to cloud up from the north. We picked our way cautiously between tracts of wet peat, found a path of sorts and eventually arrived at the summit of the hill, which – years ago – our late lamented friend, Roy, adorned with a small cairn.

Not much of the cairn remained so David added a big piece collected from a distance and Cyril topped it off with a small stone. It looked quite stylish. David, using his GPS (Global Positioning Satellites), and drawing on 10 of the man-made heavenly orbs informed us that Plover Hill has a height of 1,201 ft. The views were stunning, taking in Ribbleshead Viaduct as well as Whernside and, misty-blue in the distance, the top of Wild Boar Fell.

We followed a wallside, noticing the rotting stumps of stakes that years ago would have supported a strand of barbed wire. The dogs enjoyed themselves with bits they could manage and which, in next to no time, broke up into a ginger mush. Then began a horrendous descent to the Foxup Road. The still-frosted ground was

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potentially slippery. The path, eroded by the passage of many boots, and somewhat eroded by rain and frost, especially so. Two young men who were ascending the path were from Harrogate. A couple from Surrey had been married for a year. Bill videoed them. The young lady (she was beyond the girly stage) photographed us for a project on people she was undertaking while studying at a local college. They had stayed at the Royal Oak and sat in last evening when the jazz-men were performing.

We were overtaken by two straight-necked rambblers. At the Foxup Road we discovered the ancient route had been chewed up by the passage of motor bikes and mountain bikes. We had our major butty-stop in the customary behind-a-wall setting, then pressed on, the much rutted way eventually becoming a firm path, though the centre of it had been eroded by motor bike tyres. We crossed the Great Bog on boards and were then back to a landscape that had affinities with the Western Front in the Great War.

We left the main path for a short distance where the beck tripped down a staircase composed of limestone steps that looked as though they had been cut out. The ruins of a small building on the other bank led to speculation. Bill thought the pool below the main fall was a place where sheep were washed before clipping. Jasmine thought it was a delightful place for a swim. Popsie kept on the bank, determined not to get even her front paws wet.

At Hull Pot, Jasmine went so close to the rim David called her back. He explained that she had heard water. We entered the lane leading to Horton. At a gate in the lower part of the lane was a (partly damaged) sign placed there by the Dales Park authority pointing out (presumably to motor-cyclists and those who drive Land Rovers for fun) that under section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, it is an offence to drive a mechanically-propelled vehicle on a public footpath or public bridleway without lawful authority. The yobs who ride motor bikes in wild places must be either insensitive to the landscape – or, being illiterate, not understanding what the notice says.

