

TREVOR

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## BACK TO ROY'S MOUNTAIN



The late, lamented Roy Gudgeon climbed the mountain 495 times, his first ascent being in 1976. His ashes were borne to the summit on December 17, 2003, making it 496 times – an average (as calculated by his son Andrew, referring to Roy's copious and meticulous climbing records) of 18 times a year.

In the party: Sheila, Caroline, Michael & Janet, Andrew, Roger & Ruth, Fr Hypher, Cyril & Margaret, David, Trevor & Doris, Harold & Audrey, Tony, Bill, not forgetting Popsie & Jasmine (a doggy duo). Back-up (because of back-ache) Shirley.

Weather: Exactly as Roy would have wished for his last peak – sunny, with a light breeze. Whernside wore a bonnet of mist, Penyghent sat on a bank of light mist and Ingleborough stood out clear and cool, with a bolster of mist forming to the east of the hill during our time on the summit.

We approached Ingleborough from the Cold Cotes direction, parking cars (in Tony's case, bike) on the greensward. We tested our determination and muscular strength by surmounting a rusty (locked) field gate, scattering a small flock of Swaledale sheep. One of them caught a horn on a wire fence and was deftly freed.

For a time, we followed the upward path in a compact bunch; then we were drawn-out but not seriously enough to embarrass those at the rear. Down at the gate, we had a newly-risen sun on our faces. The district was bathed in a golden glow. Then we walked into shadow, only to experience, higher up, a second sunrise and a view of Ingleborough across a landscape of gingery grasses, chocolate-brown peat and dark pools.

The great hill had surely never looked better. The low, slanting sunlight accentuated its geological layers – the alternating bands of limestone and grit, with a gritstone cap to turn the weather and retain its shape. It did not take much mental effort to recall Roy – wearing shirt and shorts - striding out towards his favourite eminence.

Popsie put up a grouse. It was the only bird we were to see. Perhaps the ravens were grounded as a mark of respect for Roy. We had often seen them as playthings of the

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wind, occasionally flicking over on their backs as though through the sheer joy of life. At higher levels, the peaty puddles were plated with ice. Footprints were deeply imprinted on peat the colour of chocolate-cake.

It is tempting to write that we walked in solemn awe, but it would not have been correct. There was too much to talk about. Each person had memories of Roy to add to the general pool. Bill's special memory was of climbing, in the company of Roy, sometimes with Terry, all the major peaks of Northern Lakeland for a guide book to be published by Smith Settle (now Dalesman) in 2004. The task was done a week before the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease restricted movement.

On the latest climb of Ingleborough, the party rested for a short time by the old croft, with the seats composed of slabs of rock that Roy christened The Throne Room. It was traditionally a coffee-break. Higher up, some of us paused near the tall cairn standing like a sentinel over a steepish part of the way.

Popsie had looked in vain for a piece of wood to use teasingly on anyone who would play the old game and settled, instead, on a piece of dead thistle. When a length of wood was found it was divided between Popsie and Jasmine. Popsie's piece, hurled away by one of the party, landed in a ruckle of grey stones, beyond the optical and sniffing power of the doggie.

Having arrived at the junction with the walkway between Little and Great Ingleboroughs, we waded in peaty shallows, found the firm path and in due course found ourself picking a way across ankle-cracking rockscape. The path rose to a summit plateau which, for once, had such clarity that we did not need to blunder about looking for the windbreak.

Some of us recalled mist and blizzard when, having been to the summit, we found the exit path with difficulty - just as a party of children from Ingleborough Hall, Clapham, wearing identical outdoor gear, appeared to view, chatting excitedly in the Arctic conditions.

Today, there it was - the windbreak - clear and sharp, not far from the trig point and two heaps of stones. One marked the site of the hospice erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - a castellated tower that was opened and wrecked in the same day.

When we had recovered from the climb - when, indeed, our leg muscles had stopped twanging - we stood in an appropriately silent, contemplative group as Fr Hypher matched our thoughts and feelings with prayer. The time for the spreading of the ashes arrived. He, then members of the family, shared in the process. Silently, evenly,

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with swaying movements of the vase, ash alighted on a plateau on which Roy had often trod, sometimes in company, often by himself. He was known to rise on a summer morn to climb the hill and return home to Lawkland before most people were reaching for their breakfast cereals.

When it was over, and when each had a quiet, thoughtful moment, thermos tea or coffee was enjoyed. There were no sheep to share the crumbs from light refreshment. As we began our return, the RAF paid its tribute to Roy. A jet aircraft swept the hill at what used to be known as zero feet.

The usual wide range of topics was broached as the party, now fragmented, took the downward path. There was mention of Pendle Witches, of a certain holiday retreat by Coniston Water, and of a most unusual Curlew. This was the name given to a car designed by Kit Calvert, of Hawes. The vehicle was withdrawn through design faults when it had covered a mere twenty-five miles. A far-reaching chat between two of the party embraced (though not literally) St Cuthbert and the Rector of Stonyhurst. There were also tales about nativity plays, including that of the Dales lad who, told there had been no room at the inn, said to the teacher: "I blames Joseph. He should have booked."

What remained of our stamina was dissipated on surmounting the rusty gate. We de-booted and drove in convoy to the New Inn at Clapham for refreshments, both liquid and solid. Andrew briefly spoke about his father's achievements on Ingleborough. In the old days, Roy – fresh from the fells – had a bath and the world's most delectable meal: fish and chips.

